

# OPINION

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## Finally, a True Black Prime Contractor at TriMet

A grand reason to celebrate

BY JAMES POSEY

It is a well-known fact that TriMet has been the perennial leader among governmental agencies for successful results in hiring and supporting minority contractors and workers over several decades. This history spans as far back as the 1982 I-84 Banfield Light Rail project. The chronology includes the Westside Hillsboro line, their signature Interstate Light Rail project, a series of local street car projects, the South Corridor I-205 MAX, the Milwaukie MAX and more.

Thus, TriMet's most recent action of awarding a major contract to black-owned Raimore Construction is evolutionary and is the culmination of many years of struggle. It represents progress of huge portions. This \$6.8



million contract to build transit shelters for the Milwaukie MAX line is a turning point, a major breakthrough, and a momentous achievement not only for minority contractors but the entire Oregon

catalysts for enormous economic growth and wealth-building throughout the region. As well, it's also understood that compared to their white counterparts, African-Americans and other mi-

Like many other government bodies, TriMet's emphasis has been focused on supporting minority contractors in a social-welfare context rather than in fundamental investments in the economic

and operation are in a historically-black community of northeast Portland where the owners and key staff live, work and play. With a few exceptions, their workforce is distinctively black with no equivocation. And more importantly, there is a high probability the black community will be economically enriched by the company's participation in this segment of the transportation market.

This is the vision, mission and goal of the disadvantage business enterprise (DBE) program, which has seldom been implemented effectively in the Oregon's construction market. Therefore, TriMet should be commended, recognized and encouraged to continue this truly progressive example of authentic equity and inclusion. Indeed, the community as a whole has a grand reason to celebrate.

*James Posey is a Portland contractor and business owner, co-founder of the National Association of Minority Contractors, and former president of the Coalition of Black Men and vice president of the Portland NAACP.*

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It is not clear that TriMet actually understands the full impact of what it has done in terms of hiring Raimore as the first black general contractor to complete a major construction project in Oregon. It is no secret that these large transportation projects have been the

minorities have always struggled to benefit significantly from the billions of dollars expended on these projects.

One reason this had not happened previously is because metro-area governmental organizations have been unwilling to really commit to institutional inclusion.

infrastructure of communities of color.

And now, once again TriMet has made history by hiring an authentic black contractor, a contractor who has all the prerequisite skills and independent resources to be successful. Raimore is genuine because its physical location

### The Law Offices of Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney  
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd, Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080  
Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081  
Facsimile: (503) 244-2084  
Email: [Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com](mailto:Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com)

### Letter to the Editor

#### Improving Housing and Wages

As stated in the preamble of Oregon Initiative Petition 65, the High School Graduation and College Readiness Act, "Oregon has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation. More than 10,000 Oregon students fail to graduate each year. As a result, they face a future of lower earnings, higher unemployment and greater reliance on public assistance."

According to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, when including the entire state of Oregon, middle wage jobs have continuously diminished, while low and high wage jobs have increased significantly over the past decade. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, 9 out of the top 10 occupations in Portland bought an average median annual income of a mere \$26,177 in 2012. On top of the list was a "retail salesperson," while the second leading occupation for employment was "food preparation service, including fast food" and the

third was "cashier."

Since 1999, Oregon strictly prohibited enacting mandatory inclusionary policies to create affordable housing, joining only Texas in the entire country which refused to offer this vital protec-

tion to their citizens. But Senate Bill 1533 was promoted as a solution when it was passed in the State Legislature during the last session and signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown.

The generally accepted formula for pricing affordable housing units is derived from 60 percent of the region's annual median wage. SB 1533's definition of affordable housing is "households with incomes equal to or higher than 80 percent of the median family income."

According to the Portland Housing Bureau, the 2015 median income for a family of four in

Portland was \$73,900. Applying the minimum 80 percent threshold, the region's median wage, for a family of four, is equivalent to \$58,800 as a qualifier for affordable housing. This newly enacted law gives housing developers a favorable option to appeal to a wealthier citizen. They will have the ability to charge an additional few hundred dollars for rent, due to this higher threshold in determining affordability requirements. This will essentially discriminate against families making less than \$58,800 annually here in Portland.

SB 1533 also grants out of state developers multiple incentives, such as advantageous tax breaks, and full or partial exemptions from property taxes, and also the legal permission to construct taller projects.

Additional benefits can be established for these developers that can be determined at will, and can be enabled by any city or county in the state. Currently out of state apartment developers are building residential structures all over the Portland metropolitan area that are far too expensive for native Oregonians to afford. How will our elected officials provide human security to all Portlanders, and not just to the abundant amount of economically fortunate transplants, who have transformed our city's demographics over the past decade?

Also, how will our city and state leaders increase our graduation rates here in Portland, and assist this highly volatile generation of our society, our future leaders, in providing them with the proper education to succeed in obtaining a profession that actually produces a livable wage, and one that will not force them to sleep in their car?

*Alexander Krokus,  
North Portland*



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