

OPINION

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A Step Backwards for Police Diversity

Command shuffle leaves out African-Americans



BY DR. LEROY HAYNES JR. AND DR. T. ALLEN BETHEL

The recent developments with the investigation and retirement of Police Chief Larry O'Dea, the demotion of the assistant chiefs, and particularly Kevin Modica, plus the appointment of a new chief of Police Mike Marshman can either turn us backwards or propel us forward in transforming the Portland Police Bureau into a 21st Century community policing era.

More than 12 years of constant struggle by the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform has propelled us to the intervention of the U. S. Department of Justice and the "settlement agreement" accepted by Judge Michael Simon.

The implementation of the agreement has been far from perfect. Obstacles, hindrances, detours, resistance, as well as success in a few key vital areas have made a bumpy ride the first two years of implementation.

The future success or failure of the settlement agreement in transforming the Portland Police Bureau and creating 21st Century community policing is critically dependent on the kind of leadership we have from the chief of police to the assistant chiefs, to the command staff, as well as supervisors.

We need leadership in the police bureau, in city government and in the community who will

embrace the vision of community policing that will be effective and relevant as well as implementing the settlement agreement.

The demotion of Assistant Chief Modica and the lack of African-American presence on the command staff or the assistant chiefs is a "step backward" to creating a leadership team that will meet these goals.

We are living in a critical time in Portland and our nation. A time in which cities across America, as well as the city of Portland are "crying out" for police accountability. Uprisings have erupted through major cities; gang violence has intensified particular in

black communities. The failure to have an experienced, relevant African-American voice at an assistant chief or command level is a detriment to the welfare of the city.

"Where do we go from here?" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked at the crossroads of the modern Civil-Rights Movement. Is it backward or forward?

A costly price has been already paid in blood, sweat and tears. Let us move forward to create a new and fresh model for the city of Portland and the nation.

Dr. LeRoy Haynes Jr. and Dr. T. Allen Bethel are chair and co-chair of the AMA Coalition for Justice and Police Reform.

To Stop 'Bomb Trains,' I Honeymooned in Jail

Facing down a locomotive in Vancouver

BY DAPHNE WYSHAM

It was a few days after my wedding. I was supposed to be honeymooning at a nearby winery with my newly minted husband, celebrating our unlikely marriage at age 55.



Instead, I was sitting on the railroad tracks in the pouring rain. Along with 20 other brave souls, some weeping, some singing, I was facing down a locomotive in a town — Vancouver, Wash. — that many fear will be forced to accept the largest oil-by-rail terminal in the country.

Why would anyone do something like that?

Because a few short days before, we'd watched in horror as a mile-long train filled with Bakken crude derailed in Mosier, Ore., and burst into towering flames.

We call these oil trains "bomb trains" because we know, with one tiny loose bolt, they can erupt into an inferno, scorching everything for miles. It happened in Lac-Megantic, Canada in 2013. Forty-seven people were killed in a matter of minutes, the town leveled when a train's brakes failed.

In the aftermath of the Mosier derailment, local fire chief Jim Appleton, who was originally unwilling to condemn oil trains, was beginning to sound more



and more like one of us: "I think it's insane" to ship oil by rail, he told a reporter. "Shareholder value doesn't outweigh the lives and happiness of our community."

And yet shareholder value is outweighing the lives and happiness of communities all over the world. I live in the "blast zone" less than a mile from tracks that ply this dangerous cargo here in

the Pacific Northwest. And millions of people, most of them on the other side of the world, are already feeling the heat.

More bomb trains, after all, mean more climate change. Rising temperatures mean dangerous weather patterns, like the floods that recently killed hundreds in Pakistan and China.

Meanwhile, ExxonMobil,

whose scientists knew as early as the 1960s that catastrophic climate change would ensue if they didn't change course, has invested in climate denial in order to maximize their shareholder value, counting on us to not connect the dots.

I grew up in India. I can see the faces of friends and loved ones on Facebook enduring record heat and flooding there. So if the

trains wouldn't stop coming, I figured, I'd put my body on the line in Vancouver. If I went to jail, I hoped my husband would forgive me for skipping out on our first big date as newlyweds.

The riot police were beginning to gather, and the railroad's private police were issuing their warnings while hundreds chanted nearby. Not wanting to lose valuables in jail, I gave my wallet, cell phone, and wedding ring to a friend.

Then they hauled us off, one by one, in plastic handcuffs like tiny angel's wings behind each protestor's back. They put the 13 women — as young as 21 and as old as 85 — in one cell and the eight men in the other.

Seven hours later, as we were released from our windowless cage into the beautiful summer evening, I felt an unspeakable gratitude to my cellmates and those who awaited us outside.

Should we go to trial, many of us will be arguing we did this out of necessity, in order to prevent a far greater looming evil — of being incinerated in our sleep, of doing nothing to stop this deadly fossil fuel cargo while hundreds of thousands of people die each year from floods, disease, malnutrition, and heat stress due to climate change.

Call me crazy, but we might just win this one. And in so doing, we'll send a very strong message to the oil companies that threaten us all that they must end this madness.

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