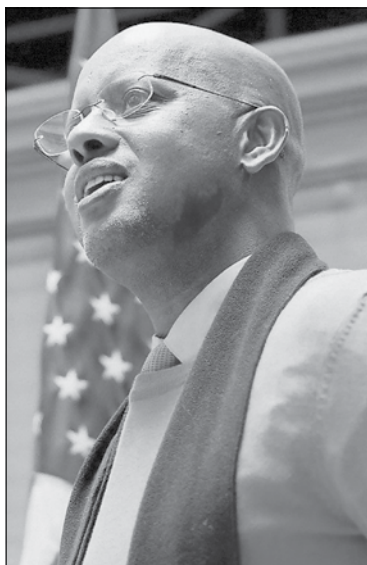


# Activist Derides Remark

Takes to social media when guard asked about bomb



Kayse Jama

When a security guard at City Hall searched a bag from a Portland activist and community leader and joked about searching for a bomb, the resident, an immigrant from Somali and an official candidate for political office in Oregon, wondered if he was being racially targeted.

Kayse Jama, director of the nonprofit organization Unite Oregon and a candidate for the state senate from Portland, told the story this weekend in a Facebook post.

“Are there any bazookas or bombs?” the security guard asked as the bag was checked through security, Jama said.

“He clearly saw I am an immigrant and I have an accent. To me this is not a joke. I am wondering if I was being identified by him as someone from Somalia or if this has happened to others.”

A wave of Facebook comments criticized the guard’s remark as racist, while others said it was just a poorly thought-out joke. Many offered their sympathy and support to Jama.

Most who commented said they’d never heard a remark like that and derided it as inappropriate, unacceptable racial

profiling. Others, some identifying themselves as white residents, said they’d been subjected to similar low-brow humor from security personnel.

Jama updated his post after the comment thread, saying, “It is evident that this is not just something that happens to people of color or immigrants or refugees. I posted to learn. To be clear, I have no interest in punishing this guard or “getting him fired.””

But Jama said he still found the remark discomfoting and chalked it up to a system failure. He called for better training for security guards on how to communicate to the public, in particular to “those who are impacted by the current environment around race and immigration.”

At Unite Oregon, Jama helps immigrants and refugees navigate inequality issues.

# Recruiting Candidates

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“I’m just a single working mother, and people can look at me and see a regular person who happens to be in office,” she said.

On average, it takes a potential candidate of color being asked to run for office eight to 10 times before they agree, according to Jesse Beason, board chair at Color PAC. He noted however, that since the presidential election in 2016, people have been more willing to get involved and take action.

Color PAC is run by a board of volunteers which helps build a network of recruiters to find and encourage people of color to engage in local politics, and provide them with tools to help them succeed. These include individual trainings on how to run a campaign, fundraise, and

engage volunteers.

“We need people in office who represent who Oregon is and is becoming,” said Beason.

Another main priority for the board is to provide ongoing support for candidates after they have been elected.

Champions of color have historically lacked political infrastructure in Oregon, and find that most current systems are not designed for their leadership and ideas, and thus rarely serve more than one term.

“We want to help candidates not only run and win, but govern effectively when they get there,” said Beason on the importance of retention. “Inequity stems from public policy, so we need more people of color to be decision makers, with their personal influences that stem from their lived experience of race,” he added.



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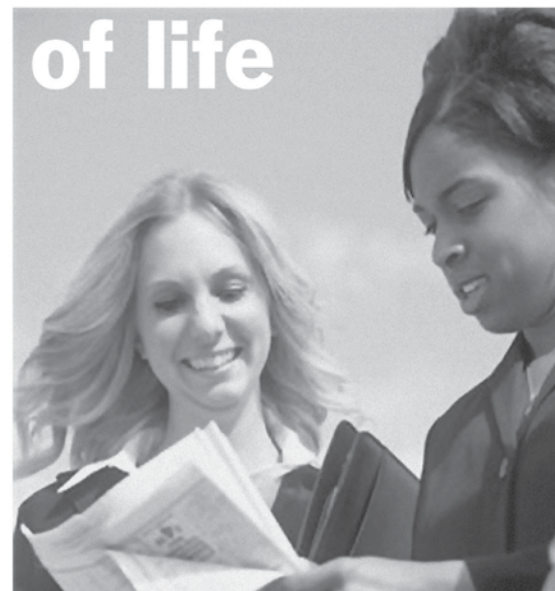
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