

OPINION

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A Reason to Vote Yes on Clean Energy Measure: Help reduce shocking health disparities

BY PATRICIA KULLBERG, MD, MPH



If anyone is still looking for a reason to vote yes on the Portland Clean Energy Initiative (Measure 26-201), here's a big one: to help reduce shocking health disparities between those Portlanders who live in privilege and those who do not. The disenfranchised and under-resourced communities of Portland suffer an undue burden of premature disability, disease and death, which stems directly from the conditions in which they live, work and play.

Low income persons suffer twice as much asthma, three times as many heart attacks and more than three times as many strokes than the economically advantaged. Among communities of color, especially African-Americans, birth weights are lower, infant mortality is higher and more people suffer from HIV, cancer, diabetes and heart disease. These differences in morbidity and mortality have been amply documented in studies by the Coalition of Communities of Color, Multnomah County Health Department and the Oregon Health Authority.

To be clear, health outcome disparities have nothing to do with genetics or demographics, or even so-called lifestyle choices. Mountains of literature contradict the idea that people simply choose to

smoke, not exercise or eat poorly. These choices are always made in the context of social, economic and psychological factors. What if, for example, no one markets fresh produce in your neighborhood? What if the nearby park is not safe to play in? What if you've been bombarded with ads since childhood about how sexy it

under-resourced. Families move in and out; neighbors may not know each other. Social isolation is more common.

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er live in areas with poor air quality. The ill effects of drought, flooding, extreme heat events and blankets of smoke from wildfires will fall most heavily on those least able to withstand them.

It is precisely this sickening combination of lousy living conditions and the underlying burden of disease that renders the residents of Portland's under-resourced communities more susceptible to the ill effects of global climate change. The Oregon Climate and Health Profile Report

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The benefits of the Portland Clean Energy Initiative are targeted to low income communities and communities of color. They include clean energy jobs and training; home weatherization; improved access to healthy food through community gardens or food buying clubs; and other community clean energy projects. These projects will not only prepare communities to withstand the adverse effects of climate change, they will also bring immediate improvements in physical and mental health.

The effects of building healthier neighborhoods are well documented: neighbors are more likely to know and trust each other. Crime rates are lower and civic engagement is increased. People are more likely to volunteer and more likely to vote. They live longer and healthier lives. Is this not what all of us want for our city? If you agree, join me in voting yes on the Portland Clean Energy Initiative (Measure 26-201).

Dr. Patricia Kullberg is the former medical director of the Multnomah County Health Department and author of "Health Equity and the Portland Clean Energy Initiative."

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Neighborhoods where low income persons, immigrants and people of color tend to live in Portland are often unhealthy. The air quality is worse. The tree canopy is sparser. The housing stock is uninsulated and burdened with vermin and toxins. Access to healthy food, public transportation or health services may be poor. Jobs are more scarce. Schools are

ering process may similarly affect all who are marginalized, stripped of their dignity and independence, or deprived of food and shelter.

Researchers estimate that social conditions account for two thirds of health outcomes; that living and working conditions have a bigger impact on health and longevity than either clinical care or individual behavior. Wiping out the differences in social conditions

(Oregon Health Authority, 2014) and the Climate Change Preparation Strategy (City of Portland and Multnomah County, 2014) identify the populations at highest risk for adverse outcomes from climate change events: persons living in substandard housing, non-English speaking persons, houseless persons, people with pre-existing health and mental health conditions and those who

Trump's Gender 'Science' Mean and Wrong

A vulnerable population will suffer more

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Trump is having a problem with sex, and it's not exactly what you might think. There are no Russian tapes, spankings with magazines, or confessions of grabbing anyone this time around.

Specifically, it's a problem with sex and gender.

Sex and gender aren't the same thing, though many people mistake them for being synonymous.

I was mistaken too, until I began studying social science. I was born with two X chromosomes

and all of the body parts that come with them. So I was assigned female (my sex) at birth and I was raised as a girl (my gender).

Since my sex (assigned on account of chromosomes, body parts, and hormones) and my gender (all of the non-biological components of what makes you a man or a woman) matched, the two felt synonymous.

Nothing about my chromosomes or genitalia created a biological need to do the behavior associated with my gender: playing with dolls, wearing dresses, polishing my nails. But, as I was taught as a child that girls do those things, they felt right.

Social scientists say that gender is something you do, not some-

thing you are. We also talk about something called the "gender binary." This is the false yet pervasive belief that there are two, and only two, sexes and genders.

It's a lot more complicated than that, and not just when it comes to gender. Did you know that being intersex — having ambiguous sex characteristics — is actually as common as having red hair?

I've always loved being a girl. But not everyone's sex assignments and gender assignments match. A transgender person is someone whose gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. A non-binary or genderqueer person may not identify as either gender.

I've never personally experienced what it feels like to be treated as the gender I'm not. That's

my good fortune. Trans people describe the experience as incredibly painful. Trans man Trystan Reese described it as a matter of life or death: If he couldn't live as a man, he couldn't go on living.

Yet Trump is now looking to define gender as the sex assigned as birth, supposedly because that's "grounded in science." No it bloody well isn't, and I say that as a scientist.

Here's what is grounded in science: Unless this country stops discriminating against transgender people and starts protecting them, more transgender people will die.

Four in ten transgender people attempt suicide. The list of reasons includes bullying, rejection by friends and family, violence, discrimination, and more.

Trump's move — if he makes

it — will serve to erase the civil rights of 1.4 million transgender Americans. An already vulnerable population will needlessly suffer more.

On the other hand, research shows that transgender people who are supported in their transition — that is, allowed to live openly and authentically as themselves, without harassment, violence, or bullying — have better mental health, life satisfaction, and even job satisfaction.

That shouldn't be surprising: It's true of all people. Why would the government want to do the exact opposite?

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