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OPINION

Letter to
the Editor

NAACP Applauds Police Bills

The Portland branch of the NAACP applauds the slew of policy accountability bills passed in the Legislature's historic special session late last month—it is gratifying to see the politics of the moment turned into action.

Of particular note is the content of SB 1604, which, after receiving bipartisan support in previous sessions, managed to escape dilution and clear both chambers. This bill goes a long way toward reforming the manner in which police officers are disciplined and the role of arbitration in that process.

Officers whose termination or disciplinary action is overturned by an arbitrator do not have credibility with the public or their peers. Standardization, consistency, and transparency in the discipline are all important and necessary components of police reform as we ride this wave of transformation.

We want to pause here and stress that these pieces of legislation are just the beginning. The People of Color Caucus are to be commended for their excellent work, and likewise, understand that we have a long way to go.

Here in Portland, in addition to the changes that will come as a result of SB 1604, we support the push for a truly independent police accountability panel with subpoena powers to avoid any perception of “The police policing the police.” This panel should be diverse and representative.

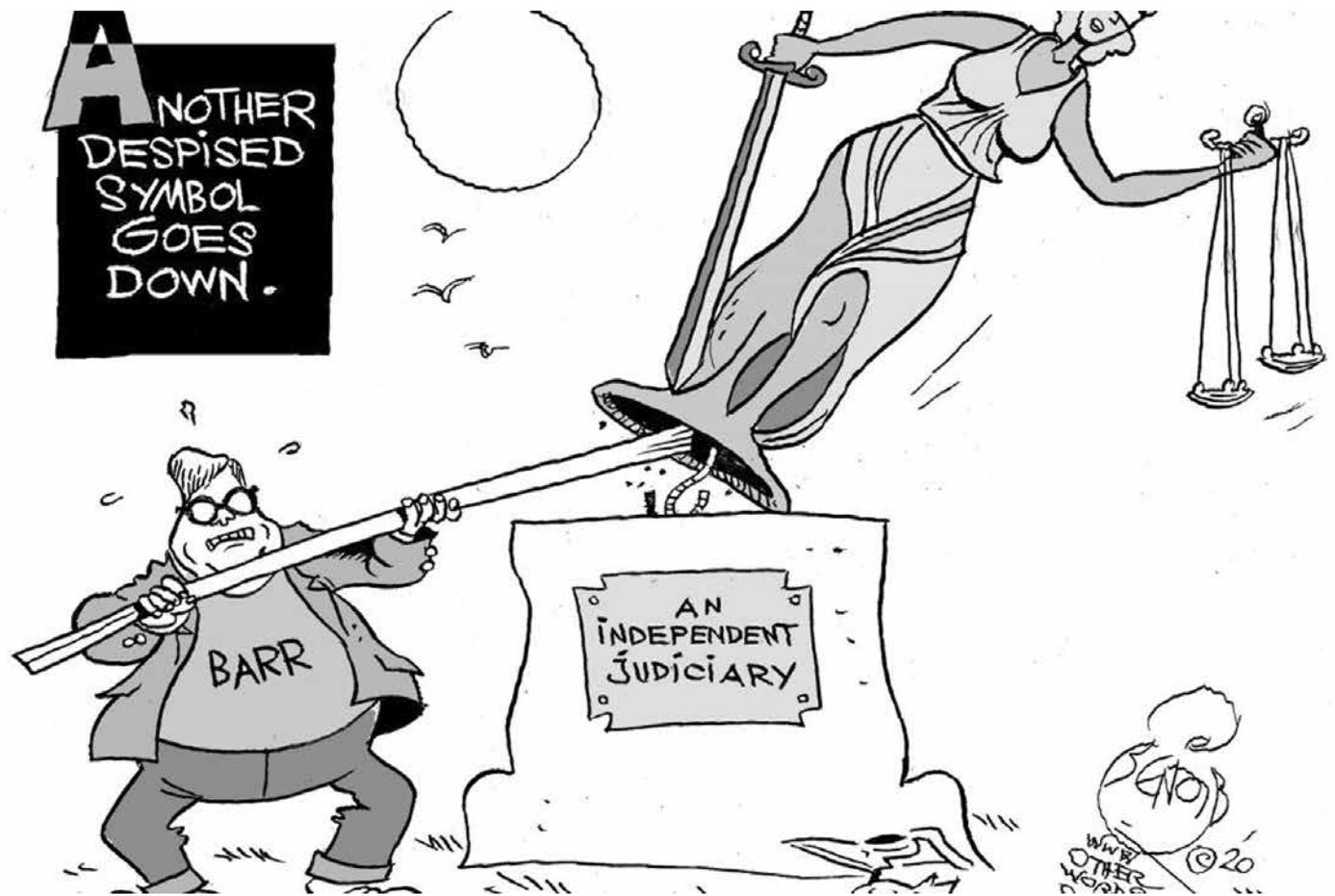
We need to do everything we can to ensure discipline from misconduct is in line with the public's expectations. We believe the trust of the community can in fact be won by the police overtime under the right circumstances.

Right now, demonstrators across the country are demanding more from those sworn to protect and serve. If the PPB is ever to live up to being “Portland's Finest,” they need to chip away at the wall separating themselves from the citizens they police. We imagine a future where both the police and ordinary citizens consider themselves to be on the same side: Working together to improve public safety and neighborhood livability.

From the Senate floor, Sen. Lew Frederick quoted a stanza of Lift Every Voice and Sing, often referred to as the Black National Anthem and in 1919, it became the official song of the NAACP. In it, the lyrics encourage us to embrace “The faith that the dark past has taught us.”

We share Sen. Frederick's desire to “March on until victory is won,” although we are unsure that our dark past should inspire faith. Our hope is that this time is different and that a year from now we find ourselves in a world vastly improved from the one we are in now. To accomplish that, perhaps a little faith is needed.

E.D. Mondainé, Portland NAACP president



Police Protecting Powerful Not a Public Good Maybe now that can change

BY RAVI MANGLA

For decades, we've been told that policing is a public good: available to all, for the benefit of all. But in practice, that's never been true.



One of the basic measures of a “public good” is that it's accessible to all people in a society, regardless of ability to pay. But from the beginning, policing in this country was designed to protect the assets of the most privileged.

Boston merchants were the first to persuade lawmakers in 1838 that a full-time, publicly funded police force would serve the “collective good.” In reality, they wanted to get the public to pay for protecting their shipped goods and routes.

In the South, where the economy depended on enslaved labor, publicly funded slave patrols were created in 1704 to surveil, track, and punish Black people who attempted to escape. As historian Sally Hadden notes, “Most law enforcement was, by definition, white patrolmen watching, catching, or beating Black slaves” — who were legally considered the property of wealthy white men.

Today, all across the U.S., landlords and property managers enlist law enforcement to forcibly evict low-income tenants. Police regularly remove homeless individuals from parks and public spaces. And cops routinely stop, search, and threaten Black and brown people

when they drive or walk through white neighborhoods.

We've seen these disparities in policing increase since the outbreak of COVID-19. And soon, with eviction moratoriums lifting across the country, tens of thousands of struggling tenants will be sent eviction notices. When families have no place else to go and landlords call in law enforcement, who do you think the police will serve and protect?

For centuries, police have taken the side of power, at the expense of those most marginalized.

Police have never protected Black lives

we had a federal jobs guarantee, people would not be forced into an underground economy that fuels a cruel and punishing prison system.

But instead of addressing root causes of insecurity, leaders of both parties have often chosen to defund education and hospitals while resisting significant reductions to policing.

What if public safety were a public good? What would that look like?

It would mean funding nonviolent tools to de-escalate and respond to safety concerns. It would mean engaging community members in collective decision-making,

“If people had guaranteed housing, there would be no one sleeping in subway cars, in parks, or on sidewalks for the police to round up.”

as much as they protect white property. And when people protest having their safety threatened — as in the nationwide protests after the murder of George Floyd — they're met with further violence from police.

Safety is born out of investment in true public goods. Policing in America reveals a lack of it.

If people had guaranteed housing, there would be no one sleeping in subway cars, in parks, or on sidewalks for the police to round up. If people had universal health care, mental health problems might be treated instead of criminalized. And if

ing, since each community has unique needs. And, most importantly, it means using an anti-racist framework to create new approaches to public safety.

We're in a transformative moment in history where structural change is within our grasp. Reform has failed time and time again to address the problem of police violence. It's more clear than ever that we need to divest from policing and invest in universal public goods that create true public safety, not just the illusion of it.

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