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ARASHI YOUNG
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MONICA J. FOSTER
Seattle Office Coordinator

JULIE KEEFE
SUSAN FRIED
Photographers



The Skanner has received 20 NNPA awards since 1998

The Skanner Newspaper, established in October 1975, is a weekly publication, published each Wednesday by IMM Publications Inc.

415 N. Killingsworth St.
P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228

Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

E-mail: info@theskanner.com

www.TheSkanner.com

The Skanner is a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association and West Coast Black Publishers Association.

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- Sports
- Entertainment
- Music reviews
- Bulletin board
- RSS feeds

Preventing Youth Gang Activity

By Representative Eric Pettigrew and Senator Joe Fain

Criminal street gangs are a serious burden in Central and South King County. Gang violence is not a new phenomenon and needs to be addressed. The most fertile ground for the spread of gangs is the hearts and minds of our youth. At a young age, our most vulnerable children are making decisions that could lead them to a lifetime of violence and criminal behavior. In order to address the problem, we must look to prevention and early interventions.

Gangs recruit using the need for belonging and guidance, thriving on a lack of social structure and support in children's lives. They give young men and women a sense of identity and a feeling of power, however false it may be.

Research shows the most vulnerable children are from communities of color, in high poverty areas, and surrounded by violence or substance abuse. The symptoms of gang activity are crime, but the illness is social and must be cured as a community.

A diverse coalition of state, city, law enforcement and local leaders came together around a plan of action to make prevention and early intervention a priority in this year's budget. With their support and guidance we secured \$1 million for gang intervention targeted at vulnerable youth, garnering the backing needed in the House and Senate to make it a reality.

This investment builds on work that started in 2012 to provide gang intervention grant funding to organizations with a successful and proven record of strik-

ing at the roots of gang activity. Street outreach workers who do the difficult work of intervention need reliable funding to maintain a sustained effort to combat the growth in gang activity. Grant applications for these services have soared across the state, exceeding the amount of available funding and leaving some communities without any meaningful support.

There are more than 12,000 documented gang members in King County alone with ongoing gang activity in Yakima, Tacoma/Pierce County, Spokane, Snohomish County, and southwest Washington. The continuing investments we make this year are targeted to cut off the supply of young people being drawn into the gangs through proven intervention and outreach.

Research by the Washington Institute for Public Policy shows

Once a child is absorbed into gang culture, there is a huge social cost that extends well beyond that individual

that “youth who spend their free-time in pro-social and constructive activities are at lesser risk of violence.”

The model for success in these efforts is the Alive and Free program operated by the YMCA of Greater Seattle. Based on a successful program transported from Los Angeles by Seahawks coach Pete Carroll, Alive and Free pursues the hearts and minds of youth and empowers them to take control of their individual destinies. By employing street outreach workers, many of whom have es-



Washington Representative Eric Pettigrew



Washington Senator Joe Fain

caped from gangs themselves, the program meets youth where they are at and builds a positive social structure for them to find their way to success.

With the support of South King County police agencies, including Kent and Renton, and a \$200,000

Those are the kind of results we need.

Once a child is absorbed into gang culture there is a huge social cost that extends well beyond that individual: lost instructional time, medical care, and incarceration costs add up quickly.

A dollar spent keeping a child out of a gang is many dollars gained in reduced crime, healthier families and more successful students.

More important than cost savings is the immeasurable benefit that both society and the individual receives from ending violence and strengthening families.

The end of gangs begins with the rescue and protection of vulnerable youth. By focusing on curing the illness of gang activity we have a chance to stop its spread and give youth the hope and future they deserve. And that is worth every penny.

Representative Eric Pettigrew represents Seattle and serves as the House Democratic Caucus Chair. Senator Joe Fain represents South King County and serves on the board for Auburn Youth Resources.

Oregon Secretary of State Honors 50th Anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act

Oregon Secretary of State Jeanne P. Atkins invites Oregonians to join her in commemorating today as the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6, 1965.

The Act outlawed discriminatory voting practices, such as literacy tests and poll taxes, which were adopted after the Civil War to prevent African-Americans from registering and exercising their right to vote.

It also established new legal protections for minority voters at the polls.

“At a time when politicians in many states around the country are acting to suppress the voting rights of minorities, youth and the disadvantaged, Oregon stands out as a beacon of inclusiveness and fairness,” Atkins said.

“We are working to make it even easier for Oregonians to become voters and cast their ballots.”

Oregon has a long-standing tradition of ensuring voting is ac-

cessible, convenient, and secure. In 1998, Oregon led the nation with Vote-by-Mail system for all elections and became the national model for making voting as accessible as possible.

“Once again we are leading the nation with the Oregon Motor Voter Act” Atkins said.

“This program will make it easier for every eligible Oregon citizen to be registered to vote

As it was 50 years ago, and as it

firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind—it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact—I can only submit to the edict of others.”

To learn more about registering to vote and casting a ballot in Oregon, visit OregonVotes.gov.

The Secretary is Oregon's chief

‘The fate of our democracy depends on preserving and upholding access to the ballot’

has been since the founding of our nation, “the fate of our democracy depends on preserving and upholding access to the ballot,” Atkins said.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, “So long as I do not

elections officer, auditor and archivist.

Additionally, the Secretary of State promotes job growth by streamlining the creation and expansion of business, authenticates documents for travel or study



Jeanne P. Atkins, Oregon Secretary of State

abroad, and offers notary training and listings.

Oregon is the only state where the secretary of state is responsible for auditing public spending.

In addition, the secretary serves with the governor and treasurer on the Land Board and manages and oversees Oregon's Common School Fund.