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Opinion

Clean Energy Measure Good For Your Health

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

Patricia Kullberg,
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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

“Researchers estimate that social conditions account for two thirds of health outcomes

park is not safe to play in? What if you've been bombarded with ads since childhood about how sexy it is to smoke?

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

People of color suffer the additional burdens of racism. “Weathering” refers to a process of premature aging due to the constant stress from the daily effects of racism: the repeated experience of being dismissed, disrespected, diminished and denied. A weathering 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.

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 (Oregon Health Authority, 2014) and the Climate Change Preparation Strategy (City of Portland and Mult-

nomah 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 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.

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.

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).

Politically Correct, or Perfectly Civil

At this writing, Megyn Kelly is off the air at NBC. After her horrendously vapid statement saying she didn't see anything wrong with Blackface, she apologized the next day and even invited journalist Roland Martin on to take her to school. Roland did a brilliant job in explaining the history of Blackface and the way it demeans African American people, and it was great that he had the opportunity to educate, not only his odious host but also the millions who watch Megyn Kelly daily. So, Kelly tearfully apologized, and she listened to Roland and television commentator Amy Holmes as they talked about race. But does Kelly “get” why her remarks were so objectionable? Roland says she does, but I'm not so sure.

She prefaced her apology by saying that she was not a “PC kind of person.” I'm not sure what that means, and what is wrong with being “politically correct” if it means being perfectly civil, informed, and mindful of others. If African American people say that Blackface is offensive, it's not a big deal Megyn. It's offensive. Whether you know the history or not, if members of a group say something is wrong, why not accept it? Or

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NNPA
Columnist

does your White skin privilege allow you to determine what is offensive and what is not?

This is not the first time Ms. Kelly has put her foot into racial quicksand. Confident in her Aryan-ness, she proclaimed that Santa Clause

“Whether you know the history or not, if members of a group say something is wrong, why not accept it?”

is White, and so is Jesus. To declare Jesus White, given his geographical roots on the African continent or in the Middle East, is to embrace a special kind of both spatial and historical ignorance. But if you are vested in the world being a narrow White occasion, then you are free to

spew racist myths, or shall we say, “fake news.”

On the Santa tip, since Santa is not a real person, but a fairy tale figment of someone's imagination, Santa's race is subject to the imagination. Kelly seemed to have a problem with a Black Santa. Why? Does a Black Santa offend her lily-White sensibilities? Is she so steeped in Whiteness that she can't think outside the box? And did NBC throw the talented Tamron Hall under the bus for that? Speaks to their own racial bias and sense of White superiority!

It is tragic to consider that Megyn Kelly has three young children who are undoubtedly being influenced by her warped racial views. But NBC may, perhaps, be reconsidering their relationship with Kelly. It would be a great loss if she were bounced off the air, though there are some who think she has learned her lesson sufficiently to continue her career.

What if, instead of losing her job, she was involved in a “Black immersion” experience? What if she had to spend a month in a dormitory at Bennett or Spellman College, spending time with the young Black women she seems not to have taken into consideration heretofore?

What if her conversation with Roland Martin could be the first of many, and she was directed to spend time with Essence Editor Emerita Susan Taylor, with NNPA Chair Dorothy Leavell, with Jada Pinkett Smith, with Rev. Jesse Jackson, and with others. Might that make a difference for the ill-educated Megyn Kelly? Or maybe she should just read a book or two.

Fifty years after the Kerner Commission report, it is clear that there are still two Americas, one Black, and one White. Two Americas, with two different realities and few bridges to understanding. This is why, even in all-White communities, Black history must be taught. This is why our textbooks ought to speak realistically about enslavement, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and lynching.

White ignorance is a choice, especially among adults who can educate themselves and expose themselves to the totality of history.

Megyn Kelly chose to expose herself to Roland Martin and Amy Holmes. Too bad she shot off her uninformed mouth before she got educated! Perhaps she will now remove the term “PC” from her vocabulary unless she happens to mean perfectly civil.