



July 20, 2020

Willamette Week
Mark Zusman, Editor & Publisher
2220 NW Quimby Street
Portland, OR 97210

Dear Mr. Zusman:

Yesterday my team reached out to the Editorial Board to present concerns regarding the Willamette Week's coverage of my race, given some very targeted efforts to re-optimize and promote a prior story from 2015, coupled with the longstanding nature of your paper's targeting and biased coverage of many leaders of color in our community – more specifically the strategic campaigns this paper has waged over the years to discredit, intimidate, and destroy Black leadership in Portland. In the communication, we named the issue very clearly – your paper invests in, and benefits from, systemic racism and institutional bias. While I understand that your team disagrees with that assertion, the lack of diversity found in leadership at your paper leaves you willingly incapable of assessing and addressing your own bias, both the explicit and implicit racism found in your coverage of communities of color, and the magnitude of the harm your paper has caused to black and brown people over the years.

When we reached out yesterday to engage Willamette Week in a conversation about these matters, I truly hoped that you would engage in a meaningful and honest conversation that would result in a better understanding of how your paper shows up in our community and a commitment to evolve and grow in a way that the heaviness of this moment of national reckoning with systemic racism and violence against black and brown bodies demands. Unfortunately, we were met with a generic admission that the paper has work to do on equity, while simultaneously refusing to openly confront, explain, and reconcile the longstanding actions of your paper that have caused harm to black and brown communities in Portland.

After further reflection, I have decided to no longer seek the Willamette Week's endorsement in the August 11th special election for Portland City Council, Position 2. I'm certain this won't endear me to the editorial team or newsroom, but this moment demands that we name and address racism, discrimination, and violence against black and brown people in all institutions – not just when it comes to the police. Whatever retaliation comes, or political consequences levied, will be well worth finally giving voice to the hurt and fear so many past and current leaders of color in our community feel when engaging with your paper. These don't have to be quiet conversations or widespread whispers any longer. If we don't speak out, then the future

leadership our community needs to step forward will be burdened with the exact same fear, and ultimately harm, that we've dealt with at the hands of your paper for decades.

I sincerely believe in evolution and growth. I've had my own struggles and challenges, and it was not until I truly examined how I show up and the impact of how I show up, regardless of intention, was I able to start making changes that I hope make me a better person and community servant moving forward. I encourage you to turn your paper's critical and scrutinizing eye inward and start the serious work of self-examination and engage leaders of color on how to repair the harm you've caused and be a better, more equitable and just establishment moving forward. Your readers, advertisers, and the broader community deserve nothing less.

As we stated yesterday, this is much bigger than me and much more widespread than this political campaign. I served this community long before I was ever on a ballot or in elected office. From making a mockery of now Oregon State Senator Lew Frederick's great-grandfather, a freed slave, when he was running for Multnomah County Commissioner to the racist caricature of Portland's first Black woman to serve as Police Chief, Danielle Outlaw, the depth and broad scope of the harm cannot be disputed or dismissed.

In Truth and Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Loretta Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Loretta Smith
Candidate, Portland City Council, Position 2

cc: Aaron Mesh, Willamette Week News Editor