

Portland Peaceful Response Coalition

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November 6, 2007

Mayor Tom Potter
Commissioner Sam Adams
Commissioner Randy Leonard
Commissioner Erik Sten
Commissioner Dan Saltzman
City of Portland
1221 SW Fourth Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Mayor and Commissioners,

The *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition* strongly supports the renaming of Interstate Avenue to Cesar E Chavez Boulevard. We stand with our brothers and sisters in the *Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard Committee* in their work towards realizing this significant expression honoring the life and work of this historic figure of the Latin American communities here in the United States.

We are deeply troubled by the bigoted comments that characterized several of the neighborhood meetings convened to discuss the renaming of Interstate Avenue, and by the ugly behavior that was exhibited towards Committee members participating in those meetings. The City Council has an obligation, a moral imperative, to model principled support for minority communities when they face that kind of prejudice. We applaud Mayor Potter for his steadfastness in this case, and for his courageous and outspoken opposition to the Homeland Security raids in North Portland earlier this year. The two cases are not unrelated, and we are deeply gratified that Portland's current Mayor has been willing to confront these attacks head-on.

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The same cannot be said of Commissioners Randy Leonard and Sam Adams, who scrambled to placate, and consequently to encourage, the opposition to the renaming of Interstate Avenue, favoring political expediency over the much harder choice of coming to the defense of those targeted by hate in our city.

In the past, Commissioners Leonard and Adams have been strong, principled allies in the struggle to make Portland truly inclusive of all its diverse residents, a place where equality and dignity are key priorities guiding their decisions in the conduct of city governance. We thank them for their commitment to these concerns through their years of service to our city. But we appeal to them to reconsider their strategy today, and to recognize that in this case standing against the rising tides of prejudice in Portland, in Oregon and throughout the United States, demands that they honor their commitments to the *Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard Committee*. That means not bowing to the cynical calls for a new process for renaming Interstate Avenue, changing the rules halfway through. It means making choices, sometimes unpopular and sometimes with uncertainty, because they are the right choices, the choices that will help Portland move bravely forward into the new millennium, inspired not by fear, but by hope, building bridges that draw communities together, not encouraging walls of bigotry that drive neighbors apart.

Thank you, Mayor and Commissioners, for considering our perspective in making your decision.

Regards,

William R. Seaman
Portland Peaceful Response Coalition