

IN MY OPINION Dan Saltzman

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Today, Portland's City Council will be asked to vote on a resolution that would withdraw our police from the multiagency Joint Terrorism Task Force. I have the utmost respect for the work of Mayor Tom Potter and federal officials, who have sought over the last month to find a way for Portland to remain a partner in the task force. The discussions have fostered better relations among the FBI, the U.S. attorney and our mayor.

But I am deeply disappointed that their efforts did not succeed. Despite the good faith of all involved, I find myself, on principle, unable to support withdrawing from the task force.

Here's why:

Having various law enforcement agencies working together, in the same location, produces better results. We know this from experience. For more than 10 years the local multiagency Child Abuse Team has effectively responded to reports of abuse or neglect and worked to ensure children's safety while building cases for the successful prosecution of abusers. State child-abuse hot line personnel work in the same building as assistant district attorneys and law enforcement personnel from throughout our county. Inspired by such successes, we are now forming a joint federal, state and local Cold Case unit to solve open homicide cases. The benefits of working in the same location are real.

Unfortunately, the threat of terrorism also is real. It's not just al-Qaida and international terrorism; there are more than 300 active domestic terror investigations in the United States. Hate crimes and abortion clinic bombings are sad realities. Pro-Nazi fliers distributed in Portland on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday reminded me that the No. 1 goal of Portland police is to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

One can be concerned about the far reach of the USA Patriot Act and still support the Joint Terrorism Task Force. I authored last year's City Council resolution expressing concern about the Patriot Act and calling on Congress to fix its most disturbing provisions. We must continue to work to ensure that the Patriot Act and the rest of our homeland security laws adequately safeguard the civil liberties that are at the core of our American values. But that effort should not sidetrack critical cooperation among our law enforcement agencies.

A recent trip I took to New York City included paying respect to the innocent victims of 9/11. It was an awkward silence at the 16-acre hole that was the World Trade Center. Among New Yorkers there is a silent, palpable sense of apprehension, a post-traumatic stress for many who were there. It's difficult to imagine looking a New Yorker in the eye and explaining our rationale for withdrawing from the terror task force. It would feel disrespectful to even attempt to do so. They, more than anyone, understand that barriers to cooperation among law enforcement agencies anywhere place all of us at risk. President Kennedy spoke in West Berlin during the Cold War and proudly boasted, "Ich bin ein Berliner." Meaning all free people, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. Wherever we may live, in our resolve to prevent terrorism, all Americans are citizens of New York. As such, we owe ourselves nothing less than to confront terrorism seriously and in collaboration with our partners. That is what the Joint Terrorism Task Force is all about.