

Greetings,

My family, on all sides, have been in Oregon for multiple generations. I grew up in Portland through high school and have been back for over 20 years.

There have been multiple generations of veterans in my family that fought in wars from the Spanish American war to WWII to the Vietnam war. The evolution of tactics and weaponry used between that time has been quite dramatic. Sadly chemical weapons were used throughout most of the 20th century with devastating effects; upon our enemies, our own soldiers and many innocent civilians. I thought collectively we had learned from these mistakes and in fact it is considered to be a human rights violation to use chemical weapons. So really I am at a loss to why this is even considered as an option for a police force in the United States, in my home state, in my home town no less.

While HB 4208 may be a step forward, it is definitely not sufficient. The ban on tear gas, CS gas and all derivatives thereof has not decreased, it seems to be even more prevalent. How can this be? Well, what we have seen in Portland in recent weeks is the arbitrary and frequent declaration of riots to then justify the use of these banned chemical agents.

There have been two occasions when the legal protests have been near our house and they have been used. I know because we were upstairs with our windows open and fans running in to cool the house and all of a sudden we were having a hard time to breathe and our eyes were irritated. Let me clarify, by near I am talking about 1-2 miles away. It is unacceptable to use these agents on protesters and it is absolutely deplorable to not think of the repercussions of using these chemicals that would now blanket a whole neighborhood, with children and elderly.

HB 4208 needs to be amended or replaced. There should be an absolute ban on the use of tear gas and other chemical weapons in the state of Oregon.

If the deployment of chemical agents in war is a human rights violation, their use among civilians is as well. A police force that requires chemical agents to control a civilian population and that can arbitrarily declare a riot to justify using these banned weapons is a police force that has failed. It cannot be left up to them to self regulate. And it cannot be an option for the federal force that has now arrived in Portland.

All of this so far is discussing the use of these chemical weapons in general. However, the reality is that we are seeing the increased used of chemical agents as we face dramatic increases in COVID throughout our state. There is much evidence to risk of this deadly combination of factors. The application of agents that target the respiratory system amidst a pathogen that targets the respiratory system is unconscionable. It is even more unconscionable when deadly force is used disproportionately against Black civilians, who also are disproportionately infected and killed by SARS-CoV2.

Chemical agents harm civilians, police officers, neighborhoods, and health care workers. They have no place in our communities and our state.

Thank you for your careful consideration,

Robert Dunham
Portland, OR