

## Your City, Seattle

Executive Department — Office of Women's Rights  
Susan Lane, Director  
Charles Royer, Mayor



June 15, 1978

Editor  
Seattle Times  
Fairview North & John Streets  
Seattle, Washington 98111

Dear Sir,

Your June 1 edition carries a letter of protest from Angela Basta, who feels you gave excessively favorable coverage to the hiring of Barbara Beers as Seattle's first women firefighter. Basta claims the City's affirmative action program has given unwarranted advantages to women and minorities in general, and Ms. Beers in particular. A special point of anger is the salary and other costs of her pre-recruit period.

Our opinion is that the Times article was topical and written in a relatively straight forward manner. Any full review of City employment and training tradition would show white males as the greatly advantaged group.

In a democracy, it is not enough to have law-making bodies selected by the people. The government work force should also be representative of the population served, to assure maximum day-to-day sensitivity. However, women now hold only two-thirds of their equitable share of city jobs and minorities are below parity. Under-representation or mis-representation is even more alarming when we look at types of City jobs held by women and minorities. They are excessively confined to low pay or low status positions. For example, 17 out of every 20 clerical jobs are occupied by women.

On the surface, the training of Ms. Beers may have seemed inordinately expensive but this impression dissolves in the face of four considerations:

(1) During the last full fiscal year, white males comprised about 62% of the City work force and absorbed 58% of the training costs borne by the City. Hence, overall, women and minorities barely received a fair share based on their present status. This share was much below par in relation to historic disadvantages. Since women and minorities are disproportionately concentrated in entry level jobs, we should expect much more of the training budget devoted to them.

(2) Few new, exploratory, ventures are cost efficient on their first "model", whether we're dealing with human or technological innovations. Seattle would

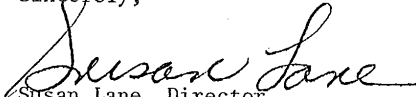
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still be a hick town in industry, education, sports, etc., if decisions to proceed were based strictly on the cost of pioneering efforts.

(3) The system for training white males as Seattle firefighters has evolved over a century of time. The cumulative costs of accommodating them - in terms of facilities, avenues of recruitment, equipment etc. - have been "part of the process" for so long few think to tally up these hidden inconveniences and costs. Basta and other supporters of the status quo refuse to recognize these historic advantages as "special treatment".

(4) There are other, usually invisible public costs in the inclusion of white males and the exclusion of women and minorities from certain jobs. For years schools, media, etc., have promoted the image of the little white boy "growing up to be a fireman". He is given both opportunity and approval for activities helpful to such a career. It should not be surprising that extra, concentrated effort is now required (a) to convince women and minorities that they're welcome in such non-traditional jobs, and (b) to make up for some of the lost learning experiences of childhood.

Sincerely,

  
Susan Lane, Director  
Office of Women's Rights

SL/pcg