

WASHINGTON, DC --- Today, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) issued the following statement on a letter that Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX) sent to Attorney General Ashcroft yesterday. The Smith letter blasted Portland, Oregon for refusing to participate in a portion of the Attorney General's anti-terrorism investigation and invited Ashcroft to address the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime to discuss Portland's decision.

“The November 27 letter from Rep. Lamar Smith invites Attorney General Ashcroft to divert his energies once more from the war on terrorism to a war on Oregon. The City of Portland is carefully working through questions of state law and good law enforcement in an effort to cooperate, to the extent feasible, with Attorney General Ashcroft's campaign to interview 5000 non-citizen residents of the United States.

There have been differences of opinion in Portland and Oregon about the extent to which Portland police are permitted to question people identified by the Attorney General based upon their nation of origin. This is not a difference of opinion about the need to protect America against terrorist attack.

Indeed, this week six former high ranking officials from the U.S. Department of Justice expressed grave concerns about the wisdom and effectiveness of the roundup undertaken by Attorney General Ashcroft. These former officials warned that this approach is poor police work and likely to raise legitimate civil liberties concerns. Their objections were based on effectiveness, not on opposition to the war on terrorism.

The situation in Portland is the same. The State's Attorney General, the Portland City Attorney and other officials are working through the issues under state law. The Oregon State Police and other police agencies are participating with the US Department of Justice, and the City of Portland is continuing to work toward a solution.

Under these circumstances, it is appalling to see Mr. Smith of Texas encouraging Attorney General Ashcroft to pick yet another fight with the State of Oregon. Rep. Smith's letter, asking for an accounting of federal monies spent on law enforcement in my State and asserting that Oregon is acting “inconsistent with the national war effort”, is a regrettable and divisive attack that is itself a diversion from the struggle we should be making against terror.”