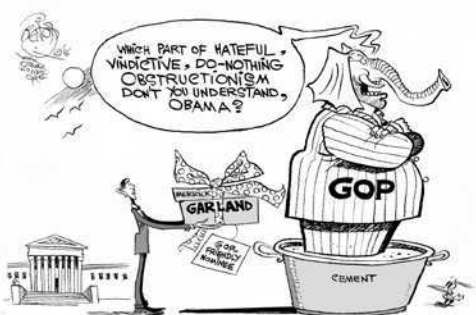


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LOCAL NEWS



Portland mayoral candidates Deborah Harris and Ted Wheeler face representatives from Portland's communities of color at a Thursday forum sponsored by the National Association of Minority Contractors.

Mayoral Hopefuls Debate

Communities of color hear from candidates

BY CERVANTE POPE
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Given Portland's strained racial history and today's divide between economic classes, the argument of who should guide the city as its next mayor was the topic of conversation for residents at a mayoral debate for Portland's communities of color.

Addressing the topics of housing, jobs and transportation for minorities within the city, the candidates participating in the Thursday forum sponsored by the Oregon branch of the National Association of Minority Contractors at New Song Church in northeast Portland, included the sole minority candidate for Portland Mayor Deborah Harris, current Oregon Treasurer Ted Wheeler, Multnomah County Commissioner Jules Bailey, and activists David Schor and Sarah Iannarone.

A specially-curated panel of

minority business and advocacy organizations sat across from the row of predominately Caucasian candidates, visually calling attention to the racial rift in Portland's government.

A shortage of housing for minority and low income residents, along with housing displacement from gentrified neighborhoods, were two issues that opened the debate.

"A big part of what we have to do in affordable housing is create these pathways for people to actually be able to own their homes," said David Schor.

Yet it was a question from Bishop Steven Holt of the Kingdom Nation Church that both confused the mayoral candidates and received one of the most eye-opening responses of the night. Not one candidate effectively answered the Bishop's question on how to assimilate displaced families back into the community.

Jules Bailey acknowledged the problem when give a second chance to respond.

"We do have an affordability crisis in this city and displacement

is on a lot of people's lips," Bailey said. "But one of the reasons it's so hot in this campaign right now is that the affordability crisis and displacement is starting to affect middle and upper middle class white families. This has been going on in communities of color for a long time, for decades."

One member of the audience showed how distraught she was on gentrification issues by storming the stage and ripping up Bailey's name card, delaying the debate.

As a result, the jobs and transportation topics were cut extremely short, but each candidate seemed to come to the same consensus of guaranteeing work for minority contractors and devising plans to grant more access to public transportation for those economically pushed to the outer limits of the city.

The candidates' closing comments made a last ditch efforts to gain support, but demonstrated that no matter who wins, how to address gentrification within minority communities and throughout the city as a whole will be a top priority.

Madison Rebuild Planning Begins

The planning process has begun for rebuilding Madison High School in northeast Portland as part of the Portland School District's plans to rebuild many of its aging schools.

Members of the community are invited to participate in the Madison Master Planning Design Workshop this Saturday, April 16, from 9 a.m. till noon in

the Madison High School cafeteria.

Anyone who wants to participate in the workshop discussion and comes in early at 8:30 a.m. can receive a free breakfast and free child care. The planning session will begin at 9 a.m.

For information, visit the Madison Bond Project website MadisonBond.pps.net or call 503-916-2222.