



IN TRANSIT THANKS, SAM

From behind the scenes during the era of Mayor Vera Katz and later, to the front line as a city commissioner and mayor, Sam Adams was someone at City Hall who was watching out for transgender citizens — a peace of mind for many, knowing no misfortune was going to sneak up on us in the city of Portland, Oregon.

While it is true that a personal decision or two by Adams left many Portlanders with their mouths agape, it doesn't erase the fact that it may be some time before many of us feel as comfortable again as we are feeling right now.

Many transgender sisters and brothers easily relate to Adam's upbringing — a rough road lined with bullies and distant dreams. Success, when it came, didn't rid us of bullies and haters — only Adams knows how this feels. Portland's next mayor will certainly be our ally, but will never have worn our shoes.

Highly regarded trans-friendly cities like Portland are rare and the occupants of city hall determine where the bar is set. I have a large presence on social media and Portland's reputation as a trans haven is stated over and over again both by people living here and those that have lived here at one time or another. I've never hesitated to say "yes" when asked if Portland is safe for trans people.

While violence is a threat for all LGBTQ citizens, transgender people are especially targeted. In Portland, the instances of violence are relatively low. Furthermore, trans people here generally do not fear calling the police, as is often the case elsewhere; trans people feel the police will not protect them from being harassed or beaten, or they fear being harassed, bullied or beaten BY the police. One can sense Adams is attuned to this in the way he's handling the Ronald Frasnour firing (Frasnour was fired for shooting Aaron Campbell, who was unarmed, in the back on Jan. 29, 2010). No trans citizen should fear their own police force.

Trans-friendly, low-violence, police attuned to our needs, and strong allies at City Hall doesn't seem to be asking for much, but sadly, in most large American cities, the lack of two or more these conditions is the norm. I'm grateful that the current and past mayors and commissioners wisely molded Portland into the great city that is for trans people today.

Now with the era of Sam Adams ending, I have an uneasy feeling that I'm sure is likely shared by other trans people in the area. Will someone still be watching out for us? In a way we are fortunate. Both mayoral candidates Charlie Hales and Jefferson Smith appear to be very strong allies of LGBTQ people. Both Hales and Smith have actively worked on campaigns or projects in the past that directly improved our well-being and both appear to support recent transgender-specific policies.

Indeed, after viewing the material from both campaigns, I'm looking at two very impressive trans allies. Choosing the better candidate may involve a bit of hair splitting. ■

In Transit is written by Courtney O'Donnell for *Just Out*. Courtney is a Transgender actress, advocate, and writer, including being a regular contributor to The Huffington Post. She is also the star of the film 'Lexie Cannes'. Reach her at JustOut.com.