

CHALLENGER, from page 8

A.W.: Do you think the issues of camping or the Drug Impact Areas need to be addressed differently?

M.N.: There are very few people who choose to sleep outdoors on a permanent basis. I could choose to sleep outdoors when I go hiking or backpacking, but there are few people who want to rely on camping, especially in urban areas, as their abode. We have an obligation to make sure that everyone feels safe, including people who live or work near places where people are camping, and the people in our economic recession who have been thrown into that circumstance.

Until we work together, with the county and the state, to address the underlying forces that drive people to have to be in that position, all the ordinances in the world, and all the exclusion zones in the world, will not have long-term impacts for the people who are homeless.

A.W.: Are you supportive of the Office of Equity?

M.N.: I fully and enthusiastically support the goals and imperative of addressing inequalities in the city. If the city really wants to move the dial and improve our record for all of our residents, then we've got to put some accountability on it. In my experience, the best way to achieve real results is to set specific, measurable targets, put deadlines on them, and put some kind of enforcement piece on it. Until we do that with the Office of Equity, it's going to be very hard to achieve real results that change anybody's life.

A.W.: Despite a decades-old pledge otherwise, the affordable housing inventory in the city's core continues to shrink. Meanwhile, the waiting lists to obtain even a modest affordable apartment are becoming absurdly long or are closed. What are your ideas on how to increase the supply of affordable housing to lower-income households in Portland?

M.N.: I know there is a conversation and debate going on about what kind of income levels to target via available housing resources from the Portland Housing Bureau. I haven't studied it well enough to have a well-informed position on it.

A.W.: The city's housing bureau is on the edge of what will become severe revenue restrictions, with the decline in TIF funding and federal grant cuts. What will you do to create a sustainable revenue for housing and homeless services for years to come?

M.N.: I do support doing that. I will be very supportive of efforts to expand to the point where we could get back to achieving the goal of doing no harm or preserving the existing stock. I don't have any magic pockets of money to address that, though. It has to be looked at in the context of the city's imperative to simultaneously do what it can to support businesses that are creating family wage jobs in Portland ... you

have to balance all those priorities.

A.W.: How will you work with county and state to develop a better strategy for addressing the needs of people experiencing poverty?

M.N.: Cities and counties, historically, have had complimentary and distinct roles (with county providing services for human services and corrections, and the city providing services for infrastructure-related issues and public safety). I believe that the division ... is legitimate. It is largely a county and state responsibility, but the city certainly has a role in making sure we're not doing anything to compromise the county's ability to be successful. It would be important for our proposals for any new funding or bond measures or levies be coordinated, so we're not weakening the county's ability to provide vitally important human and social services.

A.W.: Employment is at the foundation of self-sufficiency. What are you going to do to help create jobs for people with multiple barriers to getting hired?

M.N.: What the city can do to create jobs is to make sure that we provide the best, most cost effective and most timely services to employers who employ most of Portlanders. We have to retain the intent and the integrity of our public health, public safety and environmental standards, and move as deliberately as possible to assist businesses when they're poised to expand and bring in or create new jobs.

Specifically to people with multiple challenges, all the same applies, but I'd like to add to that any partnering the city can do around transportation access and affordability and opportunities around training and re-training to keep people current and marketable in the economy as it shifts.

A.W.: Every year, public transportation gets more expensive for riders and the free zone downtown gets chipped away and threatened with elimination. What are you going to do to preserve the free rail zone?

M.N.: Fareless Square is a TriMet decision, but I think the city partners with Trimet and Metro (the regional governing body for Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties) on all manner of transportation issues. Certainly, asserting the priority of keeping transportation accessible as well as affordable for people in entry-level, working-class and middle-class jobs is something the city can assert some leadership on.

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House Cleaning
By Kareem Ali

He emerges from junipers
Hidden in a cocoon of light
The mist of whiskey
Caught in his teeth like a fog.

His wrinkled, wizened face
Is transformed under a gust of wind
Yet he still manages
To collect bottles and cans
He still vacuums the cement
And mops the tops of trees.

By summer
He homesteads in the park
Sequestered
Under a trombone of heat
With the final dust rag of day
He can easily sweep up
The dark.

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