

EDITORIAL

Let's not waste charter commission's potential

So much potential lay in the city's latest charter commission. And yet it seemed like almost nobody, even the City Council, gave a hoot.

It's not that a charter commission — under most circumstances — would ever draw great intrigue or excitement from the public, but what could have been with this latest commission had such potential that the lost opportunity seems even more tragic.

From the beginning, the commission had one hand tied behind its back, and it emerged after months of meetings,

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sometimes sparsely attended, with little more than the housekeeping suggestions to hand back to City Council. Gone were the innovative ideas to create an independent utility commission, to revamp problematic laws around crowd control, to shift oversight of — and perhaps save — public

restrooms, and to infuse genuine independence into a handicapped system for police accountability. Nearly everyone with a dog in the fight has done their share of finger pointing at who and what is to blame for the failure — including at themselves.

Whatever.

The blame game is just another diversion from the problems of our status quo; it's a distraction, a red herring to the fact that we don't need a charter commission's stamp of approval to make these changes.

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For more than a decade, people have called for authentic police oversight and accountability and an end to the one-sided system we have now. We currently have a police bureau under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice, and we have spent millions of dollars to compensate the families of people wronged by officers under our pay. In the face of all this, we have a police accountability system so heavily weighted in favor of the bureau that challenges are almost nonexistent. Despite years of outcry, little has changed.

On the other issues, an independent utility commission may still be the answer to depoliticize utility rates and expenditures, along with ensuring that essential sewer and water services remain affordable to low-income households. It shouldn't be abandoned.

Crowd control reform — to address the use of pepper spray and horses to overpower people — is an issue on the front lines of our civil rights. It demands a public airing. And the imperative that public restrooms are just as much a vital public service — for people of all incomes — as water and sewers, calls for further consideration to shift their oversight away from the Parks and Recreation Department, which can't seem to find the money to keep them open this summer.

These were all good discussions on important ideas to address ongoing problems. They shouldn't be thrown out with the bathwater. We chant and shout for "people power," so we had better be ready to step up and exercise it. Let's not let this opportunity get wasted again.

Safety net hangs in the balance at City Hall

The City of Portland faces some big hurdles in the upcoming budget cycle. It's projected that each bureau, along with many one-time projects, could be at

risk due to a decline in revenue brought on by a shaky system and an economic stagnation that just won't go away.

With the number of people experiencing homelessness and poverty on the rise,

saving our safety net, along with maintaining and creating more affordable housing, couldn't be more important. We all know that people can't be successful in our community without the basics such as shelter, education and jobs. We hear it over and over from current public officials and candidates at both a local and national level. To the people actually affected and living on the edge, it's more than just a rhetorical

message — it's a hard reality played out on any number of fronts.

For years, Portland City Council and Mayor Sam Adams have preserved the safety net, choosing to make sure that many of the basics surrounding housing are preserved so that we can be smart and effective citywide about tackling the issues of poverty. This year, city hall has a real opportunity to keep that momentum alive — from supporting the foreclosure prevention and homebuyer education to making sure that the safety net stays in tact.

Striking a balance between what must be funded to maintain a healthy city and preserving the safety net is something that we can't take for granted, and becomes tricky business in hard times. We're looking to our elected officials to make sure we stay on the right path, and people have opportunity in the City of Roses. Being fiscally smart and having compassion is something we can all get behind.



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DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

LETTER

A siloed Left stands no chance against an organized Right

BY PATRICK NOLEN AND ILSA VAN DEN BROECK

"If you know your enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."

— The Art of War by Sun Tzu, 600 BC.

Sun Tzu was, of course, originally referring to warfare in ancient China. But to the hundreds of thousands who have more recently studied and applied his principles, his observation holds just as true in modern politics, and in our efforts at organizing around social justice issues.

Many right-of-center institutions and advocates seem to have taken Sun Tzu's advice to heart. Moreover, they may even be well on the way to perfecting the deployment of intelligence-gathering tools and technologies in their efforts to understand what they view as their enemies. At the same time, those of us who are left of center seem almost to be afraid to understand our opponents, lest the effort involved in gaining that understanding somehow contaminate us.

The political right, both conservatives and libertarians, have an entire industry full of people who are paid to think of ways to derail the Left, to co-opt us and confuse our messages, all the while sharpening theirs. There are think tanks that raise and spend millions of dollars a year just to correctly frame issues to make it harder for

us to get our points across. Our efforts on the Left are far less organized, more ad hoc and, ultimately, cripplingly siloed.

When we on the Left gather intelligence, we spend money in narrow bands, and ask for specific results, such as "How can we better serve this group of our constituents or that special interest group?" When the Right gathers and uses intelligence, they write a big check with the instructions: "Make something we can use across the board." Our intelligence-gathering is generally so compartmentalized that the results often do not get disseminated outside the initial group sponsors. When the Right releases information, it is pushed out far and wide, using every channel available.

Just to emphasize our point, how many of our readers have read George Lakoff's "Don't Think of an Elephant!?" How about "Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24"? We are betting that conservative thinker Frank Luntz has read both. We bet that Luntz and his colleagues read a lot of books by "Left-leaning" writers. They know what we fail to recognize for ourselves, which is that in order for them to be most effective, not only do they have to understand the issues from their team's point of view, but also from our team's as well.

Two weeks ago, Ilsa was in a conversation with our colleagues

where it turned out that not one of 15 people present had even heard of German general Helmuth von Moltke. Not one understood how "Mission Tactics" was important to our movement. One of our colleagues even asked derisively, "How are some German generals important to me?" They did not know who Moltke was, or what that phrase meant to our movement: However, the Right appears to have set up their think tanks based on their understanding of both.

At a similar gathering a couple of weeks later, Ilsa was laughed at for having compared the abortion issue, and its relationship to what used to be Southern Democrats, to the German attack past the Maginot line in 1940. She was even told, "that metaphor does not work, politics is not war!"

In the future, we need to learn more from our mistakes. To be effective, we need to learn to look at how we have failed and see what we can do differently. We also need to learn to use our opponent's tactics and strategies when they prove useful.

What separates us now from greater success is our own worry that we may offend someone, or somehow be corrupted by an understanding of how and why the opposition does what it does. Our opponents have not forgotten Sun Tzu's time-tested advice.

Neither must we.

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢

goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

25¢

goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.