

Do the Right Thing

IF ELECTED TO LANE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, **JOEL IBOA** WANTS TO KEEP FIGHTING FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

By Henry Houston

The world feels like it's nearing the end. From foreign politics hanging on by a thread to the existential threat of a climate crisis, it's easy to fall prey to political cynicism.

Not for Joel Iboa.

Sure, he says, he has his days when he wakes up worried that maybe things won't get fixed, but he often starts his day with the thought: "What can we do today to make tomorrow's future brighter?"

"Let's say we fight and we fail. At least we tried," he says. "If we don't fight, we'll fail regardless."

Iboa, 28, whose résumé includes fighting for human rights and environmental issues, is running for the south Eugene seat on the Lane County Board of Commissioners. A coalition manager at Causa, an immigrant rights organization, he says he's been fighting for what's right his whole life.

Iboa's campaign has raised about \$13,000 and has promised to not take money from special interest political action campaigns and corporations. His endorsements so far include Eugene Mayor Lucy Vinis, City Councilor Jennifer Yeh and state Sen. James Manning.

The board's makeup has changed since the 2018 election brought in now-Chair Heather Buch and Vice Chair Joe Berney. The change is good because institutions get stale when it's always the same people, Iboa says. The Board of Commissioners is in a place where it can make bold action over the next couple of years, he adds.

"I want to join the team," he says. "Put me in coach, I'm ready to go."

After spending time advocating legislators to pass HB 2015, which allowed undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, Iboa says he was called upon to run for the south Eugene county commission seat.

"It's one thing to actively pursue positions of leadership," he says. "It's another thing to be asked to pursue positions of leadership."

At 16, Iboa says what sparked his interest in government and policy was when he was chosen by Eugene School District 4J to attend the Minority Student Achievement Network conference in Wisconsin, which explored why students of color don't perform as well as white peers.

During his senior year, Iboa served as a high school representative on the 4J school board. He jokes that at board meetings, he would report on things like upcoming school dances and then try not to fall asleep. But while there, he saw how local government works.

Today, he's the chairman of the Eugene Human Rights Commission and Gov. Kate Brown's Environmental Justice Task Force.

If elected, Iboa says he would want to push for more



Photo by Todd Cooper

public safety policies. He's heard people talk about the lack of officers and 911 operators but something else is missing from safety proposals.

"The things I haven't heard so much from elected officials are safety concerns on behalf of immigrants, people of color and other marginalized communities," he says. "Since the 2016 election, there's been a massive number of hate crimes in the city."

He's heard from the UO MEChA, a Latinx group he advises, about the amount of harassment its members have experienced.

"In general there's been an atmosphere of fear in our community," he says.

When President Donald Trump didn't even have witnesses called for in the Senate for his impeachment trial, it's clear the rules of politics have changed. But more young people of color are running for office now, he adds.

"The threats and problems that we're facing as a country, state, as a county, as a city, require different points of view," he says. "If you take a look at who's been in positions of power, they all look the same."

Just being a child of immigrants doesn't mean that he's earned the trust of communities of color and immigrants, he says. It's his leadership getting things done for them.

"I have a track record of passing policies or bringing up issues or providing solutions to these problems," he says.

He says he built and ran a campaign against Measure 105, which would have repealed a law that limits the use of state and local law enforcement to enforce federal immigration rights.

When the Trump administration ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, an Obama era immigration policy allowing undocumented immigrants who grew up in the U.S. a renewable two-year work permit, Iboa says he approached the city to cover the DACA renewal fees.

And, he says, while on the Human Rights Coalition, he championed a 2019 Eugene City Council resolution condemning white supremacy.

When tackling climate change, Iboa says there are ways the county can act, such as Portland's 1 percent gross receipts tax on businesses from retailers that generate more than \$1 billion nationally and \$500,000 in local sales. Portland voters approved that tax in 2018 and the revenue will go toward programs like clean energy projects, clean energy jobs training and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

"It starts with incremental steps like that," Iboa says.

Another place to cut greenhouse emissions is at construction sites, he adds, where most cities' greenhouse gas emissions often occur. Iboa wants to encourage policies and practices that ensure construction vehicles meet the highest standard.

Iboa, born in Eugene, says he imagines Lane County being the model of governance for the rest of the state.

"I want Lane County to inspire other counties," he says. "I want other county commissioners from other counties to come to us and say, 'Help us. You're doing it the right way.'" ■

Twinning! A Benefit for Joel Iboa for Lane County hosted by the Dunbar Twins is 6 pm Thursday, Feb. 13, at WildCraft Cider Works, located at 232 Lincoln Street.