



OPINION

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The Portland Observer

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RON HERNDON SPEAKS

Education Comes First in Governor's Race

The Portland Observer is proud to publish a series of interviews featuring community leader and activist Ron D. Herndon. Our correspondent Yugen Fardan Rashad recently sat down with Herndon to talk about the election season and its impact for local residents.

Yugen: Ron, the state is about to send a new governor to Salem. What list of concerns and recommendations would you put before the two candidates?

Herndon: The candidates need to address issues that are most important to us. Specifically, what are you going to do about education and I'm not talking about money. Some things can be done without money; like making sure schools of education turn out graduates that know how to teach children to read, write and do math. What will you (the new governor) do to make sure we receive our fair share of excellent teachers and principals in the inner city? That's a pretty simple request. It's an issue of equity.

Yugen: As you know, the highest concentration of black people in Oregon resides in Portland, but the second highest percentage is in prisons across the state. I would think this should be a huge issue for the two candidates to consider?

Herndon: Correct. How will you (the incoming governor) address the disproportionate jail sentences that are sending a lot of folks from our community to prison for crimes that involve small amounts of drugs? They need treatment, not incarceration! How will you ensure that treatment will be available rather than continue in this merry-go-round?

Yugen: The issue of drugs is under the microscope following the indictment of a very famous native and employee of the Portland Trailblazers.

Herndon: The discussion about drugs such as pot, should happen before a celebrity is arrested. It's easy to talk about drugs when a celebrity is involved. But if you're serious about coming up with a solution, there should be a broader discussion about addiction in our community. The way it's currently addressed is harmful because incarcerating people doesn't work.

Look, what happens when your average person is caught with small amounts of pot or crack-cocaine? They're sent down the river (jail) because they don't have good lawyers. They will be gone for a very long time for what is essentially a disease. Addiction is a disease.

Yugen: What about the bread and butter issues?

Herndon: The candidates need to address these issues. Economically, what are you (gov-

ernor candidate) going to do to stabilize the black community in Portland, at least what's left of it? Job development? How are you going to make

sure that we have access to capital? Not just for emergencies, but on a long-term basis, to sustain economic development - and in a variety of ways. Housing, care for the elderly?

Yugen: Seems often this population rarely reaches the age where there retirement kicks in.

Herndon: If the truth be told, the black community subsidizes the social security system, and here's why: Just look at the actuary tables and you will find most black men don't live to be 65 years old. So we contribute to a system where we rarely see a return on the investment, period. Black women outlive black men, but not white women, so they too, will subsidize the system for other people.

Yugen: This situation certainly represents political value for the next governor to address.

Herndon: These are gut level issues involving our families that are sometimes responsible for destroying them. See, the less money you have, the less likely you'll be able to defend the rights of your family in this city, state, and the nation. Black people don't have enough money or influence on institutions that have money. Nor do we have enough access to politicians in this state, to use them for advocacy to protect our rights. A democracy should work to protect every citizen and not based upon whom you know, or how you know him or her, but this is what's going on under the heading of democracy. In fact, black people have done plenty to expand democracy in this nation. After slavery, we're the ones who said you gotta have public education. We brought public education to the South. We said you need programs to address those who are disenfranchised.

Yugen: We just elected a new county sheriff. Please talk about public safety and the need for open discussion between citizens and law enforcement.

Herndon: On the issues of public safety, I learned something from former county sheriff Lee Brown, (currently Mayor of Houston, Texas). If you're going to talk about law enforcement, Lee told me, once you figure out what you want, in a quiet moment, when it's not a crisis, go to the person(s) in power and have a discussion about the changes you would like to see. Then that person has an opportunity, without being under the gun or the publicity or folks taking sides, to say "yes or no".



Ron Herndon



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