

OPINION

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School Board Candidates Address Forum

Pending election finds few minority candidates

BY JAYMEE R. CUTI
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Closing the learning gap for children attending struggling schools was a major focus for Portland Public School Board candidates at a forum sponsored by the Portland League of Women Voters, Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc., Community and Parents for Public Schools and the Portland Schools Foundation.

Twenty-three candidates will compete in a May 20 vote-by-mail election to fill four open seats of the seven-member board.

While several of the broached topics of interest to local families, such as recent school closures and the bias of standardized testing, only three people of color and two women could be seen on the panel.

"I have dedicated my personal life and career to the issue of diversity," said Dilafruz Williams, an immigrant from India running in zone seven. "Issues of social justice and diversity are at the heart of what I teach. I know first hand what those issues are."

Williams has a broad education background, holding multiple degrees, teaching grade school, preparing future teachers and principals as an education professor at Portland State University, and co-founding Environmental Middle School.

Williams is running against Richard Garrett, an educator and former president of the Portland Association of Teachers, Jon Jacob, a parent and self-employed computer programmer and Richard Nichols, a Portland business owner.

Martin Gonzalez, director of Portland's American Friends Service Committee, earned the endorsement of the Rainbow Coalition for his work as a peace worker and union organizer.

Like many candidates in the election, he joined the race on day of the filing deadline.

"I didn't see a candidate that had a chance to win that had anything different to offer," said Gonzalez, a zone two candidate representing north, northeast and a



PHOTO BY JAYMEE R. CUTI/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Martin Gonzales (from left), Rion Lyle, David Wynde and Louie Sloan attend a forum to explain what they hope to do for area children should they be elected to the Portland School Board in a May 20 vote-by-mail election. The four candidates are running in Zone Two, an area that includes all of north and northeast Portland and a part of southeast Portland.

part of southeast Portland.

A 1998 endorsement by Rev. Jesse Jackson described Gonzalez as a person "driven by a moral obligation to lift our children up rather than locking them up."

Gonzalez's opponents are Rion Lyle, a yoga instructor and by far the youngest candidate in the race, Louie Sloan, a teacher, John Sweeney, a land management consultant and David Wynde, regional vice president for a major bank.

Jim Hanna, a zone one candidate of Arab descent, has a strong business and real estate background.

On the topic of equal opportunity, Hanna said, "We have a responsibility to help every child enrolled in our schools to be-

come a responsible, independent, successful citizen. Personalized support will be provided to every student to develop personally, socially and academically to the highest level that her or his interests and abilities will allow."

Hanna runs against Jim Davis, a publisher, John Liljegren, a lawyer and charter schools consultant, Eamon Molloy, a former neighborhood association president, Douglas Morgan, director of PSU's Executive Leadership Institute, Douglas Morgan, a retired teacher and Ron Stull, a CEO and regional sales manager.

Zone three candidates are John Ball, chief operating officer for Multnomah County, James Laidler, a physician, John

Lekas, a business owner, Sam Oakland, an professor, Bobbie Regan, a marketing / communications consultant, and James West, an on-site apartment manager.

Current board members express concerns about the upcoming school board, particularly because of the tremendous turnover the board faces during a financial crisis that threatens to cut teaching positions throughout the district in the upcoming school year.

"It's going to be a very interesting election," said Lorenzo Poe, an African American school board member half-way through his term. "Most organizations try to maintain some historical memory. Ours will only be two-and-a-half years old."



Assault on Diversity

BY REV. JESSE JACKSON SR.

Stay committed to open doors of opportunity

Solicitor General Theodore B. Olson is a proud "movement conservative." He must have thought he had a winner when the Supreme Court agreed to hear the challenge to the University of Michigan's affirmative action program.

A Republican partisan, Olson has been a leader in the effort to roll back our civil rights laws and to repeal affirmative action. With four votes locked up from the right wing of the court and Sandra Day O'Connor there for the taking, Olson must have thought that his time had come.

But by the time Olson got to the courthouse on April Fool's Day, things were very amiss. Hundreds of buses brought in tens of thousands of student demonstrators in one of the largest demonstrations ever before the Supreme Court.

Inside, the justices had been presented with a record number of briefs by outside parties—102 filings in all. More than three-fourths supported affirmative action, but even more impressive than

the number was the who.

The justices who bothered to scan the briefs surely were stunned. Dozens of Fortune 500 companies weighed in on the side of affirmative action. Virtually all of the nation's 3,900 universities—which seldom agree on anything—defended the Michigan plan, including the alma maters of every justice on the court.

And most striking, 21 retired generals and admirals, including three former military academy superintendents, signed briefs urging the justices to uphold race-conscious policies in university admissions. Affirmative action was defended by the most powerful institutions in our country.

Affirmative action, argued the brief for General Motors, is "essential to our nation's economic success." In a global marketplace, a skilled, multiracial corps of executives is essential. "Wonder Bread" doesn't work well if you are doing business where most of the world's people live. Therefore, argued the companies, it is vital that educational institutions admit and educate a diverse student body.

Affirmative action, argued the retired generals and admirals, is vital to the nation's security. "A highly qualified, racially diverse officer corps, educated and trained to command our nation's racially diverse enlisted ranks, is essential to the military's ability to fulfill its principal mission," they wrote.

America is not only becoming more diverse, it is committed to opening the doors of opportunity to all.

The White House might hope that no one would notice under the din of war, but the justices did notice. The most striking exchanges in the oral argument came on the question of the military academies. Judge Ruth Bader Ginsberg asked whether the academies' programs were illegal. "The position of the United States," Olson responded, "is that we do not accept the proposition that black soldiers will only fight for black officers." That is surely true, but irrelevant to the generals' argument that a diverse officer corps is vital to U.S. security.

Thirty-five years after Dr. King's assassination, we've come a long way. Entrenched patterns of housing and employment discrimination still close doors and put lids on dreams.

But increasingly, America is not only becoming more diverse, it is committed to opening the doors of opportunity to all.

Now it is not a courageous band of demonstrators who are defending civil rights. Now it is the military academies, the nation's universities. Now African Americans are joined by women, by Hispanics and by other minorities. The vast majority of Americans benefit from diversity.

Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. is a long time civil rights leader and founder and president of the Rainbow/Push Coalition.

Letters to The Editor

Non-Discrimination Policy Applauded

The board of directors of the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette unanimously endorsed a new policy, to require its funded partners to have a comprehensive non-discrimination policy in place to receive funding.

I am thrilled that United Way has decided to move, in this direction. During my time on the United Way board, I strongly advocated for an inclusive policy that embraced all members of our community. I applaud the Board of United Way for their leadership, and vision and for doing the right thing.

Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffy

Bigoted Remarks

Basic Rights Oregon calls on Oregon's two Republican members of congress to condemn Sen. Rick Santorum's, R-Pa., for his anti-gay remarks and call for his resignation from his leadership position within the GOP.

His comments reflect a level of bigotry toward the gay and lesbian community that should not be deemed acceptable for any elected official, let alone one with a leadership position in his party. As the Republican members of the Oregon delegation, Sen. Gordon, Smith and Congressman Greg Walden owe it to the people of this state to stand up against this level of bigotry and call for Santorum to step down from his position within the Senate leadership.

Roey Thorpe, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon