

Red Hot Race Close to Home

Portland house district up for grabs

BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

As Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and John McCain duke it out for the presidency, there's another hot race closer to home.

Three northeast Portland Democrats are locked in a close race for the Oregon Legislature in House District 45. All have strong campaigns by the standard of a state race, and the ensuing competition could make for a nail-biting finish when the votes are tallied in the May 20 Primary vote-by-mail election.

The local activists have a wide range of governmental experience to help define how they weigh in on the issues:

Cyreena Boston

The youngest candidate's age is deceptive. Cyreena Boston has already logged more than a dozen years in northeast Portland as an advocate for health and education issues.

From taking on gang crime by knocking on doors with family and church groups to becoming a health disparities equity-policy analyst for Multnomah County, her emergence as an African-American candidate came as a surprise to community members who hadn't seen competitive minority candidates for years.

"I'm the candidate that people have been waiting for but didn't know would ever exist," she says.

Boston hopes to bring urgency to issues in Salem affecting the diverse and underserved populations in the neighborhoods near her home.

She emphasizes improvements in healthcare and schools based on what supporters have urged during her campaign. But with air pollution causing higher rates of asthma in her highway-laden district, she also has lent increased importance to environmental issues, seeing how land-use and transportation policies affect quality of life.

Noticing resurgence in the interest of young people surrounding such issues, Boston makes a special effort to get people who have recently turned 18 to vote. She recently told seniors at Grant High School how much a vote matters in a state House race compared to the presidency.

"It's time for the Oregon Legislative Assembly to be representative of the communities that it serves," she says.

Boston's endorsements include former Gov. Barbara Roberts, Mayor Tom Potter, Multnomah County Chair Ted Wheeler, and State Senators Avel Gordly and Margaret Carter.

Jon Coney

The only candidate for House District 45 who's not accepting contributions from Political Action Committees, Jon Coney has committed himself to schools, healthcare, transportation improvements and environmental protection.

Coney refers to his "solid Democratic credentials" in the campaign and hopes to address a broad spectrum of needs by securing larger, more reliable sources of state funding.

He feels well-positioned to make a difference politically with his background as a former aide to former Gov. John Kitzhaber and current employee with Metro regional government.

Coney says one of his most powerful political observations came with the terrible tragedy of the state budget crisis in the early 2000s. Seeing Oregon's current sources of funding for public services as too volatile, he argues for a state sales tax to spread out the burden more evenly.

He says a stable funding of state government would give it the ability to find solutions to problems on the most basic cause-and-effect level, arguing, for example, that "it's not surprising to see an increase in crime when we see more reductions in drug or alcohol prevention."

Calling transportation "a huge underpinning of our society," Coney considers it "inexcusable" that streets aren't paved in many parts of his district, including the Cully neighborhood of outer northeast Portland.

Considering his young daughter, he also pushes for increased investments in education and public safety.

Coney's endorsements include Kitzhaber, Metro Council President David Bragdon and State Sen. Mark Hass.

Michael Dembrow

The professor of English and film studies has done more than teach during his 27-year career at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus in north Portland.

Michael Dembrow has advocated for the rights of students and faculty as president of the college's faculty federation for the past 16 years. He has also fought for the rights of students and faculty in promoting a diversity of educational programs.

In 1991, Dembrow co-founded the Cascade Festival of African Films, which now attracts more than 4,000 visits to the PCC cam-



Jon Coney



Michael Dembrow

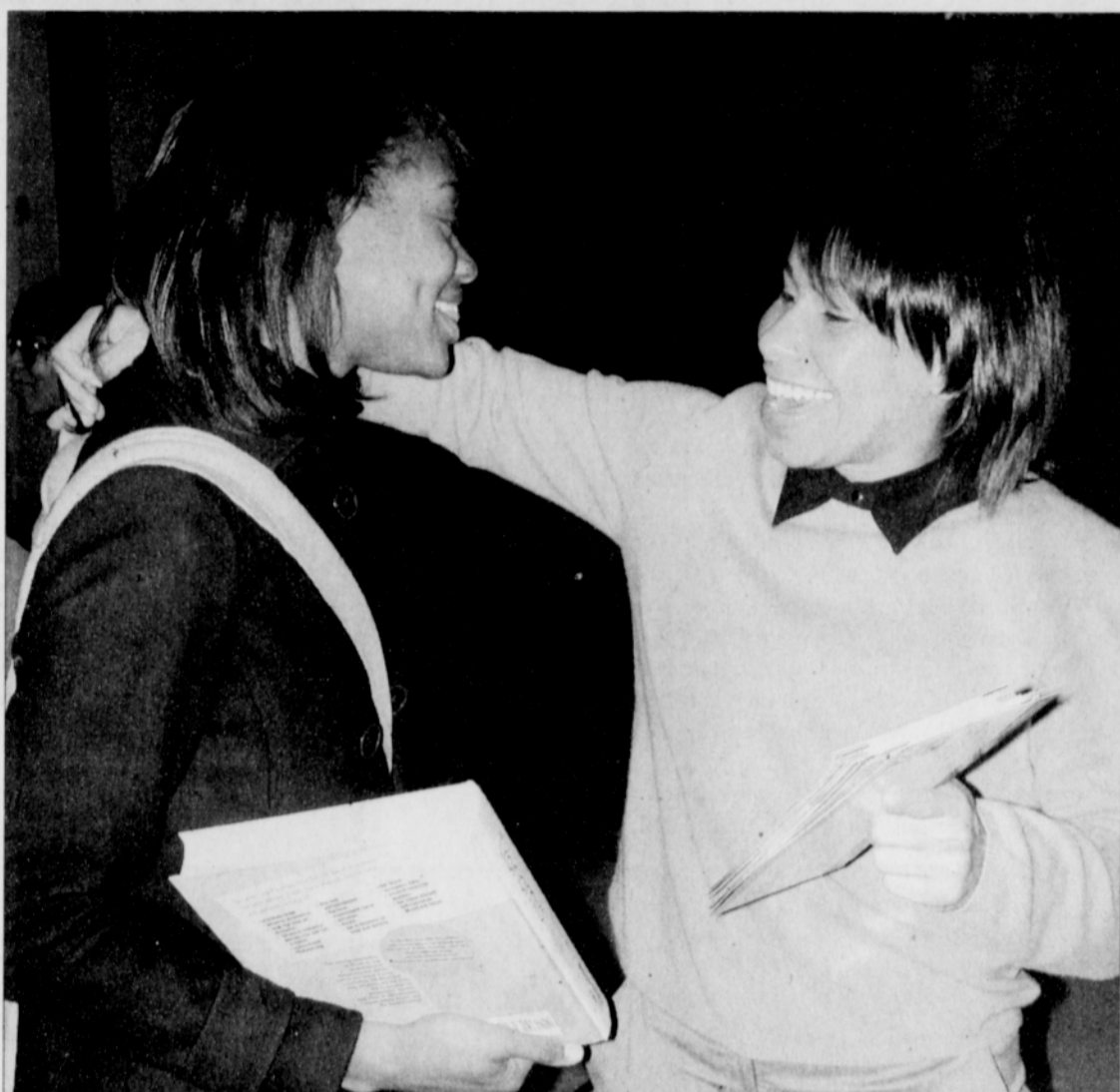


PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDELMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
House District 45 candidate Cyreena Boston (right) congratulates Grant High senior Danielle Tucker's getting into Spelman College, the historically African-American school from which Boston graduated.

pus. McMenamins Kennedy School and the Hollywood Theatre each February.

He perceives his own political campaign as represented in "War Dance," a film about former child soldiers in Uganda who are rehabilitated through winning a national music competition. His class this spring is studying how the film overcomes stereotypes.

Dembrow hopes to help Oregon overcome stigmas and challenges associated with being the only state in the nation recording

lower levels of education for 20- and 30-somethings compared with their parents.

He advances a focus on disparities that begin in K-12 public schools and wants to show students that state and local governments are willing to invest in them.

Dembrow sees the accessibility of college as related to not only good jobs, like in the building trades, but also every other social-justice concern.

"Although I definitely plan to

be the education leader when I'm in the legislature, obviously we can't ignore those other things as well, because there's no way a student can be successful when they're homeless or if they have health issues," he says.

Dembrow represents community colleges on a state advisory board. His endorsements include the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, the Portland Association of Teachers and the Oregon AFL-CIO.

May 20 Primary Reminders

- Vote-by-mail ballots will be sent out two weeks before Oregon's May 20 Primary Election.
- The ballots must be received at any county election office or designated drop site by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Postmarks don't count.
- To vote in the historically competitive U.S. presidential race between Obama and Clinton, or in Oregon's red-hot House District 45 primary, you must be registered in the Democratic Party.
- The voter registration deadline is April 29. Postmarks do count for mailed registration forms.
- Current addresses are required. If you've moved or changed your name, you must reregister to vote. Ballots cannot be forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service.
- New federal regulations for voter registrations require a driver's license number or the last four digits of a Social Security number. Also make sure to indicate a political party, "no political party" or "other." Do not mark more than one party.
- Voter-registration cards can be filled out at the Multnomah County Elections office, 1040 S.E. Morrison St., or printed from Oregonvotes.org and mailed in. Registration forms are also available at post offices, community centers and Sisters of the Road, 133 N.W. Sixth Ave., which offers its address so homeless people can participate in the election.

Wyden Town Hall at Jefferson

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., will host a town-hall meeting on Sunday, April 20, at Jefferson High School. Residents are invited to attend the open forum to ask questions and voice their concerns. Wyden will

also honor the Jefferson boys and girls basketball teams, winners of this year's 5A state titles. The meeting will take place at 3:30 p.m. in Jefferson's auditorium, 5210 N. Kerby.

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