

Cornett Support Raises Stature

Earns public monies to challenge Saltzman

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The May 18 Primary vote-by-mail election will have the names of eight people challenging Dan Saltzman, a three-term incumbent city commissioner. But one of those candidates stands out.

Jesse Cornett is the only candidate who was able to score \$150,000 in public money for his campaign by coaxing over 1,000 Portlanders into ponying up a \$5 contribution. This infusion of cash has put Cornett in a position to potentially topple Saltzman, who has come under fire for his handling of the Police Bureau.

Cornett has served as a deputy reserve sheriff. He has worked for the iconic Republican, former U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield of Oregon, and one of the state's current Democratic candidates for governor and former Secretary of State Bill Bradbury. He has worked a decade as Portland State University's director of government relations, and made two unsuccessful bids for the state Senate from southeast Portland.

"One thing that really honed

my attention on city issues has been the way the Police Bureau has operated in recent years," said Cornett, in an interview with the Portland Observer. For Cornett, the issue is personal. His close friend Raymond Gwerder was shot in the back by a police sniper while on the phone with a hostage negotiator in 2005.

He said that the Police Bureau made some positive advancements under former Mayor Tom Potter and current Police Chief Rosie Sizer, who've reinstated community policing practices that withered under Mark Kroeker, who ran the bureau in the early aughts after being recruited from the Los Angeles Police Department.

However, Cornett said that more needs to be done.

He wants to have annual performance evaluations of individual police officers, a standardization of procedures when there is a police shooting, a diversification of the ranks of the police using people from Portland, and routine mental health assessments of officers -- the need for which was demon-



Jesse Cornett

strated by two recent road rage incidents by Portland police officers, Cornett argues.

"I think that's a disparity that we absolutely have to address," he said of the lack of diversity on the force. "Once we get the right folks in that represent the community we have to train them better."

Cornett praised a recently passed ordinance that mandated more independent review of the Police Bureau, but faulted Saltzman for not drafting it in the

first place.

"Dan Saltzman wouldn't touch this issue and didn't lead on this issue, and let the auditor and another commissioner [Randy Leonard] dictate the policy," he said.

When asked about the issue of racial profiling, Cornett said that the city first must do a better job of analyzing the data the bureau records from traffic stops made by police.

"It's really easy to look at that data and think that we have racism in the ranks," he said. "That could be the case, but until the bureau looks at the data, it's hard to draw conclusions."

When asked about a report released by the Auditor's Office last year that showed that police use of force was down, he had this to say:

"You can give me charts and graphs all day, but I want to know how that would have saved Aarons Campbell's life, and it didn't," he said referring to a recent police shooting. "They are spinning a story that helps the bureau."

Cornett was also asked about his involvement with minorities and disadvantaged communities,

he pointed out that he helped institute the "Rooney Rule" at PSU, which requires at least one minority be interviewed for coaching positions.

He also pointed out that he lives in the working class Lents Neighborhood, and argues east Portland has been sorely neglected by the city.

Cornett also said that he would be more cautious about extending urban renewal areas, unless there is a firm commitment to meeting affordable housing needs.

"We can't just use urban renewal to make nice neighborhoods nicer," he said.

He also faulted a recently approved deal with Merritt Paulson, the son of George Bush's Treasury Secretary, to bring major league soccer to Portland, calling it "welfare for billionaires."

Cornett also said that a new I-5 bridge is necessary, but needs major improvements first.

He also plans to get the economy going by temporarily cutting business license fees and assigning a city commissioner to a position charged with making sure business needs are met.

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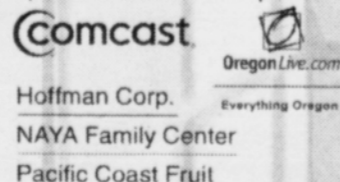
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