

OPINION



A Candidate Who Will Take on the Establishment

Why I'm voting for Julia DeGraw

BY SKIPPER OSBORNE

As an African-American who has lived most of his life in Portland, I have seen a lot of changes—some for the better, many of them not. While Portland continues to grow and expand, minorities are losing their homes and businesses through gentrification, and our local politicians are in no rush to change antiquated policies that are designed to suppress minority progress.

I have seen countless city elections and participated in many campaigns over the years, and I have noticed one constant throughout: The only time you'll ever see white politicians in African-American neighborhoods is when they're running for office. They make their promises to us, win their elections and, once they're back in City Hall, it's business as usual.

With this in mind, I was reluctant to endorse any candidates in the current local election cycle. However, a few months ago I met and learned about Julia DeGraw, who is running against Nick Fish for Portland City Council (Po-



Portland activist Skipper Osborne and Portland City Council candidate Julia DeGraw.

sition 2). I truly believe, in my heart, this is a rare candidate who is not afraid to take on the establishment and follow through on her promises.

Julia DeGraw doesn't simply want to improve policy—she wants to end the system as it currently exists. She's taking on the Portland electoral system, which is built on at-large elections with no term limits. This puts lower-income candidates at a severe disadvantage and is a huge reason why minorities are so underrepresented.

Moreover, Julia DeGraw has boldly called out the Jim Crow

roots that are at the heart of this process. She is advocating for a more representative City Hall—a districted system where elected officials will have to answer to Portlanders in all communities, not just their assigned bureaus and corporate lobbyists.

Here's what impressed me the most about Julia DeGraw taking this stance: She isn't just saying it to communities of color. She has pointed out the racist history of Portland's elections on her website and campaign materials, in the media and to voters of all races and classes. It's a major issue of

her platform.

These are not the words of a "business as usual" candidate. Julia is also sacrificing significant campaign funding by refusing corporate contributions, because she will represent the people over the lobbyists. These are not the actions of a "business as usual" candidate.

Julia DeGraw is a fighter. For nine years, she fought to prevent Nestlé from bottling public water in the Columbia River Gorge. She built a grassroots movement and won. We need that kind of tenacity in City Hall. We need someone who will actually fight for their principles and won't soft-pedal around Portland's biased political structure.

There was a time when I supported Nick Fish and I've seen him soft-pedal for almost 10 years, repeatedly turning his back on the promises he made to our communities. It's time for a change.

This isn't about one candidate, it's about finally turning the page on Portland's Jim Crow era structures and returning power to the people. It starts with voting for Julia DeGraw on May 15 for Portland city Council Position #2.

Skipper Osborne is founder of Truth and Justice for All and a former president of the Portland NAACP.



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