

# A Business Tax for Climate Justice

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

set the “green injustice and climate injustice” that is happening locally and all over the world.

“Big corporations are adding to climate injustice by not having to pay the kind of taxes that are necessary for reparations for what they’ve taken out of the community, especially communities of color,” he said.

Mondainé pointed to the late civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. as an example for someone who paved the way for identifying all kinds of injustice, including environmental injustice, and he pointed to his own childhood in public housing as an example of living under poor environmental conditions.

“My lived experience as a child in south St. Louis was to wake up to the smokestacks of Peabody Coal, Monsanto, Ralston Purina and Anheuser Busch,” he said. “And, of course, the incinerator systems that ran 24/7 in the projects left us with all kinds of health disparities.”

Mondainé said he has suffered from chronic asthma and had to have tubes in his ears until he was 40, but many of his friends suffered harsher fates because of pollution in economically deprived neighborhoods.

“Many of my childhood friends have died before the age of 50 because of pulmonary disease and cardiac discrepancies,” he said.

The idea for the initiative began with former NAACP director Jo Ann Hardesty, who is running for Portland City Council, and a few

others, Mondainé said. To get on the November ballot, it required backers to gather 34,000 signatures, but the measure had more than 60,000 signatures when it was turned in to the Secretary of State on July 6. The initiative’s eligibility will be determined by the state office by Aug. 6.

Local organizations supporting the initiative include the Oregon chapter of the Sierra Club, the Coalition of Communities of Color, Columbia Riverkeeper, the Native American Youth and Family Center, OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, the environmental group Verde, and the NAACP.

Community support from individuals has been widespread, Mondainé said.

“It’s been an extraordinary undertaking and it’s been an extremely enlightening undertaking. This is why it’s so important to the NAACP,” he said.

Over 1,700 small businesses are on board to support the initiative, he said, but he expects opposition from big corporations.

“Big business doesn’t see this as a benefit to them because it’s going to cost them,” he said. “But it’s already costing us and I don’t think that’s right and I don’t think that’s fair.”

Mondainé said when he signed on as the ballot measure’s first petitioner he became “electrified by the idea” that environmental injustice was finally something that was getting some attention in the African American community.

But not only has industrial pol-

lution occurred more often in poor communities and communities of color, those communities often are the last to learn about it and awareness needs to be raised, he said.

If the initiative passes, and Mondainé believes it will, it will require needed public outreach and information sharing.

“Many Portlanders, especially people of color in Multnomah County, suffer from not being able to get the right information or get the services that are extended by initiatives like this,” he said.

Mondainé said he expects a lot of pushback to the initiative from big business between now and Nov. 6, but he’s ready for a fight.

“There’s plenty of opposition,” he said. “They’re going to fight us with everything they can find plausible from ‘It’s going to cost too much’ to this or that or the other, but it’s a bunch of noise.”

“It’s an excuse not to participate in what is the good solid and most precious investment that any corporation or agency can add to any community — the ability to strengthen their community and give back.”

Mondainé called the initiative a potential turning point for big corporations, a chance for them to regain their civic souls.

“When we have CEOs making upwards of a million dollars in salary, I mean, come on,” he said. “Surely there is something that could be done to spread a little bit of that love back into the waters and environment that you’re contaminating off of making money. And I do mean contaminated.”

One group that opposes PDX04



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Rev. E.D. Mondainé, spokesman for a ballot measure this November to apply a 1 percent surcharge on sales in the city on business with at least \$1 billion in annual revenue and at least \$500,000 of that revenue from within the city limits. Most groceries and medicine would be exempt. The money would support a Clean Energy Fund to encourage and promote eco-friendly measures such as weatherproofing and solar installations, and to train low-income people to do the work and eventually open their own businesses and create even more green jobs.

is a new business-oriented group, Keep Portland Affordable. Spokesman Rick Thomas has stated that the measure will raise prices, according to the Oregonian, and he called on city leaders to instead focus on homelessness.

But corporate pollution is a much greater societal problem than homelessness, Mondainé said.

“Big corporations that don’t do their due diligence in the community are worse than any homeless population anywhere because they do a lot more damage, but you can’t see it like you can see homelessness,” he said.

Other initiatives that appear likely to qualify for the ballot in November:

**Grocery Tax Exemption.** A proposed constitutional amendment that would prohibit new taxes on grocery sales, an attempt to wall the supermarket industry off from the threat of gross receipts taxes. Approved for the ballot.

**Housing Bonds.** This measure was referred by the Oregon Leg-

islature to allow more flexibility in using proceeds from government bonds to build and purchase affordable housing. Approved for the ballot.

**Supermajority Tax Requirement.** The Oregon Constitution currently requires a three-fifths vote of each house of the Legislature to raise taxes. Financed by the Oregon Association of Realtors, this initiative would require a similar supermajority for any legislation that increases the amount of revenue the state raises. Approved for the ballot.

**Sanctuary State Repeal.** Backed by Oregonians for Immigration Reform. According to the Oregonian, if the ballot measure passes, it would undo a 1987 law that prohibits the use of state and local law enforcement resources to enforce federal immigration standards. Approved for the ballot.

**Ban on Abortion Funding.** Prohibits the state from using public funds for abortion and reduces abortion access. Not yet approved for the ballot.



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