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Power in Governing

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

said she spent that day last August among the EMTs and watched developments, including one where a handful of kids were dancing in front of Nordstrom's, which like other downtown businesses, was closed for the day. Hardesty said she was alarmed when a half dozen cops in riot gear started to approach the dancing kids, but, apparently upon receiving orders, turned around, got back on their truck and left.

"I'm not saying women are better leaders, but what I'm saying is that women are not so prone to immediately escalate," Hardesty said of the incident.

But that doesn't mean Hardesty doesn't push some buttons with her strong sense of what's right and wrong. Take facial recognition technology, for example. Hardesty said it's bad science and does not work the way it's supposed to, particularly for women of color.

"My goal is to ban both public and private use of facial recognition technology and plan to have it before the council no later than April," she said. "Until I'm comfortable that it works the same way for white men as it does for black women, I don't want any part of it."

Another thing Hardesty wants no part of is saving all five city-owned golf courses, which she doesn't see the need for, and believes that space could be better used.

"Why do we have golf courses?" Hardesty asked. "I haven't gotten a good answer to that, especially since we now have the third mayor who's declared a housing emergency and the most expensive thing in building new housing is that people can't afford the land."

Golf courses have plenty of land, she said, which could be used either to build new housing or to construct tent communities for homeless residents, with mobile cooking units, showers and garbage containers.

Hardesty said she believes in

a "housing first" approach to the housing crisis, but that developers are not really building affordable housing in many cases and are not helping people who are very poor.

"The only tools we have today that are addressing the severe housing shortage on the very low income scale are community development corporations, but if you build housing at zero to 30 percent (of mean income) you need to have services in the building; it can't just be housing," she said. "We need people to be able to have their needs met where they live... We're doing things the way we've always done them and there doesn't seem to be a sense of urgency around it."

In some ways Portland is better than it was 20 years ago, but Hardesty said she believes that racism has gotten worse in "the whitest city in America."

"In my entire 60-plus years on the earth it's only been in the last two years that I've been fearful in walking the streets of Portland because of all the white supremacists' activity taking place, out in the daylight, out in public," she said.

But Hardesty has hope for the future, especially for the city's Charter Review Commission to be assembled in 2021. At present, each commissioner is allowed to appoint four people to run the commission, whose work could take up to two years.

Big issues the commission will be evaluating, include the city's form of government and whether to make changes in how power is shared between the mayor and commissioners or a possible appointed executive; and if council members should continue to be elected at-large or from particular districts of the city.

"We are all elected city-wide, which explains why I'm the only person of color on the council," she said. "We want to make sure the Charter Review Commission is diverse and clear about their mission, which is to talk to every corner of the city of Portland."

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