

Primaries 2012: Pulling Out the Big Ideas

One of the most competitive primary elections in recent history heads to the finish line May 15, and longtime politics watchers are happily sorting through the campaigns' the thicket of ideas for making the region a better place.

While it is traditionally seen as a stronghold of liberalism, that hasn't stopped Portland and Multnomah County's candidates for office from fiercely jockeying for position within a political spectrum remarkably lacking Republican Party involvement.

Here is a round-up of some of the biggest ideas and issues coming out of the local and state campaigns this season.

First up: the number of candidates who felt unfairly excluded from the many forums held around the city has been a consistent issue. From the Urban League of Portland to Oregon Public Broadcasting, candidates have protested their lack of access to public venues where the races were discussed.

The sheer number of candidates presented a problem for forum organizers – 23 in the Portland mayor's race alone.

But the groups who bypassed the forum format in favor of the "meet and greet" approach, including the Delta Sigma Theta sorority which held two separate gatherings at their freshly-opened June Key Delta Community Center, appeared to have a winning idea that brought together many more candidates face-to-face with their prospective voting constituency.

The Multnomah Youth Commission also had a winner with its question and answer roundtable event – also called a "forum" -- which included all candidates in a breakout format where they sat down at tables with

young people who then peppered each with questions.

State Attorney General

While medical marijuana laws have dominated media coverage of the Attorney General's race, we at *The Skanner News* have been more attentive to what candidates said the high number of African Americans and other people of color incarcerated in the state, and the critical mass forming against use of Measure 11 against juveniles.

In our interviews with candidates Ellen Rosenblum and Dwight Holton, both said



Charlie Hales

they would expand the Attorney General's Civil Rights Division.

However on the issue of racial disparities in Oregon's incarceration rate, as well as the

FBI's "anti-terror" operations here, Rosenblum's answers stood out as more pointed and critical of how law enforcement has impacted communities of color.

Rosenblum highlighted the costs to the state that have been incurred by mandatory minimums, and while she stresses that it's the AG's job to uphold Oregon laws, she expressed support for a new committee that has formed on the state level to re-examine the impact of Measure 11 on the state.

Holton's big idea about how to address equity issues in the legal system is to build better relationships between law enforcement and the community – and he outlined numerous instances of his efforts to do just that by literally taking the time to sit down with members of the Muslim and African American communities.

City of Portland—Mayor

This race is the hottest potato of the season. Top three candidates Jefferson Smith, Eileen Brady and Charlie Hales really don't differ much – all are liberals in the non-partisan race, and have jockeyed to differentiate each other within that political spectrum.

The Skanner News asked Brady, Hales and Smith what is the most important thing for voters to know about their stands and what are their best ideas for improving the city.

Brady's campaign manager Neel Pender stressed that few women have won election to City Council – let alone the mayor's office, which has only seen one female in the top spot, and that was more than 50 years ago.

"She's been endorsed by business organizations, labor unions, environmental leaders

and significant members of Portland's communities of color, including former Sen. Avel Gordly and former state representative JoAnn Hardesty," Pender said.

Brady's biggest idea appears to be a focus



Jefferson Smith

on the private sector's role in turning around the tanking economy, which has crippled so many government institutions; her years of business experience in the sustainability and tech sectors are the big guns of her campaign.

"Eileen has been talking about the same issues for the entire campaign: good jobs, a respected and accountable police force, adequately funding our schools, making sure that government is providing cost effective services to its people," Pender said.

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- It helps kids and families succeed, with early literacy programs that research shows are vital to school achievement, summer reading programs to keep students on track and homework help after school.
- It connects seniors to the world, with home delivery of over 200,000 books a year, computer classes, free internet access and large print books.
- It provides critical resources to people searching for a job, especially important in challenging economic times.

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