

# The Asian Reporter

Volume 27 Number 9  
 May 1, 2017  
 ISSN: 1094-9453

The Asian Reporter is published on the first and third Monday each month.

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News Service **Associated Press/Newsfinder**

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**TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA**

■ Polo



## Democracy here and now

Democracy means so many things. Democracy means one thing in, say, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, while democracy demands a world of difference for folks in the Federal Republic of Germany. Likewise for us living here and now. Sure, we share the same generous continent, but because we're so many kinds of Americans, our work is weaving our many differences in ideals, in aches and appetites.

The rub of our differences is good for democracy. The expectation of important differences then their delightful blending, are essential to healthy governance. According to international research on this, on humankind's never-ending experiment, institutionalizing kindness and creativity are at the core of our pretty little planet's best democratic unions.

Tests of democracy — loud protests, agitated press, crazy elections — are regular and necessary. Often provoking enormous anxieties. Take last year's U.S. national election. Candidates for the presidency and for congress always grab at big themes, competitors overstate differences so each can cut dramatic distinctions between themselves and their opponents. Lots of theater.

Candidates for local office are usually more pragmatic. Local voters are too. Local democracy, particularly non-political party seats, functions best when campaigns offer practical problem-solving skills. What's more, local competitors and voters alike know they still have to be neighbors after election day. Civility is central. Community building trumps ugly politics.

We are in one of those local election cycles right now. Lots of school boards, water district and recreation district boards, will soon be filled in middle May, many with a lot of different, but all dutiful, local volunteers. Portland Community College's Board of Directors is among these. And among the candidates for a seat is Mohamed Alyajouri.

**Why this means so much**

Mohamed Alyajouri's candidacy is evidence of our

*“Local democracy functions best when campaigns offer practical problem-solving skills. Civility is central. Community building trumps ugly politics.”*

metro area's political maturity. Our high level of democracy. He's a Corvallis High grad. He brings an OSU public-health degree and a health administration master's degree to whatever he does. Mohamed's day job is integrating public-health services, improving family outcomes, and sharpening delivery efficiencies all over Oregon, including Washington and Multnomah counties. Mohamed and Kamili, a Nike professional, raise three bright and beautiful sons.

Mohamed's supporters mention his skills, his connectivity, and his record of community commitment — the unavoidable glare of his name notwithstanding. That's two checked boxes on the advanced democracy scorecard. Two big markers of a vibrant, diverse community moving forward together.

While his backers will surely set out the specific skills he'll bring to Portland Community College, if you persist, each will just as certainly add their concerns about how erosive last year's shrill national elections were to our most fundamental notions of democracy. And how contrary all that is to the community-building role of the PCC Board of Directors.

Which brings us to where this essay began: Democracy may mean many-many things, but among our precious planet's best democracies, voters and leaders expect their many individual and communal differences to be engaged in building a bigger us. A better us. Our metropolitan area's 2017 Special Election Voters' Pamphlet is full of all that.

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