

October 13, 2017, Candidate Forum - Seattle City Council
Pos. 8

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>>CINDI: We are now taking on City Council Position No. 8, which is between Jon Grant and Teresa Mosqueda.

We are going to go and go on with Jon Grant.
Teresa has not arrived.

>>KAREN: Thank you for coming, Jon.

We'll give you one minute to do an opening statement, introduction of yourself.

>>JON: My name is Jon Grant. I'm running for Seattle City Council Position 8. I'm thrilled to be here.

I'm the former executive director of the Tenants Union of Washington State. And I have had over a decade of experience in affordable housing and in tenants rights. And in the course of my career, I can tell you I have

counseled over 4,000 people facing a crisis with their landlord. And I would say a solid 30-40% of those folks were people with disabilities.

What we know is that people with disabilities in the housing context pay over half their -- more often, it's the case that they're paying half of their income towards rent, and more often they are living in substandard housing conditions, and I definitely saw this in the course of my work and career as a tenant advocate.

So, that has really been an eye-opening experience about the systemic problems that our city faces when addressing institutional barriers for people who are disabled.

So I really look forward to answering your questions today and hearing your thoughts about how the city can do better.

>>KAREN: Excellent. Thank you.

The first question was going to be: As an influential leader and possible City Council person, please describe your experience or knowledge of the disability community (laughter), and I feel like you might have already done that. If you would like to expand on that, you may.

>>JON: When I was the director of the Tenants Union, we had a hotline, and on that hotline, people would

call us with issues that they were facing, and in so many situations, there would be a tenant who, you know, might be, you know, newly disabled, perhaps they were in an accident, and they would ask the landlord for a modification to their apartment, so that they could have a bar installed into their shower, have, you know, the width of a door expanded so that they can get their wheelchair through. And by law, they are entitled to that.

But many times, landlords would be more inclined to give that tenant a termination notice or eviction notice rather than address the accommodation. And we would organize with tenants throughout the city who had these barriers, to be able to live in their own home.

And it was often the landlord that was the problem. It was not the law. And so this is about not just getting good laws on the books. It's about making sure that the laws are enforced, that we can have these ADA protections, that we can have these laws to allow for reasonable accommodations, but we have to make sure that they are enforced in an equitable and effective way and that people have the ability to assert those rights.

>>KAREN: Excellent. Thank you.

Of the homeless individuals in the 2017 One Night Count, 49% self-identified as having one or more disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires

that the city provide accommodations to people with disabilities where they are needed.

As a City Council person, what will you do to ensure that accommodations are made available for people with disabilities living in encampments related to their rights?

>>JON: Over the last year, our campaign has been going to homeless encampments, both sanctioned and unsanctioned encampments, and we have been talking to the residents directly and asking them: What can we do, not just as a City Council candidate, but just as people, what can we do to help you? What can we do to improve your situation? What can we do to give you the tools so that you can bring change at city hall?

And we worked at a large homeless encampment in SoDo, and the things that folks needed, you know, were pretty basic and the city could have provided them. There were many people there with physical disabilities that could not walk across the field because it was just a pit of mud. There was no way they could have any kind of security there.

And the city could have graveled the lot. They could have improved the sidewalks. They could have improved the lighting. And the city did not do that.

One of the big things that I think that the city

can do is make sure that the outreach work that is being done is being done in a way that is, you know, sensitive to the needs of folks with disabilities. And making sure that, you know, if they are putting up notices that they are going to be swept, that if the person who is blind, they may not see those notices that they are going to get swept.

And so the city needs to be sure that they are communicating directly to folks and that those notices are comprehended and understood and accessible. Otherwise, folks will have all their life's possessions thrown away. And I think that the city needs to be doing a better job to make sure that, you know, these are being communicated in ways that address the needs of folks that have those disabilities.

>>KAREN: Excellent. Thank you.

Seattle is a sanctuary city, and yet many people with disabilities who are undocumented are still afraid to access services that are available to them, including, like, health care, food, transportation, and more. What can the City Council do to change this?

>>JON: So I think what we know is that we have a severe problem right now in America with the Trump administration. Exponentially just, you know, we're seeing deportations skyrocket and we know our criminal justice

system disproportionately impacts people with disabilities. People who have one or more disabilities may actually get trapped into our criminal justice system. And we know that that same system is what is the kind of -- the funnel for people who are being deported and that is how ICE often gets folks in the first place. They get trapped in the criminal justice system.

Our people met with DACA recipients who are at most threat under the Trump administration and asked them: What can we do to fully address, you know, the concerns of immigrants and refugees in our city? And we put forth a platform that calls for decriminalization, taking felonies down to misdemeanors. Legalizing things like low-level drug offenses, to sex work, things that get people caught up in the criminal justice system that are essentially crimes of poverty.

That's how we can address that funnel that is also disproportionately catching folks with disabilities and also folks who have immigration status issues.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you very much.

It looks like Teresa has joined us.

>>TERESA: Hello.

>>KAREN: We went ahead. Why don't you do your one-minute introduction and then we'll continue on with questions that Jon has not answered.

>>TERESA: My sincere apologies for walking in late and I really hope to chat with you later.

My name is Teresa Mosqueda and I'm running for Seattle City Council Position 8. This is an incredible honor to be here today.

I apologize for coming late. I was at the Betsy DeVos rally and part of the lineup of speakers were teachers and one of the teachers was telling us about how she was fighting back against Betsy DeVos because she was concerned about teachers who teach kiddos with disabilities and how that would be impacted under the administration that Trump has.

I stand up every day in my day job right now at the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, fighting as a labor advocate side by side with families, with communities.

I have been in the halls of Olympia fighting for Medicaid expansion and health coverage for all kids, and many of the communities that I have worked with have been fighting to make sure those with disabilities also have access to high quality health care and education like I mentioned just a second ago.

So, thank you, again. Apologies for being late.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you.

So, special education students are only 12% of the

student population, but represent a quarter of students arrested and referred to law enforcement, according to the Department of Education. The Seattle Office for Civil Rights was recently directed to study alternatives to youth incarceration. What kinds of policies would you propose to prevent disabled youth from becoming incarcerated? Do you believe another youth jail would exacerbate this issue?

Want to go ahead?

>>JON: Okay. So I completely oppose the youth jail. And what we know is that when we incarcerate youth, that their likelihood of reentering the criminal justice system just skyrockets. And we're talking about spending over \$200 million to build a jail for black and brown children, and I think what we know is that that money could be better spent. That those hundreds of millions of dollars could be repurposed for restorative justice programs.

And what we're seeing in our schools is that, you know, it's been estimated between 35-70% of incarcerated youth have a developmental disability. And I think we need to address that. That if we can start at an earlier point in our schools in making sure that rather than jumping to expulsion, jumping to suspension, that we are making sure that there is going to be a process that brings together the student that was impacted by a certain problem and

bringing a family counselor, the teacher, the family members, and actually have a process that tries to keep them in the schools, rather than immediately jumping to expulsion.

And, you know, one of the big concerns that I have heard too is the concern of, you know, students being restrained, and we know that we have heard these terrible cases like we heard in Bellingham where a student was restrained over 600 times.

We absolutely have to start requiring schools to report the data and tell us how many times are they actually restraining students, so that the state and the city and the school board can have interventions to actually correct that behavior, because right now the tracking of that data is completely inconsistent.

>>TERESA: I absolutely oppose the new youth jail. I think that this is not how we commit to having jail -- a city that it says that it is committed to no youth being in jail. We don't want to build another one. Instead, since the building is continuing right now and we saw the court side with the advocates to say that we shouldn't be using that -- those dollars to create a jail, we ought to be creating more community services, more youth services, more restorative justice models, and so I'm very interested in how we do that on -- in terms of the pipeline, that we

don't get kiddos going into jail and instead, we look at restorative justice models.

On the front end of that pipeline I would like to invest more in educational programs that keep kids in school, kids all across the age spectrum, but especially kids in middle school and high school.

One of the teachers I met with who was sitting with the counselor from the high school said a lot of times the reason you see kids dropping out of school or ending up in the criminal justice system is because the school has a policy of expelling kids.

We should be keeping kids in school, doing in-school programs that help address any behavioral issues. Any learning issues that can be addressed should be done in school so kids are not getting pushed out, maybe being home alone, or maybe being on the streets because they have been kicked out of school.

So I'm really interested in partnering with the school district and making sure we have more models that keep kids in school if they get into trouble.

Lastly, what I have heard from many of our teachers, some of whom work with kids with disabilities, is that we need to be able to make sure that the school is actually a medical home as well. Our schools here in Seattle and across Washington state have mini school-based

health clinics. I would like to see more mental health services as well as physical health services.

Right now we know so many of our kids across our city are traumatized by what Trump says every day. He is attacking women, people of color, the LGBTQIA, and the communities of people with disabilities. We have to stand up to make sure there are comprehensive health services in our schools as well.

>>KAREN: That's an interesting segue into our -- one of our next questions. In the event that the Trump regime, as it says here, ends the ACA and/or Medicaid, what can City Council do to help disabled children afford medical care?

>>TERESA: Okay. Wonderful. So, this is what I do every day (laughter). I still am working at the State Labor Council and in my job I fight against the Trump agenda and all of the attacks that he is imposing on health care. I have chaired the Health Coalition for Children and Youth when we passed health coverage for all kids.

I chaired the Healthy Washington Coalition when we passed Medicaid expansion in our state. And right now I am chairing the Health Care is a Human Right Coalition as we think about not only resisting the Trump attacks to Medicaid, Medicare, and all of our basic fundamental health programs.

We are fighting back but we're also persisting. We're resisting and we're persisting, and in the city of Seattle I want to take this public health expertise that I have been working on in the last 20 years, starting at SeaMar and Children's Alliance, Department of Health, Community Health Plan. My lens is really through a public health public advocacy lens. And in the city of Seattle, we can create a health plan for all of our residents.

I would like to work with the county to make it a regional plan. If you look at what San Francisco has done, they said if you don't have health insurance through your employer, if you don't have health insurance through Medicaid or the other public programs, we as a city will provide that coverage.

Think about Basic Health. Do folks remember the old Basic Health plan we used to have here in our state which unfortunately went away? Many of us were saying don't dismantle that plan because we may need it again, and here we are, five years after, six years after the ACA was really put into effect, and we are about to see it crumble.

The tweets that Trump sends alone are enough to send our health insurance system, which is flawed in that it relies on the private market. It is about to send it into a spiral. So let's take that back. Let's create a publicly owned health plan in our city. I call it the

Seattle Health Plan.

I would love to work with King County to make it regional, because we know so many of our folks who work in the city are also getting pushed out of the city, can't afford to live here. So in Seattle, in King County, I want a health plan we can all rely on that would be comprehensive affordable health care for everyone, including those with disabilities, the LGBTQIA community, immigrants, and women.

>>JON: I think if Donald Trump cuts the ACA and cuts Obamacare, we have to go it alone. That means we have to create a municipal or regional program and I think that we have to acknowledge that accessible and affordable health care is a human right. And we have a choice as a city whether or not we want to make those rights something that can actually be lived by, something that is enforceable.

So, I think we have lots of models. I think that we can look at, again, the San Francisco municipal health care program is a great example. I mean, San Francisco, both the city and the county. I think that is also a way -- an approach that we can take as well.

But we have to acknowledge that whatever happens at the national level, we have a right and an ability to protect the interests of our residents here in Seattle.

And that means if the ADA goes away, that means we have to pass a local ADA so that we don't lose the gains that have been made over decades and decades of struggle by disability advocates.

So I would fully stand in support of both of those programs, and let's hope it never comes to pass, but I think Seattle is in a very strong position to resist the Trump agenda and to ensure everyone has those rights respected.

>>KAREN: Thank you very much.

While aging into disability is not inevitable, about 40% of older Seattle residents self-report as having a disability. What is your knowledge of what the City of Seattle does now to serve people with hearing loss, low vision, and other chronic conditions that frequently impact older adults? And what should the city do to increase those services in the future?

>>JON: So, I was up in North Seattle, up in Lake City and also in other parts of, you know, the north, and I think that what you see around there is that there is severe pedestrian safety issues.

I went and actually talked to folks in some affordable housing complexes that are up there and it's a lot of senior housing, a lot of folks using walkers, a lot of folks that have, you know, physical disabilities. And

there's no sidewalks. There's no way for them to get to the grocery store. There's no way for them to get to public transit. There's no -- they just can't do it.

So one of the things that I think the city needs to lead on is passing a very robust impact fee. This will be a fee on development. And that's money that can go towards our infrastructure costs so that we can actually have safe sidewalks, so that we can actually have intersections that have audible, you know, crosswalks for folks who are seeing-impaired. And I think that if we can really make those investments to make this city a safe city to be a pedestrian in, a safe city if you are a person with a disability, we can really go a long way.

But first we have to get the resources. So I think the first step is to pass a robust impact fee on development to address the lack of pedestrian safety that we're seeing in the north and south end that we know is a huge problem for people with disabilities, whether they're a physical disability or otherwise.

(Applause.)

>>TERESA: You can applaud. I like that answer.

In addition to funding and infrastructure improvements, which I mentioned that I worked at the Department of Health, I worked in the community and family health division, and what we did was create safe routes,

walkable, bikable neighborhoods. And I say accessible neighborhoods, because when we talk about neighborhoods that are good for a stroller, they are also good for a wheelchair, or a walker, or those with vision impairments. And I think our city has a lot to do to actually create those interconnected walkways so that people can truly get around.

As we create new curbs to protect people, that we think about accessibility in our infrastructure. But there are two more things I want to mention. I think another way that the city can help is by making sure that folks have the rights protected in housing. There are some protections right now, but I'm calling for a Tenants Bill of Rights.

52% of us are renters. I'm a renter myself. But we know those who have disabilities, folks who are from other marginalized communities, like LGBTQIA community, immigrants, and women, we are more likely to experience discrimination in housing policy, so I would like to see us have a Tenants Bill of Rights that would also include protections for tenants who have disabilities.

Number two, I have spent the last 7 years working at the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and part of what we want to do is enhance the protections the Office of Labor Standards has.

We also know folks with disabilities, again immigrants and the refugees, women, and people of color, are more likely to experience retaliation and intimidation at the workplace, so I want to make sure that as we stand up and fight for workers' rights that we think about folks who are working, with disabilities, and how we can help protect those in the workplace.

Lastly, I'll say this. My sister was diagnosed with MS when she was 19, and right now she's doing well, she's walking and she can't run very much but she's doing well. I want to create a city for folks who currently have disabilities but also for the future, so that people like my sister, when they need it, they have those accessible services built into our infrastructure and into our fundamental rights as a city.

>>KAREN: Seattle recently became the first city in the country to ban paying subminimal wages to workers with disabilities, thanks to the work of the Disability Commission. Disabled people face high levels of unemployment and underemployment, up to 80% unemployment in the case of autistic people and people with intellectual disabilities. At the same time, federal aid vocational rehabilitation has been cut.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, which pays for job training for disabled people, moves to an

"order of selection" November 1 which means clients will have an indefinite wait of several years to receive training and placement.

What can the City of Seattle do to pick up the slack and ensure that disabled workers have the same opportunity to jobs?

>>JON: So, first of all, I want to give a big shout-out to the Disability Commission and this incredible win. So thank you all for the work that you did to make that possible, in particular Shaun Bickley, Cindi Laws and many of you.

This is what it looks like when we have a City Council that is working side by side with members of the community to address institutional oppression, right? Institutional barriers.

And I think that now that we have this law on the books -- or actually, it's not quite on the books, but we're getting there. I think that as we approach it, we need to make sure that these laws are enforced, and this is something that we see time and time again, is that we will pat ourselves on the back and then say, "Good. We did that." And then the folks who are going to be supposedly protected by those laws never really see that come to pass, but they are not actually enforced.

That means that we need to fully fund the Office

of Labor Standards and have a huge outreach and education program to make sure employers are aware of what their rights and responsibilities are to making sure that they are paying people the proper full minimum wage even though they have a disability.

I think that when we start thinking about people with disabilities as not, you know -- this -- what the law kind of treated as an afterthought, but actually as somebody who is fully entitled to their rights and full wages for their labor, I think that that's a place that we want to be as a city.

I think that's incumbent on us. And that means that we have to make sure those laws are in force and the Office of Labor Standards is proactive in enforcing them.

>>TERESA: I remember being in the halls of Olympia a few years ago when the state legislature was considering a bill in the House of Representatives that would have basically put into statute the ability -- the inability for cities to do things like Seattle has done, protect those with disabilities from being able to fight for the right to at least have the minimum wage.

And we fought down there against -- I fought every time there has been an attempt at a subminimum wage. It is unconscionable that doing the same work doesn't equal the same pay. And I will fight to make sure that we protect

rights here in Seattle and that we continue to protect against any erosion of that at the state level.

There's also a few other things that I would like to do and not just in defense, not just persisting, but resisting.

I would like to see us do more with not just vocational rehabilitation programs, but new apprenticeship opportunities, new opportunities for us to learn new skills and new trades, and also have access to free college education, because if we want to get out of our current job and go into another job, many times we either need that certificate, that apprenticeship training, or we need that college degree.

I would like to see free college in the city of Seattle. We've talked about this a lot on the campaign trail. San Francisco can do it. New York is doing it. I think we can do it right here in Seattle. And I think that helps lift up many of our communities who have been kept out of systems, whether it's due to financial barriers, or basically lack of opportunities given by employers and the education system.

So that is another way that I think we can create good economic opportunities, equitable economic opportunities for everybody.

>>KAREN: Thank you.

While the city is permitting numerous new residential buildings, many of these buildings do not have any parking. Would you support a change that requires some accessible parking spaces even if no other parking were provided?

>>TERESA: That's a great question. Yes. I think the answer for me is yes. I would be interested in some accessible parking spaces for folks who may be in need to park a van, need to have access that's a short distance from the entrance. That I think is a great idea. We've been trying to get folks to think about getting out of their cars and using public transportation more often. And in doing so, we were talking about reducing the number of cars overall, which is something that I support.

But until we actually have a public system, a transit system that's accessible to everyone, with frequently coming buses and access vans, we should definitely not assume that people are going to get out of their cars and we need to be able to have accessibility for our community with disabilities, to be able to park nearby entrances. As we think about reducing the number of parking spaces, I would be very interested in making sure there's a reserved number of spaces for those who need access.

>>JON: I fully agree. I fully support it. Not

much more to add to it. Yes, more accessible parking spaces. I fully agree with that.

>>KAREN: We'll continue the theme, then, on accessible parking or accessible car spaces. Most of Seattle's downtown and neighborhood business districts lack loading zones for wheelchair-accessible vehicles. In some cases, including city hall, there is no safe loading zone for blocks. What would you do about this?

>>JON: So, I would fully support creating more, you know, safe, secure loading zones and parking spaces to make sure that city facilities and also private facilities are accessible. And if that means changing, you know, the status of the sidewalk, or if we need to do some modifications to an alley, or if there are things we need to do to change our infrastructure, the priority needs to be how can we make sure that our entire city is accessible to everyone.

And that needs to be the lens through which we actually guide these policies and make these decisions.

And then from there, the policies and the funding and everything else can flow. And so I think it's a lens that needs to be on every decision we make, including and especially how we make those buildings accessible.

>>TERESA: I think those are great ideas. I think also about where Seattle City Council halls are located,

between two giant hills, right? Between 4th and 5th is a pretty steep grade to walk up or to roll up. And I feel like if there is no accessible spot for folks to get in and out of vans, that is something we have to change. I'm really -- I'm glad you put it on my radar and I think this is a good example of making sure that when policies are made, they are not made by people who think that they know the answer, that policies are really generated by the community impacted. So having ideas generated like this that change the landscape and I think change the mentality of those making public policy decisions is critically important.

Then as we think about Seattle City Council being on those hills, most of the rest of Seattle is on those hills as well, so how do we look at every entry point into our public facilities and actually create true access.

I would be interested in working with you to find the solutions to that question.

>>JON: Gondolas. How about gondolas?

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you.

This will be our last question. The U.S. Special Olympics is coming to Seattle next July -- woo -- bringing 10,000 athletes and estimated 50,000 family and friends, many of whom also have a disability. The 2016 Democratic National Convention, hundreds of people with mobility

disabilities could not get from their hotels to venues in a timely fashion because the city of Philadelphia had done disgracefully little to address this important constituency.

What are you going to advocate for the Council to do for Seattle?

>>TERESA: Yes, I'm so excited the Special Olympics are coming. I think this is a huge opportunity to highlight our community, our champions, our athletes, and also to bring awareness to the community at large. And when we talk about accessibility, it's not just to the games. It's to our community as, you know, as a whole, access to restaurants, access to hotels, access to our waterfront which right now is a little hard to navigate.

And so I would be really interested in hearing the examples of what happened at the convention and the lessons learned. Really we do not want to replicate. If there were errors in the convention roll-out, what can we do now, starting right now, to get prepared. Have folks who were either there or heard the lessons learned be at the drawing board when we talk about what needs to change and think proactively about what is good for the athletes, what's good for the families, what's good for the participants and observers, and how does that benefit our local economy, our small businesses, our hotels.

We don't have a very reliable system in many ways when it comes to transportation. That might be a good goal to set for us, to upgrade our transit system so that we can really see remarkable improvements by that day so we can show off our city. That's I think a good investment in the future and good investment in the residents of Seattle and it shows a lot of respect for our community with disabilities.

>>JON: I think I would start by going to the Disability Commission and asking the city to fully fund you all to look at what happened in Philadelphia and figure out what are the lessons learned.

I will not pretend to know the answers to that right off the bat, but I do know some ideas would be that, you know, the city should be really doing an assessment of where folks with disabilities are staying in the city and what hotels and what transit routes need to be beefed up so that we actually have extra buses, extra, you know, like three-car trains on Sound Transit through the Link light rail so that there is actually a build-up, and making sure that those are not overwhelmed by the -- gosh, what did you say? Like 60,000 people that are going to be showing up here overall?

But I think that the city needs to start doing planning now for it and I would be very interested in

partnering with the Disability Commission and fully resource you all and get a city staff to help do an assessment about what needs to get done to make sure people can fully enjoy and participate in an amazing event that we get an opportunity to host here.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you very much.

We'll give you each an opportunity for a one-minute closing statement.

So, Jon, you want to --

>>JON: Well, thank you very much for having me here. I'm very -- very humbled to be here.

I think that the work that the Disability Commission does and many of the advocates and activists in the room have been doing is really what's moving the needle in Seattle to make sure this is an accessible city for everyone.

Through my work at the Tenants Union, you know, I have seen firsthand how much it means to folks to have the laws on the books actually enforced.

And what I hope to achieve as a City Council member is a partner and also an activist, so that we can push a really strong agenda to make sure that people with disabilities and their rights are affirmed and that they are enforced.

And I think that that starts by talking to all of

you, getting your input at the ground level, at the grassroots level, and then building that momentum so that we can build on these incredible wins like we saw with eliminating the subminimum wage.

So thank you, all, for the work that you have done, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

>>TERESA: Thank you, once again. Thank you to the Commission for People with disAbilities, and thank you for your graciousness in allowing me to come a little late, and I will stay afterwards to see if there are questions I can answer if I missed any.

My background is in public health. I've worked as an advocate fighting so seniors coming into SeaMar had access to medical insurance.

Many of them did have disabilities.

Many of them were still working one and two jobs.

Many of them were living in food deserts without access to high quality food and social cohesion and affordable homes.

These are the issues I fought on starting at SeaMar and at Public Health at the Department of Health, Children's Alliance, fighting for health care for all kiddos, and I will bring that commitment to Seattle City Council, this lens of health and public health, because the access to affordable, accessible housing is a public health

issue, the access to economic stability and a good living wage job is a public health issue, and making sure that our community and our infrastructure is respectful of our residents and all of those with various levels of abilities is what we have to make sure that we address.

So please, I will stay late, but thank you for allowing me to participate.

>>KAREN: Thank you very much to both of our candidates.

If you want to say thank you, please jazz hands.

(Applause.)

Thank you. And we'll have our next candidates in just a minute.

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