

October 13, 2017, Candidate Forum - Port of Seattle Pos. 1

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Lisa K. Hutchinson

Certified Realtime Captioner

>>CINDI: This is recorded by the Seattle Channel. It will be broadcast to thousands and thousands of people around Seattle and King County. It's not live.

Everybody has access to the Seattle Channel 22, I believe it is.

And we are moving on to Seattle Port Commission Seat No. 1, Position No. 1.

John Creighton is the incumbent and Ryan Calkins is his challenger.

>>KAREN: Good afternoon. Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us.

First we would like to give you a one-minute opening statement to introduce yourselves.

>>RYAN: My name is Ryan Calkins. I grew up in Edmonds. And after college I spent four years living in

Latin America, first as a disaster relief coordinator and then as a human rights monitor.

Came back to Seattle to work in our family business which was an import and distribution company in Georgetown. I did that for a number of years before we sold the business and I went into public service full time.

I now work for a nonprofit called Ventures. We help low income entrepreneurs overcome the obstacles to business ownership and growth.

About 70% of our clients are women- and minority-owned businesses, and we serve primarily clients in the Rainier Valley and South King County. So that's my day job.

I'm excited to join the Port Commission, if voters so choose, to work on issues of transparency in government, environmental sustainability, and equity or fairness in economic growth, and particularly as it relates to job growth and compensation here in the region.

>>JOHN: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is John Creighton. I have been honored to serve you as the incumbent in Position 1. And I grew up over in East King County. I'm a lawyer by training. I worked in Washington, D.C. and then overseas in Istanbul, Helsinki, and Singapore, prior to moving back home.

On the Port Commission, I have worked hard to keep

the port strong as a jobs creation engineer in the region, while making sure it's socially responsible and environmentally sustainable.

In 2012, I worked with a colleague Commissioner Tom Albro. We co-chaired a committee and we came up with a plan to help create 100,000 new jobs for our region. But it's more than just jobs creation. I really feel that the port's prosperity needs to be shared by everyone across King County.

An inclusive city, an inclusive county, is an economically vibrant county, and similarly, a welcoming gateway is an economically vibrant community or makes for an economically vibrant community, so I have worked hard to make sure that the jobs created by the port are open to youth from disadvantaged ZIP codes and communities, and I have worked hard to make sure that port contracting opportunities are open to small businesses.

And I see my time is up, so I look forward to chatting with you further during the course of the debate.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you very much.

First question today: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA, a person can be accompanied by a dog or a miniature pony as a service animal and must receive equal access. However, other laws, such as the Air Carrier Act, and some local jurisdictions, define a service

animal more broadly, allowing people who aren't capable of caring for a dog or a pony or who have, for example, religious restrictions, to utilize other trained animals. For example, a seizure-detecting cat. How will you ensure that airport staff are aware of and respect the needs of neurodiverse individuals who may use other service animals to travel next year or in the years beyond?

>>JOHN: Well, again, I think the more welcoming we make our gateway to everyone across the community, the better for our economy. The more people visit Seattle, spending money in Seattle, the better for our economy.

And you look at demographics, as a baby boomer generation ages, more and more people using our port facilities will be disabled, and so I have really been a strong advocate during my time on the commission, as we look to build the new international arrivals hall, as we look to expand the north satellite at the airport, that we need to take into account that the facilities will be used by people, all sorts of people, people with all sorts of disabilities, whether those be mobility issues, or sight issues, or hearing issues. We need to build facilities that are welcoming for all, and being open to all sorts of service animals I think is really part of that.

>>KAREN: Thank you. Ryan.

>>RYAN: So one of the first things I would do as

commissioner is recommend that we have an advisory committee for folks with varying abilities.

The purpose of Sea-Tac Airport in particular is to make not only the world accessible to the folks who live in this region, but also the region accessible for folks who want to come here, and if we don't have air support facilities that are accessible to folks of all abilities, then we cut that out. I have found that in order to get the solution right, we have to have folks at the table who understand personally what it is that may limit them from using those facilities.

And so that's where I would start, is getting the right folks at the table through an advisory committee supporting the commission, to let us know what needs to be done at the airport to make it more accessible.

>>KAREN: Thank you. We have a big event coming up. The U.S. Special Olympics are coming to Seattle next July.

What are you planning to do to integrate logistically with neighboring cities to serve the 10,000 -- estimated 10,000 athletes and 50,000 friends and families who will be visiting our city?

>>RYAN: It's an exciting opportunity for our city and our region to have that event here. I know John and I are both big sports fans, so we often talk about that on

the campaign trail. I know I'll personally be attending, with my children.

With regards to what the Port of Seattle can do to make sure we're a welcoming place for that event and for other events that come to our region, one of the things that we need to address very concretely is that gap between the airport terminal and Sound Transit, the light rail station, just a quarter mile of right now that has to be walked. And in the short term, they will put in golf cart service to transport people back and forth, but we as a commission need to direct the port staff to find a solution that works for everyone in order to make that not a gap in service for folks who are coming in to town to visit or for folks in the region who are going out to the world.

>>JOHN: And I would agree with much of what Ryan said. I do think we constantly need to be reevaluating our facilities to make sure that they are welcoming to all.

And I sit on the Seattle Sports Commission on behalf of the port. Getting the Special Olympics to Seattle was a huge coup, a worldwide event, and an opportunity to really showcase our city and our region, and I have been an advocate of holding back space at the airport in terms of, you know, from commercial advertising, to be able to advertise our community and events going on in our community, so we'll be showcasing the Special

Olympics at the airport, which I think is a good thing, to really get the community behind it and -- yeah, it's just a real opportunity to showcase our city.

And as we prepare for it, we need to constantly be reevaluating our facilities, not only our airport, but, say, folks who come to town who then decide: Hey, it's a good time to go on a cruise, or whatnot. All Port of Seattle facilities need to be welcoming.

>>KAREN: So it is somewhat related. In February of this year, the Port Commission set a goal to make Sea-Tac Airport the most accessible airport in America. Can you describe any specific steps that you're taking to achieve this feat.

>>JOHN: Well, and I want to thank Cindi Laws for really holding our feet to the fire on that. She's been a tremendous advocate for the community. One thing we're doing, and I know signage is always a struggle at a large facility. So we're doing a -- we have directed staff to, you know, put out for bid a reevaluation of all our signs throughout the airport, making sure they are easy to understand by all people. So I think that's part of it.

Again, as we move forward with building the new international arrivals hall and expanding the north satellite, you have to look at bathroom facilities and corridors to make sure, again, they are easy to use by

everyone.

>>KAREN: Thank you.

>>RYAN: So, I come from a small business background where it was incumbent upon me as a business owner to find out what my customers needed, and I think in this particular case we have an analogy there. The Commission and the Alliance have done an excellent job of highlighting the things that need to be addressed there. But as a port, we need to be going out and surveying the population to determine what exactly it is that needs to be done at the Port of Seattle to make it more accessible. And that's the first step in finding the right solution for the needs of folks of varying abilities that are using the Port of Seattle.

>>KAREN: Okay. Thank you. Despite Air Carrier Act protections for people with disabilities, airlines damage or destroy thousands of wheelchairs annually. What could the port do to work with the airlines that use Sea-Tac to address these ongoing problems?

>>JOHN: Well, and that one of those instances actually happened earlier this year at Sea-Tac Airport. It was really disappointing and the air carrier's response was really disappointing. I think the port, you know, we have a hammer and we have a carrot and I think we can use both.

But, for example, with airlines trying to make

sure they are doing all they can to fly as quietly as possible when they land over airport communities, we have an incentive program where we feature the quietest airlines for that year, and I think we can do the same, featuring the airline that goes above and beyond serving disabled customers.

>>RYAN: As the landlord to the tenants at the airport, we do have, as John mentioned, a carrot and stick ability, but I think there might also be a responsibility over and above that, which is to say that when people come through Sea-Tac Airport or any of the port facilities and, because of some circumstance, find themselves in a position in which they need support in some way, the Port of Seattle ought to have the ability to address those needs immediately and of its own right, and not rely on the tenants to always get it right.

And I think that's true both for the community of folks with varying abilities, but also in cases recently that have been very newsworthy around immigration. And so I have proposed around immigration to create a legal defense fund for people who are caught in legal limbo at Sea-Tac Airport and who don't have the financial means to be able to hire an attorney and take care of it themselves.

In the case of folks with disabilities who are traveling through, an analogous set-up could be created for

them that would ensure that the equipment they need would be available should something happen to their own equipment.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you.

Despite the work to make the interior of the airport the most accessible, the port's ground transportation staff have made leaving the airport difficult for special needs customers, especially those who use wheelchairs, sometimes even reversing policies, such as removing all signage about the existence of wheelchair-accessible taxis, called WATs, and ending a project that had been approved by commissioners for baggage claim pickup zones for WATs.

What ideas do you have to resolve this?

>>RYAN: I think this -- the port staff was working within the constraints of the traffic concerns that they were dealing with, and so I would maybe take a step back and say: What can we first do to reduce the single-vehicle occupancy trips to and from Sea-Tac Airport so that we have more capacity to accommodate folks with varying disabilities who are coming and going from the airport?

In other words, let's get the folks for whom a light rail trip, or a bus trip, or other form of mass transit is fairly accessible, but let's get them onto mass

transit so that we're using the existing lanes that we have for private vehicles and for WATs to be able to come directly to the terminal, and we can permit that without creating a sort of breach in the protocol currently.

>>JOHN: You know, and I would agree. I think we need to incentivize folks not to use the airport drive so the folks who really need the airport drive, it's open to them. And if you have tried to use the airport recently, you know the airport drive is congested pretty much 24/7.

Yeah, I was really frustrated with change-over in the taxi contract where they took down the signs. They didn't properly put them back up. I think staff has corrected that to some extent.

And then with the, you know, there's been a proposal to have the wheelchair accessible taxis on call on the airport drive, which makes it easier, you know, when someone's coming to the curb. On the other hand, they can't turn away nondisabled, so that's an issue.

So, right now they have signs where you can call up a WAT cab that's waiting and, you know, that's not the best situation, but, you know, we need to be looking at ways to make that more user-friendly. But, you know, because it's -- if you have them waiting there, um, people will want to jump in them who aren't disabled, and then that screws up the need for the disabled.

>>KAREN: Hmm. So, clearly there's a system here that needs to be resolved. Okay.

>>JOHN: Yes.

>>KAREN: Sounds like not all the pieces are working there. So, what are you going to do, as port commissioner, to improve the hiring of people with disabilities by the port and its contractors?

>>JOHN: Um, you know, that has been a real interest of mine, making the port, you know, not only inclusive in terms of its outside dealings with citizens, with workers, with small businesses, but also internally diverse, and you know, it's been a real joy to work with a lot of various groups of the port, whether it be Port Pride or Blacks in Government, and looking at how we can become more diverse.

And I think making sure that we have good representation within the disabled community is part of that as well. So, again, as we need to be looking constantly at our own transportation facilities we need to be looking constantly at our office facilities to make sure that they are accommodating to all workers.

>>RYAN: There are some good priority hire programs in place at the Port of Seattle, but they need to be expanded and really be expanded in the area of working with folks with disabilities.

Over and above that, because direct port jobs don't even represent half of all the jobs that the Port of Seattle has capacity to influence, the other thing we need to be thinking about is how are we creating criteria for the labor unions with which we contract, the contractors with which we contract, to say: This is a key priority for us.

And because so many of the jobs that are directly related to the Port of Seattle are artisan trades jobs that require apprenticeship programs prior to being hired to do the job, we need to make sure those apprenticeship programs also include opportunities for folks with disabilities.

And many of those jobs are the kinds of jobs that we in the Pacific Northwest desperately need, to ensure that we have the kind of diverse economy that means for a long-term healthy economy.

Jobs not only in the traditional maritime industrial jobs that we think about, like a longshore worker or a marine welder, but also the jobs that will make up the new generation of artisan trades that are coming in the next 20 and 40 years.

How are we working at the Port of Seattle to be a nexus for the public and private partnerships that will ensure that those jobs stay here in our region and are accessible to folks who traditionally would not have access

to those jobs.

>>KAREN: Thank you.

As an influential leader and possible commissioner, please describe your experience or knowledge with the disability community.

>>JOHN: Well, I have had the pleasure of working with a number of advocates for the disabled community locally, including Ms. Laws there. And, again, the demographic numbers are clear that as the baby boom population ages out, there will be more and more people with disabilities that are using our facilities.

And it is a matter of not only inclusiveness, but it's a matter of a healthy economy, making sure that all members of our society are included and can do things, like if you retire and you want to travel, you know, we have an easily accessible airport or also an easily accessible cruise terminal.

So, again, you know, as the demographics change, we need to constantly be reevaluating how welcoming we actually are.

>>RYAN: My professional experience as a small business owner, I had the opportunity to hire people regularly, and one of the criteria that we put in place in our hiring decisions was to afford the opportunity to folks with varying abilities to have access to positions in which

they would be able to succeed in spite of a disability.

So we had a range of jobs, warehouse worker to customer service rep to salespeople on a sales floor, and so one of the things that we did was prioritized applications from folks with a variety of cognitive or physical disabilities, and that resulted in our ability to hire folks that became an integral part of our organization that we may have overlooked had we given just a superficial pass at their résumé. That personally is something that I have done.

Now in my work with a nonprofit, I actually threw the nonprofits a number of people with cognitive disabilities that are starting businesses, and in more cases than should be true, the cognitive abilities disabilities they are encountering make it hard to get over the initial obstacle of small business ownership, get through the red tape at a governmental level, but once they get their business up and running, the value they provide is the kind of thing people will pay for, and they find success in that, and so in many cases, just getting past that initial obstacle. So I'm excited to do that at the Port of Seattle as well.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you.

So this is our last question this afternoon. With the recent news reports of people being taken forcibly off

airplanes, how do you propose, as commissioners, to address and ensure safety and sensitivity for passengers with disabilities, especially those with invisible disabilities?

>>RYAN: Great question. One of the, I think, lesser known aspects of being a port commissioner is not the audience that you get here, which, you know, we often have the opportunity to speak publicly, but it's the behind-closed-doors audience that where we are meeting with folks -- key stakeholders around the Port of Seattle who have a lot of nuance on these things, including the major airlines that come and go from Sea-Tac as tenants.

And we have the soapbox to say: This is the kind of airport we have in mind for our region, and we are willing to exercise our power as the landlord to enforce a set of criteria around that.

The incident on United Airlines obviously was a black eye for that airline, and I have heard personally from the two major airlines at Sea-Tac that that is the kind of customer service snafu that they want to avoid. But it needs to go further. It needs to be implemented into the training of their staffs, that in terms of being able to identify quickly someone with different needs and be able to accommodate those needs in a reasonable and fair way.

>>JOHN: So I'm a big user of social media. I

like Twitter. I try to avoid following our president's tweets because that just increases my blood pressure. But earlier this year, I saw a tweet by a young man, a hearing impaired man, who had a bad experience at Sea-Tac with TSA. And you can imagine someone with a hearing disability, you know, being confronted by law enforcement who may not understand that he is hearing-impaired, how scary a situation that could be.

And so I really think that we need sensitivity training for not only the port police, but all the law enforcement and, frankly, all the customer service folks at the airport, to really train them on how to -- to interact and understand folks with a variety of disabilities.

>>KAREN: Great. Thank you very much. I think -- yeah, we're going to give you an opportunity to do a one-minute closing statement. Thank you.

RYAN: Great. I'll jump in.

So, I wanted to say thank you to the Commission and to the Alliance for putting this on today. It is a real privilege as a first-time political candidate to be able to come out and speak to a group like you.

And I also wanted to applaud you for carrying out one of my favorite aspects of political power, and that is generating power amongst the grassroots that then force the elected leaders to make changes.

You guys exemplify that for our community and I hope you continue to do that, to be the champion of those who would otherwise be underrepresented, and so I'm excited to work with you if I get to be your commissioner.

And with that, I hope you guys tune in to the port races. I'm grateful for everyone who is here and I would love to have your vote in November.

>>JOHN: All right. And thank you, everyone. Similarly, I would like to thank the Commission and the Alliance for putting this on and for including the Port Commission candidates as part of this, because the port typically flies under the radar, but you look at it and it impacts some 200,000 jobs in our region and those jobs need to be accessible to everyone.

And the transportation facilities that the port builds, you know, major gateways, the airport and cruise terminals, and other properties need to be accessible and easy to use by all, so, I really appreciate you all putting this on.

And I have really enjoyed working with your advocates during my time on the Port Commission, and I would be honored to have your vote for reelection in November. Thank you.

>>KAREN: Thank you. May we have a hand for both candidates.

Thank you.

>>RYAN: You didn't ask the question, but I do caption all my videos.

>>KAREN: Excellent.

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