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## Saltzman Fights Back—Sort of

May 10th, 2010 in [Stories](#)

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### The embattled City Commissioner quietly holds his own in campaign debate

By *Michael Munkvold*

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman faced the top challengers for his position on the City Council on April 23 at the Portland City Club, sporting a characteristically bland, inscrutable smile as the two top-tier challengers accused him of ineffective, wasteful management of the Police Bureau, Bureau of Environmental Services, and Bureau of Fire Police Disability and Retirement. With their criticism, challengers Mary Volm and Jesse Cornett joined a growing chorus of pundits, activists and police officers who have grown weary of the scandals that have piled up at Saltzman's feet, and sought to unseat him in the May 18 primary. "One person's squabbling is another's democracy," Saltzman quipped.

He has contended with plenty of the former over the last year. When a Portland police officer shot and killed Aaron Campbell, an unarmed, suicidal black man, on January 29, it shredded the department's already tattered reputation. Saltzman responded with a report recommending mental health training for police officers and the use of mental health professionals in crisis situations. This won him no friends in the mental health community, however, and further upset the Portland Police Association, who held a no-confidence vote against him last year after he advocated putting Sergeant Christopher Humphreys on administrative leave for firing beanbag rounds at a 12-year-old girl during an altercation on the MAX. Humphreys was suspended for two weeks. For his part, Saltzman has publicly refused to talk about police matters in a debate setting.

"I'm not going to politicize police in the context of a campaign," he said in a separate interview with *The Spectator*. "I'll take the hits necessary, but I won't say anything inappropriate in terms of my job."

Of course, his opponents had plenty to say. "We should be frightened that 1,000 people in this city are licensed to take a life, and there's minimal oversight of them," said Cornett, whose friend Raymond Gwerder

was shot and killed by Portland police officers in 2005. On this issue and others, he accused Saltzman of having accomplished little in his tenure as a public servant. In a separate interview with *The Spectator*, he said, “Just because you’ve been an elected official for 20 years, as Dan has, doesn’t mean you’re going to be a bold leader. Because he hasn’t.”

Volm criticized Saltzman for mishandling public funds, accusing him of spending \$11.2 million on “private projects” instead of putting more money into improving the sewer system. “When we take our eye off that ball, we are failing Portland.” Saltzman responded by touting The Portland Children’s Levy, The Domestic Violence Center, and Anti-Child Pornography Task Force. “Tell me how any of those are bad ideas,” he said, a rare note of anger in his voice.

When speaking with *The Spectator*, Saltzman defended his record with the Police Bureau, even as he acknowledged it as a work in progress.

“I have changed how we use force, although there are still lessons to learn,” he said. “I feel my style is fair and honest. I act decisively.”

He told *The Spectator* that his main priority for the Portland police is to help lead the Bureau past its present troubles and improve relations with the community, in part by diversifying the police force. “One of my goals is to increase diversity of the police force, to have a police force that looks more like the community,” he said. “I think we need to be better at de-escalating situations, to be better prepared to deal with mentally ill people.”

In all, Saltzman answered his critics both in the debate and throughout the city with a quiet shrug.

“I would rather seek solutions than chase headlines.”

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