

Candidates head for November ballot

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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Candidates seeking to be Minneapolis' next mayor had to convince a packed auditorium inside Sabathani Community Center they were receptive to the needs of the city's various minority communities.

The recent 1MPLS forum on racial justice, organized by Henry Jimenez, Marjaan Sirdar, Jenny Lock, Ishmael Israel, Nimco Ahmed and Jeff Hnilicka brought out eight candidates vying for the city's top job. Judging the mood in the room, the diverse audience – most of whom were young voters – thinks all the candidates have a lot of work to do if they are to gain the support of various ethnic voters. Jimenez said the candidates need to broaden their nets when seeking to be the city's next mayor.

The candidates will square off this November during the general election to fill the office being vacated by Mayor R.T. Rybak. It is widely expected that the field will change by then, as no candidate has received the coveted DFL party endorsement. During the recent endorsing convention, candidate Mark Andrew was able to get 50 percent of the caucus votes with Ward 13 City Councilwoman Betsy Hodges garnering 44 percent of the vote. Sixty percent was needed to gain the party's official endorsement. Last, week, Ward 9 City Councilman Gary Schiff announced that he is withdrawing from the race and that he was supporting Hodges.

"I want you (candidates) to see what Minneapolis really looks like," said Jimenez pointing out to the hundreds of diverse faces in the auditorium of Sabathani, 310 E. 38th Street. "I'm tired of politicians coming to us (communities of color) two weeks before an election. There's a problem to say this is one of the most progressive cities in the nation yet we have some of the biggest racial disparities in the nation. We're really one of the most segregated cities in the nation. We can't keep talking about north Minneapolis as if it's another city."

The evening's moderator, Nekima Levy-Pounds agreed.

"I think of Minneapolis as a tale of two cities," said Levy-Pounds. "It's the best of times and it's the worst of times. Unfortunately, for our communities of color it's among the worst of times."

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So, do the candidates see race relations in the same vein as Jimenez and Levy-Pounds?

"I want to welcome you to one of the most economically and racially segregated cities in the nation," said former DFL chair and former Hennepin County Board chair, Andrew. "I'm running to change that."

Andrew said a major initiative as mayor would be to create great job opportunities for those in communities of color.

Schiff, who represents maybe the most diverse district in the city, said the notion that Minneapolis is a progressive city is a falsehood.

"Minneapolis can't be considered one of the most progressive cities if it is not progressive for everybody," said Schiff, who said half of the residents he represents live below the poverty line.

Northsider, former Minneapolis City Council Chair Jackie Cherryhomes, said her record speaks for itself when it comes to fairly representing the city's communities of color.

"I would not budge the day Target wanted to build a building and I told them they would not be building their building without an affirmative action program in place," said Cherryhomes. Cherryhomes said the retail giant agreed to implement an affirmative action program and goals in minority hiring for the project were met.

The only non-white in the race, 5th Ward City Councilman Don Samuels, said he specifically chose to live in the city's Jordan neighborhood so he could be of greater service to communities of color. Samuels said enough with talking about bettering the conditions for various communities of color, saying now is a time for action.

"It's not enough to say we are all created equal," said Samuels. "Are we truly equal when there's such an outrageous employment and housing gap?"

Samuels attempted to appeal to Latino-American voters and the so-called Dreamers – immigrants who came to the United States as children and currently have not been granted citizenship – by saying for a time in his life he was in a similar situation.

"I was a Dreamer of sorts, living in suspense. I know what it's like to be working illegally and thinking every cop is going to come and get you," said Samuels, who is from Jamaica and said his visa was expired for more than a year waiting to be granted permanent citizenship.

The nearly three-hour forum was wide-ranging, touching on topics of education, housing, education, immigration, Somali affairs, police harassment and more. Unlike other forums, there was considerable back and forth between candidates, audience members and the moderator. Several questioners from the audience often demanded pointed and specific responses to their questions. When asked by Jimenez if the candidates were providing satisfactory answers, there was a noticeable lack of crowd approval.

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In all, eight candidates participated in the forum. Along with Andrew, Cherryhomes, Samuels and Schiff, Betsy Hodges, Tony Lane, Doug Mann and Jim Thomas fielded questions for the audience and moderator Levy-Pounds.