

The Oregonian

Portland transportation bureau hires manager convicted of felony tied to corruption probe

By Elliot Njus

December 30, 2016

The Portland Transportation Bureau's pick to oversee its construction projects has a felony conviction for lying on tax documents tied to a federal corruption investigation that sent a Beltway councilman to prison.

Prosecutors said Millicent Williams directed \$110,000 from the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit she ran toward an inaugural ball at the request of the councilman, then signed tax forms that misrepresented the money's purpose. Though she pleaded guilty in 2013 and served 15 months of probation, documents show, she was not accused of personally benefiting from the misdirection of funds.

Williams, who now works for a city outside of Dallas, Texas, said she was open with Portland officials about the conviction during the hiring process. As the bureau's capital projects division manager, she will oversee a staff of 12 and manage capital improvement projects that total \$60 million to \$80 million.

City officials said her career in the nonprofit and public sectors, during which she rose to the post of Washington's director for homeland security, outweighed her criminal history.

She was one of several people implicated in the federal investigation of Harry Thomas Jr., who was accused of embezzling more than \$350,000 in public funds. He was convicted in 2012 and served three years in prison.

At the time, Williams ran now-defunct DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corp., a nonprofit which distributed public funds to youth programs. In 2009, Thomas asked Williams for a grant to pay for a black-tie inaugural ball that had already occurred and hadn't covered its costs.

In an interview Thursday with The Oregonian/OregonLive, Williams said the event had been described to her as a venue for at-risk youth to celebrate the election of President Barack Obama, which she believed would be a proper use of the funds.

Williams said she later questioned whether her nonprofit could give funds to the political organization holding the event, but agreed to send the money to another nonprofit called Youth Tech that forwarded it the ball's organizers.

"I didn't know that the other organization did not do what was supposed to have been done," Williams said. "Had I been more judicious in my approach, as we had been for other grants, it probably would have been detected. But I was not."

She also, according to a signed court statement, ordered revisions to the grant agreement to make it less overtly partisan and more in line with the fund's intended purpose.

Document: [Statement of offense signed by Williams](#)

She later signed tax documents that listed the beneficiary as Youth Tech, not the councilman or political organization as beneficiaries. Williams said she hadn't read the document before she signed it, but prosecutors said she was responsible for its false statements.

"Every day I wish I would have made a different decision," she said, adding that the experience "makes me much more cautious, contentious and observant than I ever would have been to make sure nothing like this, at least on my watch, ever happens again."

By the time the Thomas investigation began, Williams was serving as Washington's director of homeland security, a post she held under two mayors. She resigned in January 2012, saying at the time she didn't want her involvement to be a distraction, and pleaded guilty to the tax charge in 2013.

Williams said Thursday she had made an effort to "clean up" at the nonprofit by instituting new grant procedures. She also said she reduced her own salary, from the \$250,000 her predecessor made to \$160,000.

Portland officials said Williams rose to the top of a field of more than 40 candidates.

Transportation Bureau Director Leah Treat, who previously worked in Washington and was aware of the case, signed off on the hire, spokesman John Brady said. (She was not made available to comment on the hire.) Outgoing transportation Commissioner Steve Novick also was aware of Williams' past.

Treat said in a statement that she believed Williams' two decades of experience in public sector and nonprofit management would be an asset to the bureau.

"She was chosen after a highly competitive and rigorous selection process," Treat said. "She has been very forthcoming about her court case, and I have been impressed with her honesty and her willingness to take responsibility for her actions. I believe she has learned from her mistakes."

Williams joins a bureau that is still shaking off a major corruption scandal of its own.

Former Portland parking manager Ellis K. McCoy, was sentenced last year for accepting bribes in exchange for steering multimillion-dollar parking meter contracts to two companies between 2002 and 2011. FBI agents showed up unannounced to raid his city office and Hillsboro home in August 2011.

Brady said Williams' role would be to coordinate work with various government agencies, similar to her work as security manager in D.C. She would not choose contractors or vendors, Brady said, and another manager would be responsible for oversight of the capital improvement budget.

She will report to Planning, Policy and Projects Group Manager Art Pearce, who reports to Treat.

The hire also comes a year after Portland passed a strict "Ban the Box" policy, which prohibits employers from asking prospective employees about their criminal history until after making a conditional job offer.

Williams disclosed her felony conviction to a city human resources manager before applying, but interviewers weren't told of it until she was named one of four finalists.

Williams starts in Portland in mid-January, filling a position that's been vacant for five years but which will oversee a growing list of projects. She'll earn an annual salary of \$112,000.

Housing crisis took center stage in 2016, will keep it in 2017

*By Elliot Njus
December 30, 2016*

Renters felt the effects of the housing crisis years ago, when their leases started climbing at a much faster rate than their paychecks.

So did would-be homebuyers, who scrambled to scrape together down payments in one of the country's hottest housing markets only to find themselves in bidding wars with all the hallmarks of a flash sale.

But for Portland and the metro area, 2016 marks the year the housing crisis went mainstream.

Affordability commanded a nearly single-minded focus at the ballot box. In November, Portland voters overwhelmingly approved a \$258 million bond for affordable housing and unseated a city commissioner in favor of a political novice who campaigned chiefly on housing.

Renters, stretched financially and pushed geographically toward Portland's outskirts and suburbs, loudly demanded solutions -- joined in some cases by powerful business interests who saw the issue as a threat to the city's otherwise growing economy.

That drove state lawmakers to lift a longstanding ban on affordable housing mandates, creating an opening for Portland to approve its historic inclusionary zoning policy just a few months later.

"Housing and issues around homelessness have truly become top-of-mind issues for all Portlanders," said Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who oversees the city's Housing Bureau. "That urgency's been driven home, either by rent increases individuals are experiencing or (because) they know people in unaffordable housing situations."

The city's concentration of struggling renters has only grown. Rents have climbed 30 percent since 2012, according to data firm CoStar, a number forecasters say will continue to grow.

The median-priced two-bedroom apartment in Portland is now beyond reach for the average household in nearly half the neighborhoods, according to the city's annual State of Housing report.

That stat is even more dismal for the average Latino, Black, Native American and single-parent households, who cannot afford the median rent in any neighborhood, the report found.

The median-priced home in the metro area, meanwhile, hovers around \$350,000, up nearly 12 percent from a year earlier. Household income grew at half that rate last year.

Rising rents have priced people out of their homes and scattered them to the outer reaches of the city and beyond. As those ranks increased, so too did their calls for action.

In 2012, Margot Black's family was evicted from a rented home without cause and thrust into a highly competitive rental market with just a few weeks' notice. The Lewis & Clark College math

professor wrote to public officials at the time to say there should be more protections for renters. They responded with sympathy, but little more.

Two years later, Black started to see more complaints online about the rental market. What's more, the postings appeared in communities focused on other topics, such as parenting.

"The inability to find housing when you were looking for it was going from inconvenient to crisis, really fast," Black said. "People were starting to feel like it wasn't normal."

Groups started to coalesce around housing issues.

Black founded Portland Tenants United, an ad-hoc tenants group that picketed landlords while pushing for rent control and an end to no-cause evictions.

And a Facebook group called The Shed -- named after a particularly grating for-rent ad asking \$900 a month for what appeared to be, well, a shed -- was founded by bookseller Chloe Eudaly, who would go on to upset Commissioner Steve Novick for a seat on the Portland City Council.

"I've never seen this level of interest and engagement on housing issues before," Eudaly said. "I attribute part of that to the internet as an organizing tool and a way to get information out to the public. But I also believe we haven't faced this level of housing crisis for many decades, if ever."

Those online groups helped turn up the volume on the issues, reliably producing real-life renters to relate their experiences to policymakers, both in private meetings and public forums.

They had some unexpected allies, or at least associates, in those discussions.

The homebuilders lobby had 17 years ago pushed for a ban on inclusionary zoning, a policy which mandates affordable housing in new development, and frequently fought its repeal since. It reversed itself this year and supported scrapping the ban in an effort to help shape the legislation.

Jon Chandler, chief executive of the Oregon Homebuilders Association, said his group wants broader discussion about increasing the supply of housing in communities where it's become unaffordable.

"We needed to move forward," Chandler said. "Then you can actually have a productive conversation about how do you increase the supply across the board, none of which would have been possible if we were stuck on inclusionary zoning."

The Portland Business Alliance, the city's chamber of commerce, also got behind inclusionary zoning at the Legislature and endorsed Portland's housing bond.

The alliance has been sounding the alarm on housing costs since 2015, noting that it's harder to recruit and retain middle-wage workers if they're forced to live in the outer edges of the region.

"It becomes more of a challenge as people are finding themselves having to move farther away from their job in order to find housing that's affordable," said Marion Haynes, the alliance's vice president for government affairs and economic development. "It puts a strain on employees if they have long commutes, and employers recognize that."

The tentative peace between business interests and housing activists may be short-lived.

In the coming year, Portland will likely turn to Portland Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler's proposed tenants' "Bill of Rights," which calls for eviction reform and additional protections for renters.

Meanwhile, Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek has said she wants to cap rent increases and lift the state's ban on rent control.

That proposal will likely face fierce opposition from the business community. Rent control is particularly controversial because a clear majority of economists believe it backfires by restricting investment, reducing the quantity and quality of the housing supply.

"The lens through which we view upcoming and previous policy proposals related to housing are whether they increase supply," Haynes said. "Policies that have been shown to have a detrimental impact on the quantity of housing we're not likely to support."

Black said that even housing advocates she counts among her closest allies shied away from rent-control proposals as recently as six months ago.

"They said, 'It's just way too radical. You won't get any traction in Salem,'" she said. Now, she said, they're newly emboldened. "Who knows what will happen, but the fact that there's a bill and we've got the support of the speaker of the House, that's a big step."

Audit: Portland Building reconstruction plans could put cost before quality

*By Jessica Floum
December 29, 2016*

When it comes to planning the Portland Building reconstruction project, city officials need to be careful, an audit released Thursday warned.

The City Council promised the project would cost no more than \$195 million and get done by December 2020.

But the city's decision to fix the cost and schedule of the historic building's reconstruction could limit the project's scope if officials don't make thoughtful decisions and plan for surprise complications, the report said.

"We're not saying they're behind," said Drummond Kahn, director of audit services. "At the stage we are, these are the times that many crucial decisions will happen."

The city is reconstructing its 34-year-old administrative building to repair leaks and better position the building to withstand an earthquake. About 1,300 city employees work in the building, which also houses a child care facility, retail vendors and public meetings spaces.

Built in 1982, the building suffers from chronic water damage that has led to mold and the "general discomfort of occupants," a 2008 investigation of the building found.

A 2012 investigation found the building would "perform poorly in most earthquakes."

The city reluctantly decided to repair the building after at least two years of looking at the cost implications.

The City Council set a maximum budget after a work session included concerns about the project's ability to stay within budget.

Portland will pay for the project by issuing 20-year bonds. It would also owe \$12.9 million in annual debt payments, based on the previous \$175 million estimate.

The city set minimum requirements for the project, which include repairing structural water damage, bringing the building to seismic code, upgrading heating and cooling systems, making the building more accessible and achieving a certification in sustainability.

But government construction projects are constrained by three factors--cost, schedule and scope.

Whether the minimum work gets done depends on city officials watching their spending.

"The city may not achieve all of the improvements that it described, because it may have already used its budget or available time," the report said.

The audit also questioned how project managers would spend the 1 percent of construction costs that the City Council required them to set aside for women and minority contractors.

The project is on track, outgoing Chief Administrative Officer Fred Miller wrote in a response to the audit.

"I am comfortable leaving because I know the project is set up for success," Miller wrote.

Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler names administration staff

By Jessica Floum

December 28, 2016

Portland Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler announced Wednesday the members of his administration when he takes office Jan. 1.

Wheeler, the current state treasurer and former Multnomah County chairman, had already named Maurice Henderson, Portland's assistant transportation director, as chief of staff. He'd also tapped Tom Rinehart, his longtime chief of staff at the county and state, as his chief administrative officer.

"The challenges we face as a city are significant," Wheeler said in a statement. "So are the opportunities. We've been able to assemble a talented team with the knowledge and experience we'll need to hit the ground running."

He said Alma Flores, Milwaukie's community and economic development director, will become director of policy.

He also named three senior policy advisers: Nicole Grant, a senior policy analyst and the Portland Police Bureau liaison for the Hales administration; Nathan Howard, who served as Wheeler's deputy campaign manager; and Andrea Valderrama, Portland's first policy and outreach adviser.

Kristin Dennis will serve as deputy chief of staff and director of operations. She was Wheeler's chief of staff at the Oregon Treasury.

Former New Jersey State Sen. Barbara Buono and attorney Berk Nelson will serve as senior advisors.

Jennifer Arguinzoni, Wheeler's campaign finance director, will be the director of strategic partnerships.

Kyle Chisek will be the director of bureau engagement.

Wheeler's campaign manager Michael Cox will be director of communications and constituent services. Michelle Plambeck will be deputy communications director.

Mustafa Washington will be Wheeler's constituent services manager. He worked as the constituent services specialist for Mayor Charlie Hales.

Angel James will be special assistant to the mayor and scheduler.

Antoinette Edwards and Tom Peavey will continue to lead the Office of Youth Violence and Prevention as director and policy manager, respectively.

The Portland Tribune

Fusion of city, county police gains traction

By Nick Budnick

December 29, 2016

The stars are as aligned as they'll ever be for Multnomah County Sheriff Mike Reese's long-sought goal of marrying his former agency, the Portland Police Bureau, to the office he now heads.

While serving as Portland Police Chief until 2014, Reese was a proponent of city police officers and sheriff's deputies working together under the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office — the agency he took over in August.

Now he is engaged in preliminary talks with Portland Police Chief Mike Marshman — Reese's friend and former top aide — to look at ways to consolidate the two agencies' services. And he's got the support of County Chair Deborah Kafoury as well as Mayor-elect Ted Wheeler, who formerly held the job of county chair.

That said, a full-blown merger would be a huge undertaking, observers say. And for now, rather than a full marriage, the two agencies are expected to try the bureaucratic equivalent of shacking up: sharing some functions, such as training, and having special units work together in new task forces.

"I think that there's a lot of things that we can do right now that can make a difference," said Kafoury, who has been meeting with Reese to talk about the idea. "We'll be more effective, but also, hopefully, save some dollars."

Wheeler recently cited public safety consolidation as Exhibit A for how the city's looming budget deficit could drive new ideas.

"There are some things that a fiscal crisis can drive us to do that we might not normally have the energy for otherwise," he said in an interview. "I absolutely think there are opportunities there."

Consolidation of the two agencies might seem a no-brainer. The Portland Police Bureau costs \$200 million a year and employs about 900 cops for patrol and special units such as a drugs and vice division.

With a \$137 million budget, the Multnomah Sheriff's Office employs more than 400 corrections deputies to run two jails as well as more than 100 uniformed deputies that patrol areas east of the city and staff special units.

While the idea of merging the organizations has been looked at many times over the years, it's never happened.

In 1974, after an in-depth study of a countywide law enforcement agency, Multnomah County voters rejected the idea at the ballot.

In 1994, a joint city-county report decided that a full merger would be too costly to implement, but collaboration would lead to savings.

In 2006, the county Board of Commissioners supported a pooled law-enforcement budget in pursuit of efficiencies, but the idea never went anywhere.

In March 2013, while Reese was chief, the Portland Police Bureau prepared a confidential white paper supporting consolidation for a meeting between Reese, Mayor Charlie Hales, County Chair Jeff Cogen and Sheriff Dan Staton. The idea never got off the ground.

Reese stresses that he and Marshman are not currently talking about a merger. Rather, they're talking about collaboration between their two agencies and perhaps some functional consolidation, such as having officers work together under a unified command in a task force similar to the TriMet police.

The two agencies' special drug units are first up for consideration; after that Reese thinks training would be a good place to join forces. But he thinks there are other areas that would benefit from collaboration as well.

"You could look at almost every operation that we do and go down the list and say, 'Can we do this more effectively doing it together?' " Reese said. "You're going to see us asking those questions and engaging in conversations that we haven't engaged in in the past."

While he's optimistic that he and Marshman can achieve efficiencies through better collaboration, Reese said he won't be touching the idea of a full-blown merger unless others want to look at it, such as the Portland City Council.

"A true consolidation or merger between PPB and MCSO would be a complex undertaking involving several political entities and labor associations," he said. "It would require significant research and process to determine feasibility, cost savings and efficiencies in operations."

It would represent a merger in culture as well. Former sheriff's deputies and cops with knowledge of both agencies say Portland, because it fields a high number of police calls, has developed a more fast-paced style of policing than that of Multnomah County, which has traditionally prided itself on a more people-focused approach.

Politically speaking, the Portland City Council might find the idea newly appealing in light of how cop critics have spent the past year disrupting public meetings at City Hall.

But the unions representing Portland police and Multnomah sheriff's deputies agreed with Reese that while collaboration sounds promising, merging would be difficult at best.

A merger is "something that may sound inviting but ... it may not be advantageous financially," said Daryl Turner of the Portland Police Association.

"It's such a complex issue," said Matt Ferguson, of the county Deputy Sheriffs Association. "It would be an interesting process to see what happens, but it would also be very difficult."

Wheeler sounds the most aggressive of the lot. He declined to rule out merging patrol services, and explicitly talked about taking over police duties for smaller cities outside of Portland such as Wood Village and Troutdale.

"There are functions that we could talk about merging," he said, adding that of the outlying cities, "their needs are needs that I fundamentally believe that we can address."

10 cent-a-gallon Portland gas tax takes effect Jan. 1

*By Jim Redden
December 29, 2016*

The temporary 10 cent-a-gallon gas tax approved by Portlanders voters in May takes effect on Jan. 1.

In one of his last official acts in office, former Transportation Commissioner Steve Novick held a press conference Thursday to review the first 20 street projects funded with bond proceeds supported by the projected revenue, and to announce a schedule for future projects.

"Last May, Portland voters decided to pay a higher gas tax in order to fix the streets and make them safer," said Novick, who is in charge of the Portland Bureau of Transportation. "With the 20 base repair projects, PBOT has already started to fix the streets. In 2017, Portlanders will see more streets repaved, dangerous intersections fixed, sidewalks installed, and greenways improved. They'll also see strong emphasis on creating safe routes to schools. In short, they'll see their dime in action."

Novick held the press conference with PBOT Director Leah Treat at a recently completed repair project near the intersection of Southeast Milwaukie and Ramona Streets. There, PBOT crews fixed a failing section of street and installed a new concrete bus pad along TriMet bus route 19.

"2017 is going to be an exciting year for the Fixing our Streets program," said Treat. "After completing 20 small, but significant projects all across Portland this fall, we will now start major paving and safety projects in 2017. We are delivering what voters expected when they passed Measure 26-173: projects that will make their roads better and their city safer."

Novick, was defeated by small business owner Chloe Eudaly at the November general election and is leaving the council at the end of the year. Before that, he sponsored the tax proposal as his final version of the contentious street fee debate that many feel contributed to his loss. It projected to raise \$64 million over four years. In addition, last May, at Novick's urging, the City

Council also unanimously passed a Heavy Vehicle Use Tax that will raise an estimated additional \$10 million over four years.

The money is divided between road maintenance project and street safety improvements. The funds first began to be spent on 20 projects last year from a bond supported by the taxes. The spending comes at a time of increased traffic fatalities in Portland. They have risen in both 2015 and 2016, despite the council approving a Vision Zero policy of eliminating fatal and significant injury crashes by 2025. The safety project spending is especially expected to help the city achieve that goal.

Major future projects include: \$3 million to pave Foster Road from 82nd Avenue to 92nd Avenue and add curbs; \$2,24 million to pave Southwest Vermont from Oleson to Capitol Highway and add ADA curbs; \$3,15 million to pave Southeast 50th from Division to Hawthorne Blvd and ADA curbs; and \$2,100,000 for Small Freight Improvement Program projects to improve freight efficiency and safety.

Audit: Portland Building renovation requires strong management

*By Jim Redden
December 29, 2016*

The city auditor's office is warning that, without proper management, the scope of the planned \$195 million Portland Building renovation could be reduced if the project runs into schedule or budget problems.

The City Council has approved the reconstruction project for its largest office building by 2020, with a maximum budget of \$195 million. In a 52-page audit released Thursday, "Portland Building Reconstruction," the auditor's office wrote that the city could have few options if problems arise.

"While the city is years away from completing the reconstruction project, we conducted this audit now because of the project's high-profile nature, complexity, and cost," according to the audit. "Early audits like this can contribute to the accountability and oversight environment. Any recommendations for improvements are less costly now than if the city identified issues later."

The audit covers the planning phase of the multi-year project that is moving into the design phase. All previous reports released by the auditor's office have either covered early work or potential future work by city agencies, not projects that are underway.

Although the audit did not identify any significant potential future problems, it noted the project is complex, requiring employees to be moved to new office space elsewhere in the city during construction. The moving and additional rent costs are included in the \$195 million budget. The process approved by the council for the project is called the "progressive design-build" project delivery method, coupled with "integrated project delivery" principles. According to the audit, progressive design-build is an emerging construction method, and its application in commercial buildings is still new.

"The city will need to navigate the many complexities of the reconstruction project," according to the audit. "Politically, for example, the building is an architectural icon that receives international attention. There are many technical challenges, such as the building's location on a tight city block along a major transit corridor. Among the logistical challenges is the temporary relocation of city operations, which will require moves, leases and associated tenant improvements."

The auditor's office will follow the project and release additional audits as work progresses.

A 'meaningful and accurate explanation'

In a Dec. 23 letter of response, city Chief Administrative Officer Fred Miller said he was confident the project would be completed on time and within budget. Leases are in the process of being signed for new bureau office space for employees that must be moved during the expected three-year construction project.

"Project team members worked to identify the best approach for addressing this complex project and have been successful in meeting all deliverables so far," wrote Miller, who retires at the end of the year and will be replaced by Tom Rinehart, who was appointed by incoming Mayor Ted Wheeler. "This includes executing multimillion dollar contracts that allowed us to bring this reconstruction from a planning concept to a real project. I am comfortable leaving because I know the project is set up for success, and I look forward to visiting the finished, reconstructed building in 2020 knowing it will be a new model for construction projects in the city."

Miller also complained that much of the information provided by the project team was not included in the audit. "The team spent considerable time and effort responding to inquiries, compiling information, explaining nuances and providing corrections and clarifications. I would have liked to see more of that reflected in the audit, to provide the public a more meaningful and accurate explanation of the policies and overall assessment of the project," Miller wrote.

The audit also notes that a Community Opportunities and Enhancements program approved with the project may not actually result in disadvantaged people actually working on the building project. Miller said that is true, but that the 1 percent of construction costs dedicated to the program is intended to be spent to provide other employment opportunities.

"The money will be allocated, along with funds from the Portland Water Bureau's Washington Park Reservoirs project and Portland Bureau of Transportation's Smart Park garage reconstruction. We are in regular conversations with our regional partners about a regional solution," Miller wrote.

Post-Modern headache?

Designed by Michael Graves and built in 1981, the Portland Building has long been polarizing and plagued with problems. The garish building that includes a perch for the Portlandia sculpture was named in 2011 to the National Register of Historic Places. The building is considered the first major example of Post-Modern Classicism to be fully realized. But it has a history of water leaks, is considered a dreary place to work by many of the employees, does not meet current seismic construction standards, and needs to have its heating, cooling and mechanical systems updated.

After years of study and discussions, the council finally approved renovation of the building after rejecting a more limited \$95 million repair proposal and deciding that constructing a new building — on the same site or elsewhere in the city — would cost more.

Concerned because project costs were already climbing about the original \$175 million estimate, the council voted to limit the maximum cost to \$195 million when the project was approved in October 2015, while still expecting the work to be completed by 2020.

Sources: Hales' parting policies need more work

By Jim Redden

December 29, 2016

Charlie Hales can rightly claim that many significant new or updated city policies passed while he was mayor. But a lot of them have no immediate effect — and need future City Council actions to carry them out.

Those include the state-required Comprehensive Plan update, which is intended to guide city growth over the next 20 years. Many details about how the city will accommodate an estimated 123,000 new households by 2035 are still being discussed in various implementation plans.

The same is true of the Residential Infill Project recommendations to create more so-called "missing middle" housing "approved" by the council shortly before the end of the year. They still need to be drafted as City Code changes and considered by the Planning and Sustainability Commission before coming back to a council with a new mayor and commissioner next year.

And the Vision Zero Action Plan intended to eliminate fatal and serious-injury traffic crashes by 2025? The Portland Bureau of Transportation, the Portland Police Bureau and Portland Fire & Rescue all need yet-to-be-estimated amounts of new funds from future councils to carry it out.

Merkley tapped to take on Trump

Democratic Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley is playing a leading role in his party's strategy to launch a political comeback by exposing President-elect Donald Trump as a fraud.

According to a Dec. 22 article on the well-read Politico website, the strategy is to slow down the Senate confirmation process and depict Trump's Cabinet and other nominees as out of touch with the working-class voters he promised to help.

"His campaign, based on his nominations, was a charade. [H]e sold the American public on a story that is a false story. It is a scam," Politico quoted Merkley as saying. "He said: 'I'm for working people and for taking on Wall Street, I'm for draining the swamp.' And his nominees say the exact opposite."

Senate Republicans predict the strategy will flop, however. They intend to rush the nominees through the process as fast as possible.

Willamette Week

Ted Wheeler on Portland Police Pepper-Spraying Protesters: "It Didn't Look Good."

Wheeler says he'll make reforms to the Police Bureau, even though the union contract is inked.

*By Rachel Monahan
December 29, 2016*

Last week, WW gave Portland's mayor-elect, Ted Wheeler, a pop quiz on a range of policy issues facing the city. But we also had time for some longer discussions.

Among the topics discussed: police reform.

Wheeler told WW the Portland Police Bureau is the city department most in need of reform (in a tie with the Office of Neighborhood Involvement), and that he, like Hales, will continue to oversee the bureau himself instead of assigning it to another commissioner.

He also discussed the pepper-spraying of demonstrators protesting the new police union contract in October, and whether cops were wrong.

Wheeler's oversight of how police interact with protesters is likely to be an early test for the new mayor.

Activists are planning large downtown rallies Jan. 20 against the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump. The marches will almost certainly revive efforts to shut down interstate highways, and police want to avoid a repeat of the vandalism that marred six nights of anti-Trump protests in November.

Here's what Wheeler had to say.

WW: Tell us why you're keeping the Police Bureau under your portfolio.

Wheeler: Yes, I've been very clear from the beginning of the campaign that I'm going to hang on to the Police Bureau. And I'm frankly not sure anyone else wants it. Nobody has asked for it. It's super important and obviously rebuilding that trust with the community is something that I'll be held accountable for whether I assign it to someone else or not. So I'm going to hang onto it.

Do you see a mechanism for instituting greater accountability, even though the contract was signed?

So the contract was signed. Prior to the signing of the contract there were basically ten broad categories of reforms that I would like to see. They are based on feedback that I've received from the community. They are based on feedback I've received from activists, based on my own observations, [and] based on national best practices around police accountability. And as you know there's been a lot of national discussions about police accountability, building trust. The contract fulfilled one of those ten, so we've got some work to do. Some of the accountability mechanisms have to be negotiated and bargained for. Example: As mayor, as police commissioner, I would like to have the final say on the HR issues. That currently is not something I cannot exercise.

So are you going to be reopening the contract?

I think we have work to do first. The city council approved the contract. It gave the police chief and the police union the tools that they said they needed to improve recruitment and retention. And now I'm going to hold them accountable for it.

I'm going to do a national police search, I've already been very public about this. I've spoken to the police chief [Mike Marshman] about it, and he agrees that it's the right strategy. The public is aware we are going to commence with a national police search. It will be a public process and I understand some people may not choose to participate in the process, and I'm okay with that.

Did police officers make a mistake by pepper-spraying demonstrators on the steps of City Hall?

You know, that's the kind of question I don't know the answer to, and I'll tell you why. I don't know what happened prior to that, and I don't know the context.

I saw the video. The video didn't look good. It's not the kind of video that when you put it out in the community it engenders warm and fuzzy feelings about our police bureau or their ability to mediate or deescalate a situation. But as many people cautioned me, that may have been the eighth chapter, and I missed the first seven chapters. I wasn't in City Hall. I didn't see what went on in City Hall. I don't know what went on in City Hall. I've heard conflicting stories, so I don't think it's really appropriate for me to sit here now having viewed a YouTube video and say that I know what the right answer was.

You know, I will say it didn't look good, and if I had been the mayor, I'm not, I would have tried to explain to the community what the broader context of that was. Nobody stepped forward. I've heard internally that there was more to that than what the public sees in the YouTube video. But I've heard no clear description of what that is. I've heard nothing from the mayor or City Hall. What was going on there?

And I think this is part of the dynamic we have in the city of Portland. Nobody knows. The public isn't included in these conversations. What's going on? And if we screw up on something, be honest about it.

I believe people are ready now for an adult conversation. They want more information. Five years ago if you were an elected official and you screwed up on something, that was the end, right? People were done with you.

I think people have now heard the narrative about government not working long enough that they're interested in a different narrative.

Now the question is, if you screw up on something, why did you screw up? What did you learn? What would you do differently? How has this shaped or reframed the conversation, or reshaped and reframed the policies that you were going to enact?

When something happens, and it looks to be a certain thing, and then nobody steps forward to give us, as members of the public, information, I think it just leaves us with our worst fears realized. We don't know what happened. It looked bad, and without an alternative narrative and alternative description, that's what people walk away with—one more example of what appears to be an overly aggressive stance on the part of the police bureau. And I think that's too bad.

Former New Jersey State Senator and Candidate for Governor Will Join Mayor-Elect Ted Wheeler's Staff

By Rachel Monahan

December 28, 2016

A former New Jersey state senator will join mayor-elect Ted Wheeler's staff as a senior adviser.

Barbara Buono ran against Chris Christie for governor in 2013 and previously served as New Jersey's Senate majority leader.

She also served as a local police commissioner, according to the press release from Wheeler's staff announcing her hiring.

"The challenges we face as a city are significant. So are the opportunities," said Wheeler in a statement announcing his staff. "We've been able to assemble a talented team with the knowledge and experience we'll need to hit the ground running."

Wheeler announced the following appointments to his team (listed alphabetically):

Jennifer Arguinzoni, Director of Strategic Partnerships: Arguinzoni served at Wheeler's Finance Director during the campaign, and focused on project management for the transition as Transition Manager. Arguinzoni has more than a decade of state and federal legislative experience in Georgia and Washington DC.

Barbara Buono, Senior Advisor: Buono is an attorney who has two decades of public service as an elected leader at both the municipal and state levels. While serving in the State Senate of New Jersey, Barbara was Senate Majority Leader and Chairperson of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. As a local Councilwoman, Barbara was appointed police commissioner where she instituted the Borough of Metuchen's first Community Policing program and expanded recruitment efforts to better reflect the diversity of the community.

Kyle Chisek, Director of Bureau Engagement: Chisek has worked in City government since 2006 when he began in former Mayor Tom Potter's office, after previously working in the private sector. Since that time, Chisek has worked both in capital project management in the Policy, Planning, and Projects group as well as Program Development in the Development, Permitting, and Transit group. Chisek was also the project manager for the City of Portland's Smart City Challenge grant application to the US Department of Transportation.

Michael Cox, Director of Communications and Constituent Services: will join the transition team as Communications Director. He was previously Wheeler's Campaign Manager and his Communications Director at Oregon State Treasury. He has more than a decade of experience in campaigns and government in Oregon and California.

Kristin Dennis, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Operations: Dennis most recently served as Wheeler's Chief of Staff in Oregon State Treasury, where she previously served as Policy Director. Earlier, she was an aide to Oregon State Senator Richard Devlin. She served on the Lake Oswego City Council from 2007 to 2010 and worked for a plastics recycling company in Portland. Dennis holds a law degree from the University of San Diego Law School.

Alma Flores, Director of Policy: Flores has been a public servant for over 15 years in community and economic development policy, program and project development, most recently as the city of Milwaukie's Community and Economic Development Director. Flores holds her undergraduate degree from UCLA and her Master's from MIT's Urban Studies program with a focus on housing, community, and economic development. Alma is married and has two kids with her high-school sweetheart.

Nicole A. Grant, Senior Policy Advisor: Grant joins the Wheeler Administration as a Senior Policy Advisor after having served as the Senior Policy Analyst and Portland Police Bureau (PPB) Liaison for the Hales Administration. As Senior Policy Analyst, Nicole has primarily worked on public safety policy issues, particularly those falling under the DOJ settlement agreement. Nicole moved to Portland in May 2015 after practicing law in Baltimore, MD. Nicole is a Maryland native, and a graduate of Yale University and Columbia Law School.

Maurice Henderson, Chief of Staff and Director of Strategic Initiatives: Henderson most recently served as the Assistant Director of the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), was named Chief of Staff and Director of Strategic Initiatives. At PBOT, Henderson was recognized for his excellent leadership within the bureau and for his innovative and effective approach working with city leadership and community leaders on the Smart Cities effort. Before arriving in Portland in 2015, Henderson served in a variety of top roles in the administrations of three mayors of Washington, DC, and was a top press aide to then-Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, currently the Democratic nominee for Vice President.

Nathan Howard, Senior Policy Advisor: Prior to serving as Ted's Deputy Campaign manager for Mayor, Howard was the Interim Executive Director at The Bus Project, a nonprofit focused on youth empowerment. He's also served as the Oregon Senate Finance Director and was Chief of Staff to Senator Mark Hass. He is a native Oregonian, born and raised in East Portland, and attended the University of Oregon where he received his BA in City Planning, Public Policy, and Management.

Angel James, Special Assistant to the Mayor and Scheduler: James most recently served as the Transition Scheduler to Mayor-elect Wheeler. Previously, James served as Executive Assistant to the Assistant Director for the Portland Bureau of Transportation. James has more than a decade of experience providing support to high-level officials in Portland.

Berk Nelson, Senior Advisor: Nelson attended the University of California, Davis School of Law where he received his J.D. in 2005. Nelson received his undergraduate degree from the Colorado College where he received his B.A. in Sociology in 2000. He comes to us from Perkins Coie where he did contract work in the commercial litigation department and was previously with Molina Healthcare, Inc. where he served as in-house counsel.
Michelle Plambeck, Deputy Communications Director: Plambeck most recently served as an aide to Multnomah County Commissioner Judy Shiprack, where she advised the Commissioner on issues relating to early learning, food policy, public safety and land use. After studying History at the University of Oregon, Plambeck worked for non-profits and then as a legislative assistant for Oregon Speaker of the House Tina Kotek.

Andrea Valderrama, Senior Policy Advisor: Valderrama most recently served as Portland City Hall's first Policy and Outreach Advisor dedicated to East Portland and coalition engagement under Commissioner Novick, where she advised on transportation, housing, public safety, budget, worker friendly, and government affairs policy, and developed regional strategies on displacement mitigation in economic development and transportation projects. Valderrama is the first and only person of color serving on the David Douglas School Board, and was recently named one of Portland's Top 10 Social Change Makers by Prichard Communications. She earned her BA from the University of Oregon and is pursuing an Executive Masters of Public Administration at Portland State University's Hatfield School of Government.

Mustafa Washington, Constituent Services Manager: Washington has a Master's of Science in Management and Organizational Leadership from Warner Pacific College, and a Bachelor's in Business Administration from Warner Pacific College. Prior to joining Mayor Wheelers staff, he was a staff member for Mayor Hales as the Constituent Service Specialist and later promoted to Executive Assistant. Among his proudest accomplishments: Washington is the first person in his immediate family to complete a Master's degree program.

Wheeler also announced that he would retain staff leadership in the Office of Youth Violence Prevention with Antoinette Edwards, Director of the Office of Youth Violence Prevention and Tom Peavey, Policy Manager for the Office of Youth Violence Prevention."

The Portland Business Journal

The Charlie Hales exit interview: An outgoing mayor on what's ahead

*By Pete Danko
December 29, 2016*

On Jan. 1, Ted Wheeler will be sworn in and Charlie Hales will become the third consecutive Portland mayor — following Tom Potter and Sam Adams — to leave office after one term.

Retrospectives might paint a picture of a mayor who struggled to find a fixed course on tough issues, like homelessness, but in an interview earlier this month, Hales highlighted accomplishments he believes will have a lasting impact on the city.

Hales pointed to turning a budget deficit into a surplus, expanding youth programs and instituting reforms that have led to "a 50 percent reduction in the use of force in the Portland Police Bureau in the last five years." And he put growth management on the plus-side list.

We featured Hales' comments on his climate-change policies and the city's controversial tax on excessive CEO pay in recent stories on the Business Journal website. Here are highlights from the rest of our conversation, edited for space and clarity.

Affordability was cited as a big issue — along with traffic — in the city’s most recent survey of livability, which fell to a record low. What does that say about how growth has been managed? We are a lot less affordable. And there is more traffic. Those are consequences of being a successful, popular place. We need to work on those consequences, which, by the way, is one of the reasons this City Council has put half a billion dollars into affordable housing for the next 10 years, both by sending a \$248 million measure to the voters and putting more than \$250 million of city funds, both tax incremental urban renewable money and general fund, into affordable housing.

So you retain the belief that city government can effectively shape the future? I absolutely retain that. No doubt there’s a lot of stress right now. If you build a machine that can go 60 miles per hour, and you’re used to going 25, and all of a sudden you’re going 59 and things are rattling and bouncing and making a lot of noise, it’s scary. And that’s kind of where we are. We planned to grow like this. And we’re planning to continue because Portland is a great place where people want to live.

You talk about managing growth — how do you respond to the view that developers have had their way with the city? Oregon and Portland have a different approach to development than other states, particularly California. In California, cities do plans that aren’t really binding and then have massive arguments over each and every development project. What Oregon does, and therefore what Portland does, is says, plan your city the way you want it and then have the plan have the force of law. So a property owner, a developer, can walk up to the permit counter and if you’ve zoned for a 10-story building, they get to build a 10-story building. It is erroneous to look at that situation and say the developers are having their way with the city. No, the developers are executing their side of the deal that we made every time that we opened the planning books.

On homelessness, there’s a widespread perception that it’s out of control. Is that a misperception? In a word, yes. One, we have this consortium effort between the city, the county, the county housing authority and others, called A Home for Everyone, and it’s got a very detailed plan that we’re following that says we’re going to increase shelter beds, we’re going to increase our commitment to affordable housing, we’re going to put more funding into rapidly rehousing people who become homeless, and all those efforts are working. Homelessness is still very visible in our city. We’ll find out in January (when a count of the city’s homeless will take place) whether it’s more numerous. I’ll place my bet that it’s actually less numerous. But it’s much more visible.

Why is it more visible? Two reasons. There are a bunch of places where homeless people used to live that are now beautiful urban environments, like the Pearl District ... which used to have people sleeping under the Lovejoy Ramp. The Lovejoy ramp is gone. There’s a streetcar running on that street now and there are million dollar condos stacked 25 stories high on both sides of it. Secondly, the homeless people in our city, for reasons that I am still not clear on, have acquired tents. They don’t sleep in doorways wrapped up in a blanket, they sleep in a tent or under an improvised structure in some corner of right of way,

Any advice for the incoming mayor? My advice to Ted and to anyone who serves here is, one, you should do this because you love the city because it is not really a political career move. It is a very demanding office with huge satisfaction but you need to be all in. Secondly, get outside of the building. There’s a bubble in government, whether you’re in Congress or the Legislature here, get outside the building and find out what’s really going on. I’ve certainly done that and

that's been helpful. And three, understand that no good deed goes unpunished. There will always be criticism but it's better to do and be criticized than the alternative.

What's next for you? We're going to take a long sabbatical and sail our 40-year-old sailboat to Panama, the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. On January 4th we cross the U.S.-Mexico border heading south and except for a stop in Miami to buy gas and food, I won't be back in the U.S. for 18 months. I've spent a lot of weekends with grease under my fingernails working on this old boat and getting it be ready to go, and I have a wife who's willing to at least meet me at the other end of the long passages.