

June 27, 2023 - DSA Steering Committee

Present: Sarah McClain, Mark Anderlik, Robbie Liben, Sandy Burch, Evan Sevaly, Arthur Endsley, John Wolverton, Tony Davis, Max Cumming, Gwen Nicholson (guest candidate)

Recorded by: Arthur Endsley (*paraphrasing any candidates' responses*)

“One Rabbit Dilemma”

- Perceived trade-off between Recruitment and the Strike Ready Campaign
- Tabling at Strike Ready event
- Robbie: Sarah, are you sure we have Imagine Nation for the July 30 event?
 - Sarah: Yes; the band is expecting \$300 plus tips for the performance; Robbie and Tony both volunteered to donate \$100 so we have that covered when we include the \$100 we had set aside for the May Day event.
- Sandy: Fund-raising at the event; do we have ideas?
 - Mark: On this National call, quite a few chapters are having fund-raisers... Ours is for the DSA Solidarity Fund, not for the Teamsters; it can support any kind of labor organization. A good suggestion is buying some swag and raffling that off. Teamsters have a great t-shirt that reads “Stop the War on Workers.”
 - Robbie: Would we be selling tickets at the event or before-hand?
 - Sandy: I think it would be easier if we handled all the cash at the event itself.
 - Sarah: Who’s going to buy the swag? July 30 is coming up quick?
 - Mark: I can look into this...
 - Sarah: So we’re going to buy the swag ourselves and then pay ourselves back from the proceeds...
 - Sandy: We could also ask local businesses to donate swag... This is something we can ask the membership to take the lead, reaching out to local businesses.
 - Arthur: Let’s make sure this gets added to the draft Business Meeting agenda.

Western MT DSA questionnaire for candidate endorsement

- *Introductions*
- *Gwen Nicholson* (candidate)
 - Lifelong resident of Missoula, running for City Council in Ward 1
 - Member of YDSA while at the University of Montana
- Sandy: Why are you running?
 - Gwen: Desire to get more involved in things politically. My whole life I’ve been a leftist; someone trying to get involved and figure out where my place is in the progressive political sphere in Missoula. Got my degree at Montana in Journalism, started working for the Montana Budget and Policy Center which brought me to Helena. There, I got to see all the harm coming out of this system. As an indigenous person and a queer person I know how difficult Montana can be but I also have a deep connection to this community, a desire to put up a fight. I wanted to dedicate my life to stem the tide of fascism and these right-

wing power-grabs. In April, I announced my candidacy the same day that my friends and I went into that gallery [to protest the treatment of Zooney Zephyr]. That impulse to stand up and fight [is why I'm running] and I think that the best place for that is at the municipal level. I think there are opportunities to make an impact and to carve out space for the left. All of that is what's keeping me going as we start our campaign, start to knock on doors. I'm someone who has a very different perspective than other people running in this election. We need someone who will speak truth to power; someone who speaks on behalf of the working class.

- Arthur: How will you manage your relationships with other City Council members?
 - The left-wing voices that are already on City Council have been marginalized; it's easy to dismiss them as cranks. I've spoken to other City Council members who express sympathy and support for the issues that Daniel and Kristen bring up but they feel uncomfortable speaking up in public. I think having another voice in the room will help people cross that divide. Having connections in this City, to more marginalized groups in this City, I can help bring a different tone and bring different voices to this discussion. Working in Helena, working in the non-profit world and as a journalist, I think I can bring people together. I really like that Daniel speaks openly and brazenly. I have a different communication style; I like to make space for other people to speak up and be heard; to help getting "some W's on the board."
- Tony: Any particular issues, any drums you want to beat?
 - Gwen: The big one for me is renter's and tenant's rights. The housing crisis is the "hot button" issue in Missoula. I work a lot with the Missoula Tenants Union which is a great group of people. They've got a lot of really exciting ideas and they've reached out to other tenants unions across the country. They've got ideas about how to shift the balance of power away from landlords, from property management companies that have an out-sized voice in Missoula politics. I'm a renter, I'm a tenant, and it's not easy. It's not easy staying where they are, affording a place they already have. A big push from the union this summer is the right to council; getting that eviction rate down is a big deal. It affects your ability to hold onto a job, getting a new apartment, being able to visit your kids if you're separated. The majority of the cases these landlords bring wouldn't fly if both parties had representation in court. That's one way we can shift that balance of power. Other ways include setting up reimbursement funds for application fees and security deposits; "taking the hammer" to Airbnbs and vacation rentals. Ultimately we're fighting against the landlord-tenant agreement at the state level. The ultimately goal is to have a more organized and aware class of tenants that can more effectively advocate for their needs; and eventually creating community-owned housing. The centerpiece of my campaign is that it should not be this painful to have housing; to have a roof over your head.
- John: The City is in the middle of "code modernization;" of the development code and the zoning code. But it includes updating our Growth Policy. What is your vision for where that should end up?

- Gwen: This is the most exciting thing for me about being in this race. Things to take a look at would be shifting away from zones and regulations that encourage less-dense housing... Creating more avenues for permanently affordable housing. Creating fewer impediments to creating new developments. For instance, Daniel Carlino has been trying to eliminate the parking [minimum] regulations for a long time now. Also, there are these opportunities to create zoning policy that fosters community; that reduce car dependency; that promote access to city services. We can create neighborhood-focused zoning. I really want to open it up and create awareness about these things in the community and have their voices heard. I want it to be a community referendum. I'm not sure how aware the general public in Missoula is.
- Robbie: Do you see any role for movement-building, either by creating bonds with other City Councils in the state or through the Tenants Union?
 - Gwen: Absolutely. I do identify as a socialist and as such I believe in a ground-up view of politics. I don't want to be a person that throws their hands up and says, "The state say we can't do it. That's it." I attended a Missoula Organization of Realtors meeting recently, not because I'm necessarily seeking their endorsement, but to get a sense of where their heads are at; to be friendly with them before getting into office and potentially being antagonistic with them. But it was eye-opening, someone said, "I live in a universe of limitations." That struck me as indicative of why this situation is so difficult. I would be very interested in reaching out to other City Councils and driving this movement. I think that this is the way to be most effective in this [City Council] position; being a bulwark for this movement. The important thing is to try, to start that conversation, and to push that Overton window left-wards.
- Mark: The best City Councils have a mix of personalities and expertise. How would you characterize your "working with others" in this super-heated forum? Are you a "fire-breather? Sometime Daniel plays that role. Are you someone that works in the background and tries to find compromises?
 - Gwen: My strength as a communicator is in my flexibility. I have a ton of respect for Daniel as someone who is a bomb-thrower in the classic sense. From my point of view, it's important to pick battles; to figure out which hills are the important ones to die on and which aren't. I'm not someone who compromises values for short-term political gain. But when you're someone in the room having these conversations, if you overlap with someone on one of these issues, but not on others, I think it's important to find areas of common ground. If you can find ways to craft a proposal or an idea in a way that makes someone feel like their ideas are being represented, you'll go pretty far. There are areas where there is no compromise and you can't back down.
- Sarah: Are you a member of the DSA?
 - Gwen: Yes, I'm a paper member. I haven't been an active member in awhile. Because of COVID and... I'm openly trans, so I took some personal time off to take care of myself and my transition. But there was a time when I was actively involved, doing the readings for it. I remember reading "Exiting the Vampire Castle," read a lot of Gramsci...

- John: What do you think about the possibility of a Local Government Study Commission?
 - Gwen: I think there's a lot of opportunity to get some meaningful reform on the board; to make government more accountable to citizens. As long as there are left-wing voices in the room, from the working class, from the unhoused community in the room, I would be very supportive. The thing I hear from people on all sides of the ideological spectrum is the frustration with how much is dictated to the City government from the state without any feedback from the people who live in the City.
- Sarah: Which mayoral candidate would you prefer to work with?
 - Gwen: To be frank, I don't think there's a whole lot of daylight between the three candidates that have a chance. I've been impressed by the endorsements Andrea has received. I think that Mike Nugent would be better to work with as a councilor rather than as a mayor. I don't want to say anything too judgmental about Jordan Hess; I think he's representative of "politics as usual." They're all liberals at the end of the day, but I think I would prefer Andrea.
- Robbie: Are you running for an open seat or...?
 - Gwen: Heidi West is not running for re-election and has endorsed Eric Melson (sp?). He seems like a nice guy; politically speaking, there's not a lot of "there" there. His main issue seems to be creating a trail on Marshall Mountain, which is not what I would include the top twenty issues facing Missoula. When I spoke to him, his take on things was that: 1) He thinks the City Council is doing a great job already; 2) He doesn't have a set agenda because he wants to "learn on the job." I feel like you should have an idea of what you want to accomplish before you get into office so you can be an effective voice for the people you want to represent.
- Mark: Do you want to be endorsed by the Western MT DSA?
 - Gwen: Yes, I would be very proud to be endorsed by the Western MT DSA.
- Sandy: Well, I for one am glad that you have an agenda.
- Sarah: How can one get involved in your campaign?
 - Gwen: You can visit gwenformissoula.com; we're going to be canvassing and fund-raising over the next few days.

Electoral endorsement process

- Sandy: Proper protocol is to send the endorsement out to all candidates...
 - Mark: We should send this questionnaire to all the City Council candidates. I put some date... July 3rd maybe?
- Sandy: Since we just interviewed Gwen we should give her opponent at least a week to answer the questionnaire. We can schedule the interview once we get the questions back. At our next Business Meeting we can vote just on endorsement of Ward 1 candidates.
 - Mark: I think we should modify it and send it out to the mayoral candidates as well.

- John: We should be careful about how much time we spend on this. A lot of these Council races may be foregone conclusions.
- Arthur: Agree and, in particular, why do we need to have a questionnaire and an interview with the candidate? It seems like we should be satisfied with the results of the questionnaire because it takes a lot of time to interview every candidate in every ward.
- Sandy: Historically, the intent has been to see if there's a difference between how the candidate responds on paper and how they respond in person. But, not every candidate does respond to the questionnaire, so we don't have to conduct interviews with those that don't respond. I think what we're getting at is some kind of working group... But, we can revisit this topic at our next Steering Committee meeting.
- Mark: I agree with Sandy, you get to know someone through interviews... It's also a chance for them to learn about us. The importance of also doing the paper questionnaire is when a candidate reneges on a promise. Both Kristen and Daniel wanted to be here but they both had something come up. But they're also very interested in being part of process.
- Arthur: I think we do need to make a decision as to who is sending the questionnaire to Eric Melson and who is sending the questionnaire to other candidates.
- Robbie: I could send the questionnaire to Eric Melson.
- Arthur: I could help send the questionnaire to the remaining candidates but I need some help figuring out who to contact.
 - John: I dropped a spreadsheet in the chat that should help with that.

Kristen Jordan

- John: No one else seemed interested in joining me to meet up with her so that never happened... I did talk to informally at City Chats but there was nothing there that we hadn't discussed before. Homelessness is the "big deal" right now; Councilors are all getting hit by that right now. I could tell she was frustrated by that. She said that there is this perception that Missoula is a magnet for people who are marginalized... I don't know if she is privy to any study that validates this but I think she must be if she would say that other municipalities are sending people here. I think there is potential to reach out to other City Councils or to the state: We'll take on your problems but we need resources. Everybody in Missoula has an opinion about how to solve problems but no one wants the solution in their backyards. The Ward 2 representatives are getting a lot of calls about homelessness.

Business Meeting

- Sandy: I will facilitate... Tony will do respectful discussion agreement... Arthur will take notes... Robbie will be on top of Zoom. Anybody want to do progressive stack?
 - Sarah: I'll do stack...
- Sandy: I'll need to add something about the Ward 1 election... And probably about the Convention.
- Mark: I think we need to set the date so people can talk about the Convention resolutions.

- Sandy: Forgot to do this at the top of the meeting... Do we have any agenda items to add?
 - Arthur: Hate to bring it up, but we should do the land acknowledgement vote.
 - Sandy: Yes, it's on there, and Tony, would you send me the ballot?
- John: On the agenda for the Business Meeting... I had some communication with Dave Jones, he can speak to the Ecosocialist Working Group. Arthur can speak to Common Good Missoula, and add a bullet point for housing and that can be mine. Looking on the agenda for this meeting, I'm curious about the part that says Common Good Missoula.

Convention

- Sandy: Mark, can we set a time to discuss the resolutions? Something like the third Wednesday, as we've done with previous education working group sessions?
 - Mark: July 19 seems a good time.
 - Sandy: And we need to discuss fund-raising for the convention?
- Sandy: Anything else?
 - Arthur: I just want to take one minute, I set a timer, to talk about Common Good Missoula—the mayor is making a public announcement of support for the Gardenwalk Neighborways tomorrow, Wednesday, at 5:00p at the Headwaters Center (119 W. Main St.). It would be great if DSA people could be there to add their support.
- Mark: Just realized that July 19 is the Wednesday before Socialize with the Socialists, so let's do it next week.
 - Sandy: Got it, Wednesday, July 26, not July 19.
- *Motion to adjourn* (Robbie, Arthur), *approved*