

Jonathan Maus ([00:03](#)):

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([00:52](#)):

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([01:21](#)):

In this episode, I'll share an interview that I just wrapped up with. Portland City Council candidate, Jesse Cornett. Jesse is running for Council District Three. That is southeast Portland, roughly from the Willamette River, I84 in the north, about 82nd Avenue to the east, and then down to the southern border. If Jesse's name sounds familiar, that's because he's run for office in Oregon two other times, once in 2008 for a seat on the state senate, which he narrowly lost, and then once in 2010 when he ran for Portland City Council. Since then, he's done several interesting things, a lot of them in the political world, but let's get right into the conversation so you can hear from Jesse himself, just what kind of person he is, what he believes in, and why he thinks he should be one of your next Portland City Council members. Here's our conversation.

([02:13](#)):

Jesse Cornett, thanks for coming into the shed.

Jesse Cornett ([02:15](#)):

Excited to be here.

Jonathan Maus ([02:16](#)):

Especially on a day like this with this just really wild weather we're having. Do you have any deep freeze experiences that you want to share as we get started here?

Jesse Cornett ([02:25](#)):

Deep freeze experiences, no. I've been really fortunate. I've been spared. We haven't lost power. We've put people up. We've let another friend whose pipes froze use our shower a couple of times, but for me, the worst has been that I've missed being able to go to yoga because it's been closed, so I'm doing really good in this.

Jonathan Maus ([02:42](#)):

Good. Well, it's pretty rare that I get to interview someone for local elected office twice over the span of 14 years because I sat down with Jesse back in 2010-

Jesse Cornett ([02:52](#)):

2010.

Jonathan Maus ([02:53](#)):

When he was running for council. By way of introducing yourself a little bit, how has Jesse Cornett changed since 2010? Tell me what you've been up to in the last 14 years.

Jesse Cornett ([03:01](#)):

Well, I've grown up, for better or worse. 2010 I ran... I ran for the state senate in 2006, came very close to winning. Booed by that, in 2010, needing a job, I decided to run for city council against an entrenched incumbent Dan Saltzman, who's actually endorsed me for this race, which is really neat. I think what's different then and now, back then I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what I was supposed to say that would get me votes. In 2024, I know what I think and that's what I keep saying over and over again and people seem to like it, which is really neat. Fortunately, I don't think that I will craft the way that I say anything in order to get a vote, and maybe that makes me a crappy politician, but we'll see.

Jonathan Maus ([03:45](#)):

Can you help us understand what's some of the work that you've done since 2010.

Jesse Cornett ([03:49](#)):

I've done an awful lot of work since 2010. A majority of those years have been working full-time in the political realm. I worked for both Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns, including being the personal assistant during the second campaign. I did a variety of other projects including getting healthcare funding for 55,000 Oregonians who would otherwise be eligible, but for their immigration status. These are migrant farm workers and such. I lost badly when I ran in 2010, I've joked, and I also got more votes than I deserved, but the reality is that as this city has changed and as I've matured, I never thought that I would run for office again and here's why I'm running. One of the things I got to do with Senator Sanders, even prior to having that particular role was go to Homestead Child Detention Center with him and watch where, as a nation, we're actually caging kids.

([04:42](#)):

That's we the people, that's us that's doing that, and even though that's not something that's ever going to happen on the municipal level, for me, seeing that we're electing people who are allowing that, that's not okay. Fast-forward, I think the other reason that I'm truly running is I walk around a lot and actually one of the things that I like to do as well is just turn my phone off when I'm going for those walks or sometimes for a whole day or a weekend, and when you walk around the city and you're not staring at a screen, I don't know how you don't cry in seeing what's happening with our city. Folks are hurting in our city. That I started looking around and even though early on I would say specific names, I look around at folks in leadership, both at the federal level and here within our city, and I really realized that, wow, I would have to have a really poor opinion of myself if I didn't think I could do a better job than those guys.

Jonathan Maus ([05:35](#)):

So that's your animating principle, if you will, for wanting to get back into a role like this is the folks that you're seeing on the street in Portland right now, that acute crisis is the thing that's really driving you and the sense that you think that current leadership hasn't really done the right things?

Jesse Cornett ([05:51](#)):

Correct. I've also spent the last three years deeply engaged with a recovery nonprofit, Oregon Recovers, and serve on their board. Between homelessness and addiction, I think that we have to do better as a community and helping those in need. I am aware of my white privilege, my ability to stand up and speak, and I got to see something in Bernie Sanders that you had to pay really close attention to that there was never a story about because nobody paid that close attention. But we could be in a room packed with 500 people, all of whom having their hands outstretched, just wanting to get their handshake, and he would see somebody like Jonathan and Jesse standing there, super excited. One of us is holding a phone. We're going to get our selfie, and he would brush right past us because he saw somebody 30 feet away in a wheelchair that couldn't get to him. That's who he wanted to represent. That's who I want to represent. Certainly I will represent everyone and proudly, but I want to use my privilege as a voice for those in our community that need it the most.

Jonathan Maus ([06:50](#)):

Do you see some intersections between these, what you call on your website, these triple crises of homelessness, addiction, and mental health? Do you see some intersection between those issues and how people get around in transportation and the state of our streets?

Jesse Cornett ([07:05](#)):

Yes, absolutely. These are affecting everyone. My partner walks around Southeast Port. I walk around Southeast Port. We walk the dog. She walks the dog multiple times a day. I try to go with her multiple times a week, sometimes twice in a day if I'm really lucky, and pathways are blocked. It's not just streets, it's bike lanes or not just sidewalks, it's bike lanes. And I am really very compassionate to the person that is sleeping in that tent and needs something better in life. But I also think the person that needs to get safely past that, especially, let's go back to the person in a wheelchair that I mentioned, folks are crossing streets and putting in a lot of effort to be able to get safe passageway, so it impacts society in a meaningful way, beyond those suffering in the tent.

Jonathan Maus ([07:49](#)):

I mean to that issue in particular, I'm sure you're aware there was a lawsuit from folks, from people who are disabled saying they couldn't pass on sidewalks, and I've heard from numerous people in the last several years about not feeling safe on paths and stuff like that when there's people living with tents right there on the path, sometimes blocking it, whatever. As an elected official that has the concerns that you do and wants to elevate and speak up for people that are vulnerable, how would you lead around that issue? How do you balance that need for people to move themselves through the city on safe transportation corridors and feel safe doing it with the fact that people are sleeping in those places? How do you balance that? What do you think is a good tone or something to tell the public that's coming to you and saying, "Do something about this?"

Jesse Cornett ([08:33](#)):

I think for the public in doing something about this, it's starting with the reality that there are two sides that are struggling as a result of that issue. I think societally, something that I've talked about on my, I

think it's on my website as well, the importance of building more affordable housing. If you look at the cause of homeless in America, it's lack of affordable housing. If addiction were a cause of homelessness, West Virginia would not exist. It would be just one big homeless camp. If it were poverty, same thing with Detroit. Those aren't the causes. The cause is lack of affordable housing.

(09:09):

So as a society, one thing that I think that people may struggle with my candidacy and as a prospective elected official, and I don't want to fully pivot over to policing, which is something I've talked an awful lot about, but community policing is a good example, we need a twenty-year plan to get back to where we should be with policing. In terms of housing and eliminating the problem, we have to do something about the person that's your curb as a pillow tonight, but we also need a strategy, so in 20 years from now, there's not new people falling into that, and that's going to take pretty broad community support and it's going to require patients that policymakers no longer deserve but need.

Jonathan Maus (09:49):

Okay. You touched on a few things there I want to get into, but let's zero back in on district three. The district that you're in, inner Southeast. Can you explain to folks what the boundaries are? I could try, but I'd fumble and I assume you have a better answer, so orient us around district three if you could.

Jesse Cornett (10:04):

Sure. Well, Willamette River and 84 goes down, excludes Sellwood, and Sellwood and Moreland, goes all the way out to 82 along the Clackamas County-Portland border there, takes 82 up to Powell, then it jogs out to 205, goes all the way up to Maywood Park. Then it takes in some neighborhoods north of 84 until you get back down to 47th, then the line is 84 back down to the river.

Jonathan Maus (10:28):

All right, that's a good description of the district.

Jesse Cornett (10:32):

It's not my first time giving [inaudible 00:10:35]. Had you asked me that two months ago, I would not have been able to give it as cogent as that.

Jonathan Maus (10:39):

I just now figured out what they basically are like on a map, the one, two, three, four, so I'm feeling pretty good just about that. But that district is, last time I talked to you in 2010, that had some of the highest rates of bicycle use anywhere in the country, the district that you're running for. I'm just curious, do you think about transportation in your district or what are some of the things that come up for you? What do you think are some of the key streets or the key pieces of infrastructure that come to mind for you?

Jesse Cornett (11:04):

I mean I, for a long time lived out in Lents, was the chair of the Lents Neighborhood Association and would teach downtown, and so I would get up and cruise down Foster and over and all the way down Clinton, which has made tremendous improvement since, I don't know when last I did that, probably 2015. But just understanding the importance of some of those bike routes that have continued to be

improved. You look at 39th Avenue, traffic goes way too fast out there. I know you well covered the death of Jeannie Diaz, I believe was the name, unfortunately.

(11:35):

I took the transportation class at Portland, the citizen transportation class at Portland State offered back in the day. One of the days we talked about 39th and Hawthorne, the Fred Meyer there, 36 inches I think the sidewalk is there. It's the most narrow sidewalk in the city and there's absolutely no protection from cars. It can go very fast. So I think we've made some great strides in terms of infrastructure. I mean from Ankeny on, there's a lot of experiences I've had there and it's nice to say we've continued to improve and I think continual.

Jonathan Maus (12:08):

Do you think that it's reasonable or wise to consider reducing the amount of space to drive a car in your district? If we're talking about, let's say we're trying to make protection for sidewalks. I personally think protected sidewalks should be something people talk about more. We usually talk about protected bike lanes, but as we saw with the death of Jeannie Diaz, if it was a protected sidewalk, she might still be alive.

(12:31):

I'm just curious where you would come down on a decision where the question was about reducing space for driving, maybe an entire lane for driving or putting in some kind of bike lane or even a protection for a sidewalk, because often it does come down to that, especially on a street like Cesar Chavez where the city of Portland is very, very careful to not reduce the car volume on there because it's really one of the only major north-south arteries through that area. So say if you're on council and you're a part of some transportation caucus or that's an issue that comes up, are you willing to entertain the idea of reducing space for driving so that we can put other things in its place?

Jesse Cornett (13:10):

Yes. I'm not going to just stop there. I was being a little cheeky, but no, absolutely. I think to the extent that we find opportunities to reduce lanes, we absolutely should, and we also need to focus on speed limits more and more in Portland. One thing that I've said, I've never said this, I don't know if I've said this to anyone other than my partner, so perhaps bold mentioning it here for the first time. 31st Avenue is shut down right now north of Hawthorne for a block for construction, and I've long had this perspective, seeing this all around inner southeast Portland where we're building these condos, we're shutting down entire blocks for months, years, in some cases. It's been well over a year this block has been closed. I think we've proven as a city, we don't need that block. Let's start shutting down some of those blocks and making community spaces out of them.

Jonathan Maus (13:58):

I like that idea. What people would say if you were to do that would be, well then all that traffic's going to come over to my street or some other street. How can you say that if it's just going to create all this diversion, how would you respond to people that say that?

Jesse Cornett (14:11):

I think if that were a primary concern of theirs, you would've imagined they would've been saying something over the past year and a half while this street was shut. So somebody could make a profit selling condos. That's okay, but keeping it shut for community use is not okay. No, I think it is.

Jonathan Maus ([14:30](#)):

Okay. And I forgot to ask you this at the top, but I've asked almost everybody that I've interviewed for the last, I don't know, how long, how do you personally define your transportation relationship to mobility? How do you get around? Have you always been a bus rider, a car driver, everything? Tell me something about that.

Jesse Cornett ([14:46](#)):

Multimodal, if that's even the right way to say it. I drive fairly regularly and so I have that experience. Secondary, I walk. I have a bike and I use it more for a recreation than transportation and it also has been transportation, but I enjoy going out and just hopping on it on Saturday morning and going out for some random 20 mile loop.

Jonathan Maus ([15:10](#)):

Cool. Cool. Where do you like to ride?

Jesse Cornett ([15:13](#)):

Marine Drive really is the big one for me. I find myself getting stuck in a rut, going out Spring Water looping, crossing down those shitty streets, what is it, 181st down to Marine Drive and looping and coming back in.

Jonathan Maus ([15:26](#)):

We can talk about routes because maybe I can give you some tips on how to not have it be so bad.

Jesse Cornett ([15:31](#)):

I like loops and I'm a creature of habit.

Jonathan Maus ([15:34](#)):

I hear you. Okay, gosh. Like I said, there's so much I want to talk about because I'm a huge political junkie and I know you have a lot of political experience, but there's also some issues that are more, I think, germane to what people might be expecting. So you mentioned a little bit about community policing.

Jesse Cornett ([15:50](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan Maus ([15:50](#)):

So let's jump into policing a little bit. It's an issue that actually comes up a lot, obviously in transportation. Some ways obvious, some ways not so much. I think it's interesting for folks to know that you actually wanted to be a police officer at one point, went through some training, it didn't end up working out.

Jesse Cornett ([16:06](#)):

Well actually, I did go through the police academy in 1998. I spent three years as a reserve deputy sheriff for the county. The reserve programs, you've got the badge, the gun and the car, you're out there

enforcing laws. We got to initiate traffic stops and do a handful of things. I actually pulled somebody over that blew 0.24 that year or one of those years. So had an interesting experience doing that. As the other side of this, when we talk about policing, I always point out that in late 2005, Michael's friend was shot in the back by a Portland police officer that was on my back porch.

(16:39):

So I do bring, I think, a bit of depth on policing issues that matter in this race. And I'll just add, I've joked public policy by rhyme should be a crime, but it's not real serious because 20 is plenty and other things like that are certainly great. But the point behind the messaging is simply that what we do is we find these very quick things and we don't really get into the depth of them. So defund the police is the lead up where I want to ask the question of what are we doing with the folks with the badges and the guns? Maybe we should break off some of those other duties and then we need to get officers that are from this community, which I can talk about in great depth.

Jonathan Maus (17:21):

Yeah, so based on what you just said and what I've heard you say before, you're definitely a police reform person. You want to make the existing system work a lot better is how I understand your general thing, and I hear you as more of a reform person, but I wonder, we have a Portland Police Bureau where we have the top traffic officer hold a press conference to tell Portlanders that police were not going to stop them for traffic violations. And then he later admitted to me that he was basically trying to gin up support, political support to get more funding from City Hall. So I heard that as basically the police being willing to make the community less safe in order to play politics to get more funding. And I'm just curious how that lands for you. If you were on council, would you have put out a statement about that? Would you have addressed that in some way? Does that kind of behavior concern you?

Jesse Cornett (18:13):

Well, yes. It concerns me that the people that we're hiring to be the enforcers of law are able to be actively dishonest with no regard. And I think that's unsafe and it sends a message. I think that the lowering the emphasis on traffic infractions has had an impact. And I don't have the numbers. You have the numbers on transportation deaths and I would expect that we've seen an uptick. And there are many reasons and the lack of enforcement is certainly one of them. In political science, it's the Washington Monument strategy. I'm not sure if you referred to that. In the federal level, if you go out and you tell agencies, if Congress tells agencies, "Well, we're going to have a 10% budget cut this year", the first thing the park service has come back with is, "Well, we clearly can't afford to keep the Washington Monument open." Everyone's coming to Washington DC and they want to do these big flashy tourist attractions. It gets out, the Washington Monument might be closed, everyone goes to their members of Congress up in arms. Suddenly there's not a 10% budget cut. It's a tired strategy.

Jonathan Maus (19:14):

And so you mentioned community policing. I see on your Instagram you have selfies with Tom Potter who former... He was in charge of police, right?

Jesse Cornett (19:23):

Yeah. He ushered community policing end in Portland.

Jonathan Maus (19:25):

Right. I knew there was something there with former Mayor Potter. So I mentioned Tom Potter and community policing because I just wonder, it sounds like you're someone who'd be a fan of having more civilian, so non-badge holding, non-gun carrying some kind of civilian force may be doing more of the things that currently we have sworn officers doing. Is that something that you're in support of? Do you think that's a good way to go?

Jesse Cornett ([19:48](#)):

We need sworn officers to do a lot of dangerous things in our community and we have a whole lot of things that they have become responsible for. They are the first responders to Portland's mental health crisis. That wasn't their training. That wasn't why they got into the job and where we might be able to bolster traffic enforcement a little bit more and respond to safety calls. Since October, any time talking about anything community safety, one thing that I like to mention is I witnessed a father on one of those lime-like scooters, have one of his kids in tow and holding it with one hand securely and a beer propped on the handle on the other side, and he crashed. I called 911 and three and a half minutes later somebody had a traumatic head injury. It took three and a half minutes just to get the call taken. So we need to reprioritize where when somebody's in an emergency, they don't have to sit on the phone for, what is that, 200 seconds, which feels like 20 minutes.

Jonathan Maus ([20:52](#)):

So if we had officers focusing on different things, maybe like you mentioned minor traffic violations, and I agree with you. By the way, yes, deaths are way up, which is why I think this is such an important conversation. So maybe if we had officers being able to respond to serious stuff like that, which I agree. I just did a story that mentioned some of the crash reconstruction expertise on the police bureau and the lengths that they go to determine what happened, especially if it's a fatality, I think those are really important things that you could have trained police officers doing. But what about some of those minor issues like let's say even license plate tags or something. Would you support a new level of PBOT service officer that can go out and issue citations? Was that something that you would support

Jesse Cornett ([21:33](#)):

Likely. Talking about actually-

Jonathan Maus ([21:36](#)):

Well, it's something that's actually got a lot of research behind it. There's people say they're in support of this, current counselors have said that they're in support of this, but we just haven't seemed to really take any steps on it. Broken headlights or taillights, if someone was to see a car without the right license plate or tag and they were part of this civilian service corps or whatever, they could actually issue a citation that someone would have to pay a fine. In general, getting more civilians to do some of the traffic enforcement work that police do now, is that something that you feel is ready to move and something that you would prioritize or make some headway on?

Jesse Cornett ([22:11](#)):

Having a data informed approach, and the one thing that I would just want to do a good survey of for a yes vote on that is seeing if there have been any instances of violence or unsafety because somebody is initiating those stops without a firearm. Expired tags, lights being out, no. There's no reason you need a 40 caliber pistol in order to have a conversation about enforcing that law.

Jonathan Maus ([22:41](#)):

One of the big reasons why so many people are dying on Portland streets are related to crimes. Actually, if you look at the data this last year with the 75 deaths, there's about half of them, I think, there's a crime involved if not more. I haven't done the final number crunching on that. So there's definitely a nexus here between what we allow people to do on the street or whether or not people think there'll be enforcement or consequences for their actions and actually saving lives. But I wonder with you, some of the high crash quarters certainly run through District Three. And I wonder when you think about traffic safety, you think about your district and you think about those bigger streets such as where a lot of people are dying, can you think of anything that you would think as a solution or how you might approach making those streets safer?

Jesse Cornett ([23:23](#)):

Slowing down the traffic. The last time I worked for a legislator, it was Jackie Dingfelder and I helped her pass a bill that increased the fine for using your cell phone while driving. This is not going to be a surprise to you or literally anyone else that listens to your show, but the vast majority of time, especially when I was a bike commuter, when there would be a close call with a car, just look, their attention is on a gadget and I don't know what it's going to take to deprioritize texting and driving, and that doesn't just impact my district, but everywhere.

([23:57](#)):

But on streets such as Powell, it's getting the speed slower and it's making safety improvements where you know you need them and where you discover you need them. I drive past 26th and Powell several times a week. The death there, was that last year or the year before, was a cook at one of my favorite restaurants, not somebody that I know, but obviously very sad and impact people in my world. So I think that's what we need to do. And then also we just don't need state ownership and city limits of any streets. We need people that are here and responsive to people here, not Salem. And I've never seen a move to shift Powell from the state to city. It is still state ownership, isn't it?

Jonathan Maus ([24:44](#)):

Yeah, there's been some talk about that.

Jesse Cornett ([24:47](#)):

We're just going to wait until its 82nd and the maintenance is so bad, State's happy to get rid of it, but until then.

Jonathan Maus ([24:53](#)):

But then it's going to take a lot of money and a huge push from advocates to make happen instead of just being a matter of course, like a lot of these things do unfortunately. I mean, 82nd only happened because two people got killed within two weeks at the same intersection. I mean, even in your district, a lot of the stuff, actually citywide, a lot of the safety initiatives and projects happen because someone gets seriously hurt or killed and it leads to huge response from activists. And while I appreciate that we make progress on things, it's really sad that we wait until these things happen before electeds really engage on these street safety issues. And then year after year we're seeing record deaths and it's like, well of course, it's not an issue until it becomes political for some people on council. I don't understand that. I just wonder if you have any ideas on how to be a little more proactive in making streets safe instead of paying with blood of citizens before something happens?

Jesse Cornett ([25:47](#)):

Sure. Also, when I worked for Jackie Dingfelder, there's somebody who was killed in Montavilla and it was on Gleason and we added the enhanced crosswalk there. The particular name of the flashing beacon there is-

Jonathan Maus ([25:58](#)):

The rapid flashing beacons, whatever.

Jesse Cornett ([25:58](#)):

The rapid flashing beacons on the crosswalks, measuring where folks are going and putting them there. I think just simple measures like that. I actually, I'm going to admit, I'm like smiling. Do I say this site, but the last time that I got any kind of a moving violation, I was on my bike and I blew a stop sign and I was assigned to go to traffic school if I wanted to get out of the ticket, and so I did and I found it fascinating and I think I knew it at this point, but something I remember them saying in that is that anywhere there's the wheelchair ramp, it's a legal crosswalk and not a lot of people know that. So I think there's a lot of awareness on small things like that that need to happen. I haven't looked at any traffic safety courses for new drivers, but making sure information like that is included I think is important and I think simply adding paint because people just don't get it, can also be helpful.

Jonathan Maus ([26:57](#)):

My personal plug is I wish at the state level we had a scared straight video you had to watch at certain intervals to get your driver's renewal and stuff like that because scared straight around it all the time in my line of work, but it causes me to be extremely, extremely careful whenever I'm in a car. And I just wish that everybody had that same level of fear and understanding of consequences.

Jesse Cornett ([27:19](#)):

Well, the lack of consequences, and this is something I'm going to sound political, we had a President of the United States for four years that during that time and since has proven that turns out a lot of the rules we have in society are arbitrary. And I think as a society, people have learned lessons from that combined when you get a cop that gets out there and says, "This isn't going to be enforced", we're being plagued by that.

Jonathan Maus ([27:43](#)):

Yeah, I think that's arguably one of the big problems that's creating unsafe streets right now is the general, and I'm liking that it's being talked about more. I mean even Commissioner Mingus Maps, who's currently in charge of the Portland Bureau of Transportation, who I'm not exactly thrilled with Commissioner Maps as leadership of the transportation bureau, but he has identified traffic culture and driving culture as being problematic and being a big factor, which I agree with. Unfortunately, he hasn't come up with any way to shift that. People tend to throw their arms up and say, "Well, you can't change culture." I don't necessarily agree with that either. I think there are things we could do differently to shift that, but yeah, you're right when people don't think there's consequences. Also, you helped me segue into politics a little bit because unfortunately even traffic crashes, what we do on our streets has become, everything is politicized now.

([28:30](#)):

I think another contributor to the dysfunction we're facing as a city is because I think things have become even more split left and right. People should know when I say left and right, it's because it's a convenient way to communicate and I don't necessarily see the world as having two sides only, but for lack of a better way to express that there are differences of opinion and it's a convenient way to talk about it. So I'll try not to use it as much. But I think that split in Portland is becoming probably more acute entering this new election cycle. And so I'm just curious if you could share with us how you plan to lead with an electorate that is as divisive as ever or as split as ever. And even with some folks you might be running against or who might be on council or even running for mayor or who you may have strong disagreements with. How do you lead in this environment right now in Portland?

Jesse Cornett ([29:21](#)):

So Portland is almost shades of left by sticking with the same analogy. I am really fortunate and if you look at whose even given me money so far, there are some names on there that people would think, "Wow, Homer Williams gave \$350 to Bernie Sanders guy." And there are some other names that are maybe less brand names who aren't considered politically liberal, are supporting me despite my personal politics. And that's because I think I've started to prove that I have a particular brand of collaborative politics in terms of, to go back to something that I know this is back on housing and homelessness, but I thought that I was extremely liberal before I started this. And now I get out there and let's look at the issue of housing and homelessness. I think that we've created this scenario in Portland where if you dare to speak nice of somebody living in a tent and their rights and our responsibilities as a society, the homeowner who they're five feet away from is feeling ignored and as if their concerns aren't valued.

([30:30](#)):

Well for me, that person and their wife, that's probably their major lifetime investment, that house. Do I think that the care of the person in the tent matters? Yes. Do I think the concerns of the homeowner are valid? Absolutely. And it's not one or the other. And I think that helps me bridge a political divide being that I think that all sides are important. I said somewhere, and I don't really remember where it was, our folks Rene Gonzalez's positions that are far more conservative than mine and I don't know what we agree on or don't agree on. And I've not actually sat down with him and maybe someday we'll that conversation. At the end of the day, to the extent that I think that he is wrong about passing out tents, and I don't think that one individual should have that much power within city government, but there are people that agree with him in Portland and I think they deserve a voice as well. And I think having that perspective helps get at what you're asking about.

Jonathan Maus ([31:28](#)):

Do you think it's an accurate assessment to say that the Portland electorate has moved a little bit to the center since 2020 and all the turmoil that the city's been through? And if you do think that's a fair assessment, I wonder, is that changed your approach to being an elected official in this town?

Jesse Cornett ([31:47](#)):

Yes and no. I do think that the city has become a little jaded and concerned when you look at, and I can talk all day about how homelessness and addiction are different and where they're intertwined, but if you look at issues of homelessness and addiction, people in Portland are just tired and that is going to move them more on those issues to the center. And if I were here just to get elected to office and no other reason, maybe I would move to the center with them and just say what I think they wanted to hear.

[\(32:16\)](#):

But the reality is that I'm going to have the conversation about how that's maybe not the case. The clear and present one right now for me is Measure 110. I've been deeply involved in things 110. I've been to Portugal to understand their model and there's a rush to recriminalize right now. I could have that conversation and say, "Okay, cool, yeah, let's just lock them all up." That's not the right thing to do. And using a data-informed approach, there's actually no data that shows that the criminal justice system is a pipeline to help. That's not the intent of the criminal justice system. And recriminalizing is going to make people that don't need to feel better, feel better. So we have those tough conversations. We don't chase the political lens.

Jonathan Maus [\(32:59\)](#):

I feel like so much of the backlash to a lot of these initiatives is rooted in people's just distrust of government to some degree. Do you believe that? I've heard you say that democracy isn't just about the will of the people necessarily. We have an elected body that is supposed to set laws and decide on things. And I heard you say that and I was like, "Well, he hasn't run for office for a while." I mean people right now are just so angry and distrust, and I just wonder what kind of tone can you find to respond and satisfy people in 2024 that are just not having it, that are just sick and tired of it, whether it's decriminalization of drugs, if it's repealing Measure 110 or if it's people saying, "We want to vote on tolls", or if it's people saying, "Vision zero is a failure because people still die".

[\(33:43\)](#):

There's all these things where we're seeing people basically just saying they're fed up with government it seems like. And here you are wanting to step back into government saying that elected bodies, deliberative bodies are the ones that should be doing these things. How do you respond to people that are just so frustrated?

Jesse Cornett [\(33:57\)](#):

With four people plus a mayor, we don't have the ability for Portlanders to engage with their government in a meaningful way in this city with their elected officials. And we have a neighborhood system, which, if I'm on city council, I hope to bolster as much as I can. But we're going to do with four districts, three people for each district, we're going to create a scenario where anyone can talk to their elected officials that wants to talk to their elected officials. You don't just get that quick blur at the start of city council meetings. We're going to be out there. We're going to be actively engaging. My phone number's just about everywhere that I can imagine putting it. That number's not going to change when I'm elected. For me, there's 160-ish thousand people in the district. I can't talk to every one of them every day, every month, or even every year. But to the extent somebody wants to engage, I will.

[\(34:41\)](#):

I've caught some people off guard during this campaign. I'm not confrontational at all, but when somebody will say something online and I'll see it or send me a message, one guy said he was going to start writing letters to the editor 'cause I wouldn't engage, and I forget what the issue was. It was a housing and homelessness issue and I picked up the phone and I called him immediately, as soon as I saw that, and that's my approach, being accessible and you're not going to please everyone. I was in a situation on Tuesday night where I was with some folks without roofs over their head and saw some interactions and there was this reality that struck in that where like, oh, that particular person is not operating from... I guess, I shouldn't have even said the context.

[\(35:27\)](#):

I interacted with somebody where I very quickly realized, oh, that person doesn't have anything resembling rationality and they're not going to, and there's nothing that I can do in this situation to change that. Can you engage with that person? No, but that's a rare person. And what you also learn when you're talking to folks, when you do pick up the phone and you call that person, every person you talk to, you're for better or worse, you are focus grouping. You're not saying anything different, but you're finding a way to say it that helps people understand it. And I think whether it's online or in person or on the phone or email exchanges, my ability to make that connection. And I'll just say as a last thought here, I had somebody respond to an email that I sent out about Measure 110 with a response of, "You just don't get it." That was it. That was the summary of the email.

Jonathan Maus ([36:17](#)):

That they sent to you?

Jesse Cornett ([36:18](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan Maus ([36:18](#)):

Okay.

Jesse Cornett ([36:19](#)):

They sense have given me the most maximum contribution because again, I picked up the phone and said, "Wait a second. What is it you don't think I get?" Then we talked through it and it turns out the way that I worded something was imprecise in their opinion, but there was very little shade of difference on the issue.

Jonathan Maus ([36:37](#)):

So you're saying good communication, accessibility. Am I hearing you right in saying not shutting people out necessarily, but listening to them? I feel like there's a lot of that in Portland where people that don't agree with each other are even unwilling to talk or respect each other, and that just makes it even more difficult, I think, to solve these issues. Is that what I'm hearing from you is?

Jesse Cornett ([36:59](#)):

Everyone wants to be heard and sooner or later they get tired of talking.

Jonathan Maus ([37:02](#)):

There you go. Okay. Few more things here. There was a reason that I mentioned some of these older faces on your Instagram page. Randy Leonard was another one.

Jesse Cornett ([37:11](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan Maus ([37:12](#)):

Former commissioner. What it made me think of is that I think part of what's going on in Portland right now in politics and with the electorate is because people are frustrated and tired and jaded, like you

said, there's this feeling of the good old days and what's fascinating to me about that feeling and about that phrase is that everybody has a different version of what the good old days were to them or what they feel like were the good old days, whether you're left, right, center, whatever. So I'm just curious, you Jesse Cornett, do you think of it in those terms in terms of... I'm assuming that you want Portland to get better and to cure itself of its current ills. What are the good old days to you in Portland? What should we be striving for as a city to get back to or to move forward to? What is it?

Jesse Cornett ([37:55](#)):

I don't want to get back to anything. I had this awareness early on when I very first started talking about doing this in June, July, and I was chatting with folks and I'll admit, and there's nobody on my website that I'm referencing specifically here. There were, I think, a lot of folks that realized that I might be somebody to get us back to the good old days. And I very quickly realized, well, that's not what I'm here to do. What I am is I'm a bridge to the future that we want to see in this city. And I think that most of the folks that are supporting me are doing so because of a sensibility that I have and it feels weird talking about yourself like this.

([38:34](#)):

But I've also been very naturally collaborative for a long, long time and I think that's something that we're lacking in government today and that some of those old-school folks see in terms of if we are going to go back in government, we used to have really good collaboration where folks that disagreed would still sit down and hammer folks out without going through the Willamette Week. And I think we can get back to that. But in terms of who we are as a city, we've changed, we've grown. Diversity has shifted. I don't want to get us back to anything. I want to help folks that liked it in 1997 to love it in 2027.

Jonathan Maus ([39:08](#)):

Okay. I appreciate that. That would've been a great place for me to end because that was just the kind of answer that I would typically end on. But I'll kick myself if I don't ask you just at least one more bike specific question.

Jesse Cornett ([39:18](#)):

Okay.

Jonathan Maus ([39:18](#)):

You talked about the future. There's a nonprofit in a town called Bike Cloud PDX.

Jesse Cornett ([39:22](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan Maus ([39:22](#)):

Kind of the scrappy, they don't have a paid staffer yet, the scrappy bike activism group. They've made it their central mission to push Portland to 25% cycling mode share by 2030, which is just the thing that we've already adopted in our... City Council's adopted that. It's in our comprehensive plan, so we're only six years out now. I wonder if you think that's a reasonable goal to set for Portland? 25% bicycle mode share, so that means trips made by bike is 25%. Right now, well, we don't really know the census. The census has turned into such a fiasco. It's not really a great number, but let's say right now it's three to 4%.

Jesse Cornett ([39:58](#)):

I don't think it's my job to tell a group of volunteers what's reasonable, but I'll say, had the US government not set a goal to get a man on the moon within 10 years, we would've absolutely never sent somebody to the moon. You have to have goals that are lofty. If your ridership is at 8% and you get it to 10%, you can take a victory lap and probably raise some money on that. But was that going to happen already? Maybe. So not knowing where the numbers are now, it's hard to know where they would go, but just understanding how the safety of the city is improved by less cars on the road, who cares if it's unreasonable? Let's go for it. And I can't believe they don't have a staff. They seem to be everywhere.

Jonathan Maus ([40:41](#)):

Feel they'll be happy to hear that. Okay. Let's see. Have you ever heard of the Ladds 500?

Jesse Cornett ([40:48](#)):

I've heard of it. I'm not familiar with it though.

Jonathan Maus ([40:50](#)):

It is in your district. It's April 13th. It's 500 laps around Ladd Circle. You can do it any way you'd like, bring a whole team. Will you consider going to that this year, April 13th?

Jesse Cornett ([41:01](#)):

Damn it. I won't.

Jonathan Maus ([41:03](#)):

You have to send somebody.

Jesse Cornett ([41:04](#)):

I will send somebody. So I will, outside of everything else in the world that I do, I've gotten fairly into fitness over the last few years and I just signed up for a weekend long training out of town that weekend.

Jonathan Maus ([41:15](#)):

All right, well maybe next year.

Jesse Cornett ([41:17](#)):

And if I don't end up going for life circumstances, yeah, absolutely.

Jonathan Maus ([41:20](#)):

Cool. Is there anything else that you wanted to make sure folks heard?

Jesse Cornett ([41:24](#)):

No, this is a lot of fun and I've listened to some of your other podcast, I very much enjoyed listening to Angelito take questions at your happy hour and just, I'm looking forward to being at one of those. I'll actually put voice to that phone number that I mentioned. (971) 219-5429. It's also on my website, which is cornettforportland.com. I never remember to say that. So I'm glad I did for once, but if anyone

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wants to call me out on any of my answers today, call me, text me, or if there's anything value you think I should know, I hope folks will get in touch. And if anyone wants to talk further, I say let's go on a ride meeting.

Jonathan Maus ([42:02](#)):

Cool. Sounds good. And will you be able to come to Happy Hour next week?

Jesse Cornett ([42:06](#)):

I will.

Jonathan Maus ([42:06](#)):

Okay, everybody. January 24th, Bike Happy Hour, Ankeny Tap, come and meet Jesse, shake his hand, ask him your questions, bend his ear. Jesse Cornett, District Three City Council candidate. Thanks so much for coming by.

Jesse Cornett ([42:20](#)):

Thanks for having this and enjoying it. Thank you.

Jonathan Maus ([42:24](#)):

That was Portland City Council candidate for District Three, Jesse Cornett. Thanks again for listening. Really appreciate all of your support. If you are not a paid subscriber of BikePortland yet, please become one today at bikeportland.org/support and find out how you can be a part of what we're doing here and pay a little bit into keep it thriving and surviving. I also want to thank Brock Dittus of Sprocket Podcast fame for our wonderful new theme music. Thanks again for listening. Until next time, we'll see you in the streets.