

Students, business leaders grill candidates

If you go

■ **What:** Another mayoral debate.

■ **Who:** Sponsored by Associated Students of Washington State University Vancouver.

■ **When:** 3:30 to 5 p.m. today.

■ **Where:** WSUV administration building, 14204 N.E. Salmon Creek Ave., Room 110.



Royce Pollard
Wants Clark College parking garage built

Series of debates continues today in race for mayor

By **KATHIE DURBIN**
Columbian staff writer

Clark College students wanted answers on college parking, homelessness, Vancouver's complicated relationship with Portland and jobs.

East Vancouver business leaders wanted answers on the city's budget crunch, tolling the Co-

lumbia River Crossing, solving the city's east vs. west "disconnect" and jobs.

Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard and city Councilman Tim Leavitt faced off before two very different audiences Tuesday in their race for mayor.

More than 150 students crowded into the Fireside Lounge at Clark College for a chance to pepper the candidates with questions, including, right off the bat, one on the perennial shortage of parking for the college's 15,000 students. "What practical, prag-

matic solutions do you have?" one student asked.

Leavitt, a member of the C-Tran board, said the agency hopes to improve bus services to the college, and light rail could eventually ease the crunch. For bicyclists and pedestrians, "I'd like to see a safe corridor on Fort Vancouver Way," he added.

Pollard held out the possibility that a state-funded parking garage at the north end of the campus could be part of the college's future.

"The city doesn't have the

funding. We're not going to build a parking garage. But somebody should," he said.

Several students asked what the city is doing to create jobs, specifically engineering jobs, green jobs and jobs in the skilled trades.

Pollard touted the city's role in helping to bring an electrical engineering program to Washington State University Vancouver and predicted that the planned expansion of the SEH America



Tim Leavitt
Takes credit for engineering jobs

Debate:

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campus in east Vancouver will bring new engineering jobs. He vowed to travel to Palo Alto, Calif., next year to meet with Hewlett Packard officials and persuade the company to stay in Vancouver.

Leavitt noted that the engineering company he started with two engineers 10 years ago has grown to 45. "I've created 43 engineering jobs in downtown Vancouver," he said. But new businesses won't locate in a community with an unfavorable tax climate, he said.

Regarding the creation of jobs in the skilled trades, Pollard predicted that the city's waterfront redevelopment project will bring 12,000 construction jobs to Vancouver, including some within the next year and a half, and

7,500 permanent jobs eventually.

Leavitt was openly skeptical. "Let's be honest about the waterfront project," he said. "It's not going to happen all at once. It's going to be one project at a time."

As for permanent jobs, Leavitt said, "Just because you put a new building up doesn't mean you've created jobs," and the jobs that result won't necessarily be full-time, high-paying jobs.

Question of safety

Responding to a question about neighborhood safety, Leavitt jabbed at Pollard for what he characterized as Pollard's failure to adequately pay for public safety.

"On his watch over 14 years, our police force has been understaffed by at least 50," Leavitt said.

Pollard defended his public safety record, noting that he traveled to Washington, D.C., this year and won a

commitment for three years of federal funding for 10 new police officers. The mayor also acknowledged that new funding sources are needed.

Recalling Pollard's legendary 2005 public relations stunt, when he smashed a Starbucks mug with a Portland logo to make a statement about Vancouver's separate identity, one student asked, "Do you look to Portland as an ally or an enemy? Downtown Vancouver is not exactly thriving."

Pollard described the relationship between the cities as one of "mutual respect."

"We've learned a lot from Portland," he said. For example, Vancouver's neighborhood associations are modeled on Portland's, he said. "We are part of a great metro area."

Leavitt said he has a "great relationship" with Portland Mayor Sam Adams and Metro Council President David Bragdon, "but that doesn't mean we roll over to what they want to have happen."

That gave him an opening to repeat his opposition to tolling on a proposed new bridge over the Columbia River.

Later in the day, the candidates sparred over budget priorities and tolling at a debate before an audience of 60 sponsored by the East Vancouver Business Association at Clark College's east Vancouver campus.

Pollard acknowledged that there is a perception the city has invested more on its west side than its east side. In fact, he said, the ratio is roughly two to one in favor of east Vancouver, which corresponds to the east-west population distribution.

"We have tried very hard to connect east with west," he said. "It is a challenge for us. We have to continue to find ways to make people realize that we are one Vancouver."

"There is a disconnect," Leavitt said. One way to solve it, he suggested, is for the city council to meet regularly in east Vancouver.

In one of the testiest exchanges of the evening, Leavitt lambasted Pollard for warning during last year's budget deliberations that cuts to police and fire protection would be necessary if the council did not approve a utility tax increase.

That showed a failure to set priorities, Leavitt said. "We need to be prioritizing police and fire. They should not be compromised." Leavitt voted against the tax increase, which was approved by a council majority.

The city had no other options, Pollard said. "We would have been required to find \$4.7 million (in cuts) to make up the need," he said. Even elimination of the parks budget wouldn't have come close to closing the gap, he said.

"We have cut \$8 million in the past two budget cycles and laid off 100 people," Pollard said. "Revenues have not kept up with the needs of the community. We need to lay out the choices for the voters."