

PDXFTL2: Conversation with a Total Recall Canvasser

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SPEAKERS

Canvasser, Piper, Josh

J Josh 00:04
friends and neighbors you're listening to Portland from the left, my name is Josh I use he him pronouns

P Piper 00:10
and I'm Piper I use she her pronouns. And today we are with someone who we will refer to as The Canvasser. Can you please introduce yourself?

C Canvasser 00:19
Yes, hi, um I am just you know, The Canvasser I use she her pronouns and yeah, The and C are capitalized.

P Piper 00:32
Josh. Why did we invite The Canvasser here to talk to us today.

J Josh 00:36
So last time, we talked about the recall petition for Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, and just to bring everybody back to the scene of the crime. Right now in Portland, Oregon, we've got a mayor in place who illegally loaned himself \$150,000, barely squeaking by to get reelected with 19,000 votes over a much more progressive opposition. And that person is currently in office and spent most of the last year and a half assaulting and attacking our friends who were out in

the streets protesting for civil rights. So we have a recall petition and we talked about a little bit last week, it's actually not going super well. It doesn't have the signatures it needs, it's going to be over in just a few weeks. So things aren't looking super good for the petition to succeed and get enough signatures but we're super hyped about the people that are trying to get signatures and trying to talk to people about this evil mayor. So that's kind of setting the scene a little bit about the recall petition and then also our position on it. Like we're a little bit sad, but also like we're trying to figure things out. And yeah, that's where you come in Canvasser. So tell me why did you get involved like, like, what what was your kind of thinking process with the recall petition in particular? Were you like, a signature gather from from birth? And that's just like what you've always done?

C Canvasser 01:59

Yeah, so actually, Funny enough, I had some previous experience working on some canvassing in Portland especially. Um, I a couple years back you know, when we were gathering signatures for the environmental PACs relating to and pushing for the styrofoam and disposable, whatever, to-go containers, that ban that took place. A couple years back we canvassed for that in Portland. But that was not just canvassing. We were also asking for money which is a way harder ask. And frankly I was terrible at it back then, haha. I you know, I was a little bit of a newer Oregon resident so like a lot less well versed on kind of the you know, the minutiae of weird local politics and you know, the amount of incredibly strong opinions that Portlanders have on things...you know you don't really think about often like you know the city charter. So I was rough at it then for that and also asking for money is infinitely more difficult. And so when I recognized that the recall campaign was offering A. paid positions, and I was very poor and unemployment stopped

J Josh 03:19

We love paid positions,

C Canvasser 03:21

yes. And also that I could decide my own hours, which was extra fun. And that I would have a nice little kind of recourse for my extreme and deep seated hatred for Ted Wheeler. Plus, I didn't have to, you know, ask people to scratch their couch cushions to hand me quarters to recall him. It seems to be just like, okay, I could probably do better this way.

P Piper 03:46

So you were talking about when you were asking people for money, that that you also encountered people having very strong opinions about other things like the city charter? How does that compare your experience then, with canvassing for Ted, to recall Ted Wheeler? Like, what are what are people saying to you? What is what is it like,

C Canvasser 04:04

Canvasser 05:01

oh, there's all sorts of wild, wild people in the city. And it does vary greatly depending on neighborhood, on the first day that I was supposed to canvass. I was informed that it's best to get you know, 15 signatures an hour, at least, the bare minimum is like eight, before an area or zone is kind of deemed just not productive and not worth, you know, whatever, my hourly wage is. And so I was stationed outside of the whole foods in northwest right off Burnside there. And wow, yeah, that was bad. People were angry. It's also a fair amount of tourists over there. So people that can't actually sign the petition because they're not registered to vote in this city. But yeah, a lot of Northwestern residents are very much friends with Ted, or have like a strange parasocial relationship with the mayor because you live You know, or has lived in that area.

P

Piper 05:02

interesting.

C

Canvasser 05:03

And so they defensive very quickly. Also, we get a lot of people that say, you know, why aren't you recalling Joanne? And why aren't you recalling Kate Brown? And why aren't you recalling Mike Schmidt and I'm like, honestly, fair points, we can talk about that my T shirt literally said, Total Recall. So I don't know how much more clear I can make that to you that I'm not a fan of any of these politicians. And that, frankly, you know, as an anarchist, working in a field relating and pushing for democracy. I am all for just hearing people's wild takes on these things. Really.

P

Piper 05:43

I want to hear your elevator pitch. But I also want to hear like the difference between your elevator pitch and the reason you want to recall Ted Wheeler. And are they the same?

C

Canvasser 05:51

now there's a there's a script, you know, that we're, we're told to stick to, and it's, you know, it's one that I guess, you know, some testing has seen as most productive, because it initiates conversation with someone that you're talking to, without immediately saying like, you know, fuck Ted Wheeler, over the just screaming out in public. But the script is: are you a local voter? you pause and wait for a response. And would you have you signed the petition to recall Mayor Ted Wheeler over his inaction on homelessness and police accountability? nice and vague. You can get you know, the NIMBYs in on that you can get, you know, the ACAB crowd. And on that, you can get Yeah, the soft libs in on that. There's, you know, pretty solid pitch that works for a lot of people. But if that doesn't work, or because it's pretty wordy, and most people just don't respond or look at you, because they don't want to look at someone holding a clipboard. That's when I usually just go with especially when a very busy space, like a farmers market where there's a lot of moving people, no one really stopping to look at me specifically, that I just want to say that you want to get Ted Wheeler out of office, do you hate Ted Wheeler? sign this. Yeah. And that's, that's it. But my I mean, the reason that I want to see Ted gone is because I think he is a cowardly and spineless little man who has never really had to work at anything

before. And now that he has to, really, because the city is facing a lot of problems that need genuine hard work, and probably not from any sort of leader, um, he is kind of in a crisis of just, you know, I thought, This is what I was owed as a rich white guy. I can't stand that. Not to mention that, you know, seeing him get tear gas was, you know, allegedly in person is its own kind of sweet joy that I'll never forget. But actually reminding him that his life is not some weird moments to get back at like the bad orange presidents, or to do any sort of weird liberal posturing, and he's actually responsible for a city right now. And he needs to act like it. You know, I just want to see him suffer. I want to see him in pain.

J

Josh 08:11

I totally validate that and just want to take a moment and say that, like, it's okay to feel that not that you need my permission, but also like, I fucking feel like, wow, this fucking guy's respon--I literally got shot by police. I'm fucking a 40 year old, whatever, middle aged dad dude, like, I shouldn't be getting shot by--nobody should be getting shot by the police. But why did I get shot by police? This is not my fault.

C

Canvasser 08:32

Yeah, I mean, just the amount of like mutual aid efforts that I've had to. I've seen so many people in myself, like step up and actually take care of I just think of all of the work that people have put in over the almost five years now that we've had Ted in office, and how little he has done and it's not fair or right.

P

Piper 08:53

Yeah, that's a really interesting contrast, just thinking about how much work just regular people I've had to do because of his failures.

J

Josh 09:01

And do and Redo, right, because we've seen like, you know, just thinking about the mutual aid situation down in front of the Justice Center last summer, and how often it had to get recreated out of nothing, because, you know, the cops came through and tear gassed everything, tear gas to all the food, literally defining like the flavor of a particular form of like ribs. Like for a few weeks, like

C

Canvasser 09:24

I know, it's, um, I just, I really can't stand the sight of him generally. And, you know, I mean, what was the latest picture of him playing pool last night at some bar with no mask on? I just like to think that, you know, at least from my stance, if I see someone, if I see him out in public, like it's just an immediate combative kind of attitude of, you know, that the crowd back then

was just, it was a very diverse group of people and it was not a lot of people that would immediately see the mayor and be like hands on site. It was a lot of people that would, you know, hand him a microphone and give him a platform to speak his cowardly little, little words.

J Josh 10:03

Piper, do you think we're in a different place now as far as a city? Because like that, that's what maybe early July late June last year, if you're calling shots, if you're if you're looking at things and evaluating things, do you think we're like, in a different place broadly? Like, as far as the mayor goes, do you think like, there's basically the same vibe going on as far as support and stuff? Where do you think everybody's at?

P Piper 10:26

I don't, I don't think it's the same. I don't know the numbers. But um, there's, I think a lot more people learned that he was terrible. But then, also, there was a contingent of people who are like, they really don't want to consider politicians when it's not election season. It's like, it's like a burden upon them.

J Josh 10:51

That has me imagining like Biden voters dodging signature gathers being like, Listen, I already did my part. Yeah. So far. I voted blue.

C Canvasser 10:58

It does a lot of that. I think it's Yeah, kind of a fair split. Like you're saying, Piper in terms of what I've seen canvassing is, you know, they're the people that, you know, know the details of the city charter. They're the people that, you know, have hated Jo ann's entire political career and can recite that to you. Our conversation is kind of like, oh, wow, somebody finally gave me the microphone to you know, go on my anti government or anti local government spiel at long last, and then they'd go on a tirade for like, 10 minutes that I could have been gathering signatures from literally anyone else. As well as the people that when they hear me say, Are you a local voter, they respond with? Oh, yeah, I'm already registered. And I'm like, that's not what I'm asking here. Like, listen with your ears and hear me when I say that you can be doing more than the weird apathetic, like probably mail-in thing that you did last November, maybe, we'll say on detail on that is that a lot of the like, I refer to them as kind of the higher ups at the end of the anti authoritarian practice that's embedded in my soul. But

J Josh 12:10

you mean the bosses?

C Canvasser 12:11

C Canvasser 12:11

Yeah, the the big bosses at Total Recall, who are just lib yuppies, like that's expected. It's again, like a very democratically oriented crowd. You know, these people have a lot of experience canvassing and like, you know, implementing canvassing campaigns, but they're all often and have been for, like local environmental causes, and things like, or just give me your money, or like, you can just be a signature on a, like a change.org. petition. Basically, you don't need to be a local Portland voter. And then to some degree, the canvassing variance on like Couch and Burnside is going to be like almost part of the Portland tourist experience of like, oh, wow, we're in Portland. Now. There's like a bunch of people out here that actually care about the world.

P Piper 12:57

Interesting! what do you think about that?

C Canvasser 13:01

I it's strange to me, politics is kind of always going to be commodified, especially, you know, West Coast politics, where you know, you have there's a lot of transplants out here from other states, you know, that are fighting for very serious issues. You know, and obviously, Ted has committed some fucking war crimes. But you know, if I were, if I had come from, say, Texas, I would keep my voter registration in Texas hands down. Rather than switched it here, if I were to move out here for, you know, say, as a young adult, which is a most Portland that have come out here recently, you know, so there are folks that politics is always going to kind of be a strange game that way, but the fact that we have been commodified as part of the Portland image is like, you go to the PSU farmers market, and there's eight people with clipboards down there. You know, that's just part of the experience of that farmers market. And it does feel like we're performing a little bit, you know,

P Piper 14:04

I also wonder, I'm just testing a theory. So like, canvasser, tell me if this makes any sense, I get the sense that Portlanders are very good about the pandemic compared to other places.

C Canvasser 14:17

This is very true

P Piper 14:18

and that the suburban folks, not so much. So I wonder if right now we maybe have a higher percentage of suburban folks out and about than usual,

C Canvasser 14:29

Canvasser 15:05

I would I think there's probably some validity there. Yes. I mean, I, I had a death of a family. So I traveled this summer to my home state. And I mean, it's, it wasn't amazing in terms of like mask wearing period and I was very refreshed to come back to Portland and be like, Okay, wow, you know, like we actually got pretty high vaccination stats and at least in comparison with the rest of the country and you know, people that actually do wear masks even if they are like eating or drinking inside or something. They do the whole like, oh, only take it off and we're having a sip of my beer thing.

P

Piper 15:06

Rule followers.

C

Canvasser 15:08

So you know, the people that are coming out to you know, say like a farmers market or something like that are probably yeah now like Hillsborough voters, Milwaukee voters that can't actually participate in this but are damn happy to be in public.

P

Piper 15:24

I'm sort of curious kind of coming back to something you said earlier where canvassing sort of gave you a chance to vent your frustration, I wonder like, is that working? Like? Because I know you have to you have to be on you have to talk you have your script that you mentioned, which apparently they tested in some way, like, how does it just feel?

C

Canvasser 15:45

Yeah, I mean, we the script is there to kind of, you know, you lay the groundwork and if someone's interested in signing it, they're probably going to immediately fire back with a either a reason they hate Ted Wheeler or just like enthusiasm towards it. Through that you can kind of get to know someone very quickly. I've had people that are just you know, the NIMBYs and like apparently soulless asshole Karen's that will just say like, Oh my god, there's so many houseless people, you know, they say Home homeless people living in the street and the streets like smell like shit. And like, there's needles everywhere. And like, I can't even take my kids in the Laurelhurst Park because now they're camping inside the park instead of on the street outside the park. And I'm like, well, where did you think they'd go? When you push them off the street? Outside of laurelhurst, they're probably going to go to Sunnyside and inside of -- anyway. You can find out a lot about someone very quickly based on how they respond to the initial kind of question, I usually try to kind of play it safe. I'm not going to be like openly wearing my cute iron front earrings, when I'm canvassing. And all very heavily rely on the point about Ted, you know, ending the trial period for the Portland Street Response Program because that is a point that a lot of NIMBYs can get behind it. You know, ACAB folks get behind it. Blue Lives Matter folks can get behind it because they think that cops shouldn't have to deal with all these gross homeless people in their exact words. Portland Street response is a nice middle ground of like here was a perfect opportunity for Ted to do something right. And he very much

chose not to. And I try to kind of play it safe that way. But the second anyone looks young, or queer, or has a cute tattoo, a neon colored mullet. I can usually just be like, Listen, fuck Ted Wheeler. This dude sucks like fuck that guy. All cops are bastards get on this shit. Please tell your friends.

P Piper 17:43

And how does that feel when you get

C Canvasser 17:45

So much better

P Piper 17:46

when you get to have that kind of an interaction?

C Canvasser 17:48

Oh, much better. Like it just makes my life feel infinitely easier if I don't have to, like be playing customer service role while also canvassing.

P Piper 17:56

Oh, that's a good that's a good way to describe it.

C Canvasser 17:58

Yeah, it's very much like placating the needs of someone who you know at any second and can decide like, Oh, actually, I'm not I'm sure if I'm really into this. And often people have their opinions very fully formed way before they ever see me.

J Josh 18:15

Yeah, you're pitching them on something that they have already made up their mind about probably if they can even sign up. And then also you're trying to like angle yourself to be on their side not knowing you know, it's a sales technique, of course, but like it's such a I think that's a lot of maybe what Piper and I are trying to do here is try to be just be honest, so fucking tired of like, copping for people or whatever. It's just like, fuck, dude, can you just be frank like, Jo ann Hardesty seems strategically inept, even though her politics are good. It's fine. Yeah, we don't have to like it's not feelings. It's just power and we're trying to do better.

C Canvasser 18:50

Yeah, like okay, yeah, Mike Schmidt. No complained my arrest, but like, dude, still fucking sucks.

J Josh 18:55

There you go.

C Canvasser 18:55

Yeah, yeah, it's a it's entirely infuriating. So to kind of approach the very fine line though, of like, just reading someone based on very, very few words that they'll you know, say about Ted Wheeler of just okay, I hate him because he's not requiring cops to get vaccinated, but I still support cops. And there's just like, there's so many nuances to like a reason that someone can have to hate Ted, because there are so many. Kind of navigating that path and not wanting to make them feel alienated from the recall effort. When I'm clearly you know, getting their signature because I need it. We need it. and I'm getting paid. But it's it changes things a bit. But that's why you know, in certain neighborhoods, I feel a lot more comfortable northeast 33rd was wonderful. Anything East makes me happy, deep East makes me very, very happy to be in. There's so many people out there and yeah, there's also right wingers out there and you know what, they hate Ted too, and I think he's a spineless coward because it wasn't murdered every single Antifa in Portland

J Josh 19:59

The spineless coward thing totally has me remembering that early on, when the recall petition was kind of first initiating, getting organized and stuff, I kept thinking that the pitch just seems so easy. And the reason why I didn't get more involved earlier on with the recall campaign was just it seemed like very, like, there's, there's like, so few people in Portland that would support him. Yeah. But I, you know, I say that, but also, you know, I've heard real actual, you know, anecdotal but still experienced from you where, like, you've, you've heard from lots of people that, you know, at some level, whether that's because they're yuppie, and they don't know better, or because they actually support his policies, because they made him a couple million dollars in some real estate deal, you don't know. Like, there are there are people that support Ted, no matter what the percentages are, even if they're, there's only a few of them. There are people that support but there's, there's a broad coalition, there's like a very easy case to make against him. And so the idea that not only that the case wasn't very clear, which is kind of something we talked about on the previous episode that it seems, according to the journalistic output about the recall, petition, that the the idea was that it wasn't clear why the recall PAC wanted to recall Ted Wheeler, like there wasn't a specific case. And it's like, it's very, like, you know, I've said it on Twitter 17 times a day for the last six months. It's just like, it's a very, it's a sentence you could get away with. And so and then hearing you talk about, like, the people all over town in all the different pockets that not only already agree, but also need to hear what Ted Wheeler has been doing with their resources. Like, for some people, you know, people are

dealing with a pandemic, life is busy. Not everybody has all day to watch city council meetings. And so like there's so many people that obviously care about what's going on with their neighbors, but have no fucking idea who the city council members are

C Canvasser 21:56

Yeah, yeah. Or people that either need to have access to those education resources, which recall could have provided a probably a lot better. I mean, that they're, you know, the pitch was so unclear, was intentional, which is that you know, we need to keep this kind of multi partisan, you know, we need to have cops that feel like Ted has screwed made their lives harder. Sign this, which like, Jesus, the fact that a cop may have signed my petition at some point makes my skin crawl, but

P Piper 22:28

sorry, but how many what percent of cops live in Portland?

C Canvasser 22:34

Yeah, yeah. The odds are slim. So that's

P Piper 22:38

you I'm just doubting tailoring a message to such a small minority

J Josh 22:41

You're talking about like, 17 I don't know. I don't remember the actual, I think it was like maybe 100 out of the 1,000 or so they had before. Yeah, yeah. But yeah, you just randomly happened upon one of them is like Jesus what fucking terrible luck.

C Canvasser 22:56

Knowing me maybe but you know, there's there's that there's the there's right wingers that feel like, you know, Ted is just like too blue and Trump said that Ted sucks. So they should probably get in on this. And you know, there's so many brown people, black people in north and east Portland, that who their voices have not been heard on this. And they have been A. more victimized by the police than any other demographic in the city. And Ted is our police commissioner. And they probably don't, they cannot even know that that's not clear. You know, that is not something we lead with often. And there are so many folks that just need to have their voices heard on it. And they kept the message really vague on that because then it kind of leaves it up to say a canvasser to tailor that message based on the interaction based on how someone looks, how they, you know, respond when I asked them, how they feel about Ted Wheeler. And they expect a lot of the legwork to be done on that end of things, which is tricky.

J Josh 24:05

Some of the distinctions that are hard to make are things like you know, Ted Wheeler is a person that said frequently says Black Lives Matter at meetings and stuff and like partners with quote unquote, civil rights organizations and whatever. So if you're not paying attention, if you're looking at the news after work, and you kind of have only half paying attention, your your perspective on him may not be that he's actually this weird law and order mayor and also police commissioner has actually been the only person in the way of civil rights in Portland right now. Police are leaving the city to get out of the way for justice to happen for that that those funds to be spent to helping people instead of hurting them. But Ted as the commissioner hasn't done anything, he hasn't made any moves. You know, at least we're getting some of the cops to run away but fucking Ted's right there.

C Canvasser 24:56

Yeah, yeah, top cop. He, that's the one thing that I, you know, have tried to push the most is that, at least with my time with recall is that we need to be addressing people that don't live in the downtown core that don't go to the downtown core. Because frankly, I've lived in Portland for a while. And before protests were a very big deal I never went downtown because there was no reason to be there.

J Josh 25:24

Absolutely. People live in the neighborhoods. Like it's, it's, you know, for me, technically, the downtown core is kind of a neighborhood. But that's also again, I'm a pedestrian, I don't walk everywhere, blah, blah, blah. I know all my friends live in their neighborhoods, like when I say where'd you go? They said like, you know, the bar down the street, they go to the movie places close by whatever. Like that's one of the things that makes Portland amazing is we have all these cool neighborhoods where you can just live and be in like, exist, but it doesn't work when you've got a mayor that's running cops into neighborhoods, tear gassing people and having them chase after us. And then setting like other neighbors as vigilantes because I wear too much black or whatever. Like it just doesn't work like that

C Canvasser 26:02

Ted Wheeler cares about the image of this city more than he cares about the people that live in it. And that has impacted you in this way and you in this way and your neighbor's housed in unhoused in this way. And people are usually most receptive to that. Of he is just truly putting on a front of what the city is, and he wants tourist money. And no one in Portland really likes tourists. That works pretty well

P Piper 26:32

If the recall doesn't work and get on the ballot, and are there is there anything you still is there any benefit to doing what you're doing on its own?

any benefit to doing what you're doing on its own.

C Canvasser 26:43

Well, I have a job. There's that.

J Josh 26:46

We love that.

P Piper 26:48

That is good. I'm glad

C Canvasser 26:49

I can. Yeah, rental assistance is really taken sweet time these days. So you know, I've got a job and a place to live. So that's great. I do think there's a lot of value and talking to people in the way that I talked to them. There is a lot of I'll put it kindly bullshitting. But I have met in the past X amount of time of working for this recall campaign, a very, very diverse group of Portlanders who have a lot of opinions. And these are people that I never would have engaged with prior, who have thoughts that either are vastly different or somewhat similar than my own. And it really has drove home, for me at least how much diversity exists ideologically in this city. And it does make us kind of a breeding ground for, you know, right wing protests and counter protests. And we have a very rich anti fascist history. But it is really interesting to actually get to know people and hear their thoughts on this and educate people in the very minimal conversations that I can have with them. And I think there's a lot there. But the education factor is something recall, could have and should have pushed harder. And it will bother me for a while that that didn't happen.

P Piper 28:04

When you say the education factor. I know you mentioned before you thought they could send more about like, you know, just like what did Ted Wheeler do? They could have sent it out? Like, what, what in particular? Do you want to tell Portlanders? Like if you got to make your own scripts or your own flyer for recall? Like what do you want to tell East Portlanders or just people that you're out talking to?

C Canvasser 28:27

Yeah, I would say that, you know, Chad has probably disappointed you and made your life harder in ways that we can't even truly quantify but the amount of human suffering that we've seen in the last year of this pandemic, year and a half now, Jesus has been amplified by his

apathy towards the city, and his self centeredness and just the absolute misuse of public resources that we are all contributing to every day that we work and live in the city.