Question: What can/should the city do to address the public-health and environmental concerns along Allens Avenue and the Port of Providence?

Espinal: As the City Councilor who represents this area, I have been dogged in my approach at addressing the harmful impact these businesses are having on our community, our waterways, and our City. Last year I introduced an Ordinance that effectively bans any new waste, recycling, or incinerator centers from opening in the City of Providence.

After the most recent incident at the scrap metal facility, I introduced a resolution demanding that the businesses operating in the Port implement better environmental controls and compliance. I have also asked that the RI Department of Environmental Management provide the City Council copies of all notices of violations to businesses and property owners located in the Port for the past ten years.

Question: What’s the next step in addressing the pollution problems that plague this part of the city?

Espinal: There needs to be a holistic approach to addressing the pollution that plagues, not just the port, but other parts of the City as well. Legislatively, there are some options that we are exploring, but in the interim it is important that we continue to work with our community partners and hold these businesses accountable. We need to ensure that the environmental compliance that is demanded by the state and federal government is being followed and enforced. And we must hold these businesses accountable when they are in violation.

Further, the City is set to receive $130 Million in stimulus funds and I would like to see some of those dollars be allocated to purchasing the currently available property around the Port — as well as other properties as they become available. By doing this we can help grow new green industries in this area which would create new jobs and help ensure that these new industries are creating not just an environmental benefit, but a fiscal benefit to the neighborhood as well.

Question: Despite the documentation of high asthma rates in the neighborhoods of South Providence and Washington Park, years of odor and pollution complaints, and at least one business that has been illegally contaminating the Providence River for more than a decade, why have past and present city officials been slow to address an obvious health and community problem?
The City has not done enough, but there is only so much the legislative and executive bodies of the City can do. The enforcement falls under the jurisdiction of the State and we need to make sure that we are actively working with RIDEM to make sure that those that would or are causing harmful pollution are being held accountable and that we are providing these businesses with opportunities to become “cleaner and greener.”

We can’t simply close the businesses that are in operation down, as much as I would like to. But, they also have a responsibility to be good neighbors. I encourage our state leaders to work to create incentives for businesses to transfer operations to make them safer for not just the community, but for their employees.

**Question:** What businesses in this part of the city are making an attempt to address neighborhood concerns?

**Espinal:** There are several businesses and community groups who are making attempts to address neighborhood concerns, but they aren’t always the ones that are causing the environmental damage. The People’s Port Authority and the Washington Park Neighborhood Association has been very vocal, and an important voice in the discussion to clean up the Port. There are ways for the businesses along the Port to do better and be better, but the state also has to work with them to make it happen.

**Question:** How does the city get more businesses to become better neighbors?

**Espinal:** This is the constant challenge that we as municipal leaders face. We want businesses to come to Providence, to create good paying jobs, and help improve the quality of life for their employees and their neighbors. We need to be proactive working with our business community and giving them the tools, they need to succeed, and asking them to become part of the community. That is something that I have been working towards, once a business becomes part of the community — their vision and what they do becomes more community focused. There is an old saying that you can’t teach an old dog new tricks, so we have to focus on the new businesses that are coming in and advocating for stronger penalties for businesses that have environmental violations.

As an elected official my first duty is to the residents that I represent. Their health and well-being are at the forefront of every decision I make as a leader, and that
will continue to be the case as we continue working with our partners to make the Port cleaner and greener for everyone.