Surprise candidate takes Huss' GOP chair

Stories by
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The Oregon Republican Party has given itself a new leader, but it may not have heard the last from its old top executive.

GOP delegates voted by more than 2-1 Saturday to recall embattled chairer Walter Huss and later cast five more ballots before selecting surprise candidate Robert Voy of Tigard as the party's new leader.

Following the recall vote, Huss challenged the election on the ground that it had been performed improperly. The conservative Republican contended that as a public official, he cannot be recalled without the approval of at least 25 percent of the state's registered Republicans.

"You do not have a recall to create an election," Huss told the convention. "Most of what you've done today — if not all — is invalid anyway."

Huss said he will consider a challenge of the recall convention after he receives a ruling from state Attorney General Jim Redden later this month.

Until that opinion is given, however, Huss will turn over the duties of the position to newly-elected state chairer Voy.

Voy claimed the position late Saturday afternoon after nearly five hours of debating and balloting. He finally received a majority of votes on the fifth convention ballot, defeating Bob McNaughton of Bend, 47-46.

Voy had announced his candidacy for the chairer's position the day of the convention and told delegates after his election that he was tired of the "Watergate image" of the Republican party and that he hoped he could reunite the divided party.

"I'm hoping that with such a close vote I can bring this party together," he said. "I hope the vote doesn't mean we are still a divided party."

Voy worked for both Ronald Reagon's and Gerald Ford's unsuccessful 1976 presidential campaigns and is also a charter member of the Oregon Taxpayers Union, an organization started by the Libertarian Party.

Voy also drafted a property tax limitation measure that will be considered by Secretary of State Norma Paulus later this month.

Medford Republican Jerry Lausmann, whom some had called the favorite in the balloting, gathered only 20 votes on the first ballot and was dropped after the third tally.

McNaughton, who was criticized because of his close relationship to Huss, stayed in the balloting all the way to the end. The state finance chairer fell one vote short of the necessary 47-vote majority on the fourth ballot and lost on the fifth ballot to Voy.

Before the recall vote was taken to make room for the new chairer, two delegates told the convention that Huss was unfit to continue as chairer and should be replaced.

Steve Jose of Portland, said several members of the GOP whom Huss recruited had become "disillusioned" with his leadership and questioned his "motives for running the party."

"Many of those brought into the party by Mr. Huss now have strong ethical and practical reservations about him and the way he has been running the party," Jose said.

A group of 23 Republicans met with Huss in March to discuss their reservations, Jose said, but were turned away by Huss' idea that the troubles of the party were caused by a "few disloyal members."

Jose also called Huss' objections to the recall movement a "last ditch political ploy" to retain his position as chairer.

"Walter will do anything to hold on to his position of chairer," Jose said. "But we do not believe that the cause of good government will die if Walter is recalled."

Lane County GOP chairer Mike O'Brien echoed those complaints, but said the recall movement was not because the delegates disagreed with Huss in principle, but rather because they disliked his style of leadership.

"I don't believe that there has been any real party leadership. It has been nothing but a one-man show since last fall."

Huss, however, compared his recall to the betrayal of Julius Ceasar and Jesus Christ by calling his opponents traitors to the party.

"It is not unusual for a man to be betrayed by his friends," Huss said in response to the recall. "Consider what happened to Julius Ceaser and Jesus and George Washington with Benedict Arnold.

"This party is on trial today, not Walter Huss," he said.

Calling the convention a "Gettysburg," Huss said his opponents were trying to destroy the party that he had helped to build.

"This party has taken a new direction since the fall. It used to be controlled from the top down, now it is in the hands of the people."

Huss also complained that the "old guard" of Republican elitists were attempting to take over the party once again to keep the party from expanding into a grass-roots movement.

"Those of you who oppose me also believe in abortion," Huss told the convention. "Because the gestation period for a chairer is two years, and you would abort me before that time is up."

Prayer precedes recall, 'enemies of Christ' win

Even in defeat, those who backed deposed Republican Party Chairer Walter Huss offered prayers of support.

Huss, who was removed from office Saturday at the state GOP convention in Eugene, left the chairer's post the same way he took it last fall: controversially.

During Saturday's eight-hour convention, Huss' supporters held a prayer rally, fought bitter floor battles over the qualifications of other delegates and finally split the still-divided party over the choice of a new chairer.

The haggling began early with a GOP Executive Committee meeting to amend the GOP bylaws so a new state chairer could be elected following Huss' recall.

The meeting was the beginning of a fight that lasted throughout most of the afternoon. Bend delegate and chairer candidate Bob McNaughton challenged the Executive Committee's choices for the credentials committee. The committee was to validate all voting delegates who would participate in the recall convention that afternoon.

During the Executive Committee meeting Huss supporters and other born-again Christians met in a rented room on the second floor to pray for God's guidance in the convention.

The prayer meeting was publicized a week prior to the convention as a rally to ask God to "bind the satanic forces that are operating to bring confusion within both our political parties." Portland realtor C.L. McDonald held the meeting to honor Huss.

According to a letter mailed to Republican Party members around the state, McDonald called Huss' opponents "enemies of Christ" who wanted to destroy the Christian work Huss had started.

"You can be sure that Walter Huss needs your help in warding off the attacks from the enemies of Christ," the letter said. "Discerning Christians know that our whole system of government is now under attack; the time is now for concerned Christians to unite in prayer on behalf of good government and at the same time support Walter Huss."

More than 25 persons participated in the prayer meeting, at which Walter and Rosalie Huss arrived more than an hour late.

During the meeting, Huss told those praying that the attacks on him would be taken care of by God.

"Let us pray that God will wrest their hands as they mark their ballots," Huss said of the recall vote.

"Some people have tried to short-circuit plans for this state," Huss said. "But God won't let them."

During the first few minutes of the recall convention, Rosalie Huss asked the central committee to bar two Multnomah County representatives from voting because of a court battle over the chairer's position in that county organization.

After several minutes of debate, the delegates rejected her motion and went on to recall Huss, 62-30.

Huss said of the whole affair: "I'd rather be Walter Huss today than to be those people who lied about me before this convention."

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