

# ...Labor Lobbyist

(From Page 1)

work area: Members only.”

The Capitol Club is Oregon’s 400-strong lobbyist professional association, and Room 40 is their clubhouse — a combination lounge/workspace where they can retrieve messages and hang out between appointments. There’s wi-fi, coffee and closed-circuit television screens showing whatever’s under way in legislative committee chambers.

Ducking into the Legislative Printing Office, she grabs a copy of the Joint Legislative Schedule — a compendium of every official proceeding at the Capitol that day. Today’s is 42 pages long.

Botkin joins Baessler at Café Today, a basement diner where lobbyists and capitol staffers chow on the cheap. Lawmakers have their own cafeteria, off-limits to the public.

A legislative assistant to House Democrat Mike Schaufler walks by.

“How are you, Mary?”

“I’m fine,” she sighs.

“That wasn’t very convincing,” he says.

She’s thinking about the hearing. Her bill is assigned to the House Business and Labor Committee. Schaufler, a former member of the Laborers Union, is the chair.

She’s got hours to kill before her first scheduled meeting, and heads back to the Capitol Club. It’s not yet 8 a.m., and the lounge is nearly empty.

By now, Botkin is multi-tasking. She’s checking e-mail on her laptop, reading a bill, browsing a specialized legislative database that helps lobbyists track 90 lawmakers and thousands of bills. At 8:30 she picks up the remote control and flips channels on the TV, stopping to watch Portland Democrat Diane Rosenbaum chair a hearing on ballot measure reform.

A few minutes later, AFSCME lobbyist Ralph Groener walks in. “Mary, I need your help.”

He has a 9:30 meeting with the gov-

ernor and he needs a proposal typed up. Groener is “old school,” a high-tech holdout who refuses to cart around a laptop.

“I’m not a production typist,” Botkin says. “If you want it by 9:30, you better give it to me right away.”

Lobbyists trickle in and out of the room; several confer nearby.

Without time to read every bill, lobbyists rely on each other to stay on top. It’s like a hive. They exchange little pieces of information with each other as they pass in the hall.

“Holvey just left the hearing.” “Schaufler is looking for you.” “Any idea what this bill is supposed to do?” “What did you think of Kardon’s presentation?”

Botkin has a special status in the hive, and 20-plus years at the Capitol have earned her an outsized reputation. Critics and admirers alike describe her as a fighter, loyal, hot-tempered, blunt and funny. All day long, fellow lobbyists come up to her with questions or greetings, asking for directions to someone’s office, borrowing mouthwash.

Botkin says it’s her policy to treat other lobbyists with professional courtesy, regardless of who they work for.

“There’s no bad guys. Everybody has a job to do,” she says.

Besides, sometimes they work together.

A minute later she’s speaking into her wireless cell phone earpiece: “I really need to know what’s going on with the 911 bill.”

It’s time to make the rounds, visit a few lawmakers.



At a Feb. 16 hearing on a bill to give 911 operators early retirement, AFSCME lobbyist Mary Botkin testifies along with 911 dispatcher Stephanie Babb.

Rep. John Lim, a Gresham Republican, is the first.

“How are you?” she asks.

“Working hard for you,” he replies.

“You always work hard for me,” she says. They get right to the point. She’s pushing a bill to require that state workers be reassigned if an on-the-job injury prevents them from doing their old job. Lim asks questions. How many people does this affect? Who will oppose it? Will it cost money? Which committee is it assigned to?

Botkin closes the meeting by asking Lim what his priorities are. Reciprocity is an unspoken rule of lobbying. She’s asking his support on one of her bills; maybe she can help on one of his.

Botkin has no qualms working both sides of the aisle in Salem, but in the wider world, she’s a diehard Democrat. From 1988 to 2004, she served as one of two Oregon representatives on the Democratic National Committee, the body which chooses the party’s national

leadership. She chaired the national Democratic Women’s Caucus until 2004, when she was unseated from her DNC post by party activist Jenny Greenleaf.

Back at the Club, it’s 11:45, and Botkin is preparing her testimony for the hearing. She looks in her computer for notes of what she said in 2005.

At 12:30, she grabs lunch and heads to a fourth-floor conference room for the weekly meeting of the United Labor Lobby — an informal roundtable of the Capitol’s union lobbyists. Today a couple dozen labor lobbyists sit around a table, reacting to a \$220 million bombshell. Last night, Josh Kardon of U.S. Senator Ron Wyden’s office delivered a grim message — the federal government isn’t going to renew its subsidy to rural counties that used to collect revenue from federal timber

sales. They debate responses, but don’t see a way out. AFSCME stands to lose 350 members who work in rural county government.

Botkin has seen a lot of layoffs over the years. In fact, layoffs were her introduction to legislative politics. In the late ’70s, when rising natural gas prices cost her husband Mike his job at Oregon Steel Mills, Botkin threw herself into organizing a group called the Plant Closure Committee. They didn’t stop the plant closures, but they did help win a 60-days notice before mass layoffs.

After lunch, Botkin sees Rep. Paul Holvey in the hall. He’s a Eugene Democrat and a union carpenter.

“Do I have to lobby you?” she asks.

“It depends on which side you’re on,” he says.

“I’m on the side of the angels,” she says.

“I’d better read the bill,” Holvey says, teasing.

Botkin’s record of candor provokes the same from legislators, and the more experienced ones don’t beat around the bush or obfuscate where they stand on a bill. That helps her do her job, because she needs to know where they stand in order to count votes and know when compromise is needed.

It’s 2 p.m., an hour before the hearing. AFSCME council representative Deb Kidney and several 911 dispatchers have arrived. They are setting up in the hearing room. The recordings are truly horrifying. They decide not to use the one where the caller’s daughter has just shot herself.

At 2:30, City of Portland lobbyist Mark Landauer takes Botkin aside. In hushed tones he tells her he’s going to ask the committee to hold off on the bill, to give the city attorney more time to look at whether it would create a problem for Portland in its negotiations with police and fire unions.

Steam is practically pouring out of Botkin’s ears as she re-enters the hearing room, closing the door behind her.

At 2:50, Sally Jones walks in, beaming. Jones, a lobbyist for an association of 911 managers, tells Botkin she’s supporting the bill this time and will testify. In past sessions, they didn’t support it.

Then Schaufler, the committee chair, comes in to fetch Botkin back outside to the hall — he’s heard about the fracas with Portland and wants to see if tit can be resolved. No settlement is reached.

At 3 p.m., the hearing begins.

Chair Schaufler bangs the gavel, and calls Botkin and Stephanie Babb as the first witnesses. Babb is a 15-year veteran of the Portland 911 call center. She walks the committee through the recording. They listen as a 911 operator helps calm and guide a woman trapped in a burning mobile home. They stop the recording.

“What happened?” Rep. Vicki Berger wants to know.

“She burned to death,” Botkin answers.

The second recording, a few seconds in, a woman screams, “He blew his head off.” Schaufler interrupts: “I think we’ve heard enough.”

The point is made. Imagine listening to that, day after day, week after week, for 25 years.

Then Landauer takes the microphone.

“We’d like more time to review this bill. We’re concerned that it creates a potential fairness issue, because it would allow dispatchers to retire without reaching the age of 50, which is the present standard for Police and Fire.”

Fire and Police would ask for the same, he suggests. Behind him, the 911 workers are fuming.

Out in the hall after the hearing, Botkin is all gloom. “You people are never going to retire early,” she tells the dispatchers.

Landauer calls her over for a quick word. “It’ll get fixed. I’m a straight shooter. You have my word.”

Schaufler comes out, and speaks to Botkin.

“They’re going to move the bill anyway,” she tells her people. Schaufler is the bill’s sponsor, and they’ve got the votes. The delay is a courtesy.

In the car ride back to Portland, she decompresses. “It’s not about who you are,” she tells Baessler. “When they talk to you, it’s our organization they’re talking to.”

Turning philosophical, she tells a story.

“One of our [corrections] officers came in to testify. He was really nervous, and he spoke in voice so soft you could hardly hear him.”

But he followed Botkin’s advice — “talk about what you know — your job.” Having his union behind him meant he could give lawmakers his honest opinion, without fear of repercussion. Soon, they were asking him questions, and he straightened up. The effect was physical. Seeing that elected leaders were interested in what he said, he became taller.

Over the years, Botkin has won passage of more bills than she can remember. But what gives her the greatest satisfaction is the thought that her work enables her members, public employees, to stand a little taller.

## Westmoreland's Union Manor

6404 SE 23rd Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97202  
503-233-5671

## Marshall Union Manor

2020 NW Northrup  
Portland, Oregon 97209  
503-225-0677

- Planned Events, Clubs, and Activities
- Ideal Locations offer easy access to Bus Lines, Shopping, and Entertainment



## Manors Make the Difference

- Studio and One-Bedroom Apartments
- Affordable Rent includes Utilities (except phone and cable)

www.theunionmanors.org  
TDD 503-771-0912



## Kirkland Union Manors

3530 SE 84th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97266  
503-777-8101

## Kirkland Union Plaza

1414 Kauffman Avenue  
Vancouver, WA 98660  
360-694-4314

- No Costly Buy-In or Application Fees
- Federal Rent Subsidies Available (Must Qualify)