

City of Portland workers may help elect their own bosses

Union locals spread out support to several different candidates

This year, four out of five seats on the Portland City Council are up for election this year. That means unions at the City of Portland may end up helping to determine who members' bosses will be come January.

Under Portland's commission form of government, City Council consists of the mayor and four commissioners. Each of the five is in charge of at least one city bureau, and the mayor is responsible for assigning bureaus to council members.

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 189, which represents about 1,100 city workers, is backing Sam Adams for mayor — and Nick Fish and Randy Leonard for City Council. It's staying out of the race to fill the Council seat Adams is vacating.

Laborers Local 483, which represents about 600 maintenance workers in parks, streets, and sewage treatment plants, also backs Fish and Leonard, plus Amanda Fritz for Adams' seat. But it's making no endorsement in the mayor's race.

Only one of the four races has an outcome that's virtually assured: Leonard, a former Fire Fighters Union leader, is an incumbent and faces no serious opposition to unseat him. So, barring some calamity, Leonard will continue to serve alongside Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who doesn't face re-election this year.

But the other three seats are truly up for grabs, and union help could make the difference. In the race for mayor, Adams, once considered a shoe-in, is being challenged by businessman Sho Dozono and 11 relatively unknown candidates.

In the race to fill City Council Position 1, the seat mayoral candidate Adams now holds, seven candidates are running: Jeff Bissonnette, John Branam, Mike Fahey, Amanda Fritz, Charles Lewis, and Chris Smith.

For Position 2 — which became open through the resignation of Erik Sten — Fish faces Jim Middaugh, Ed Garren and two other candidates.

AFSCME staff representative James Hester said Local 189 is supporting Adams because the union has had a positive working relationship with him as a City Commissioner.

"He's taking on some heavy issues like transportation and basic infrastructure, that no other candidate seems to want to bring up," Hester said. "That's something the DCTU (District Council of Trade Unions) has been talking about since 1999."

But the Laborers balked at backing Adams. "It's always been hard for our members to endorse their boss," said Local 483 Business Manager Richard Beetle.

Laborers represents city maintenance workers who repair and maintain sidewalks, sewers, streets, streetlights, and parking meters. Adams is in charge of all those bureaus. His campaign for "Safe, Sound & Green Streets" — a November ballot referral to vot-

ers — is applauded by Local 483, and it was with Adams' backing that the local won health insurance benefits for seasonal maintenance workers — maybe the first group of seasonal workers in the country to get such benefits.

But Adams has also been the target of several union complaints about contracting out bargaining unit work, including some meter repair work that the union says is supposed to be performed by city parking meter technicians. Consequently the Local 483 Executive Board split on whether to endorse him.

For City Council Position 1, Local 483 is backing Fritz, a member of the Oregon Nurses Association, partly on the strength of her 2006 run against Saltzman. Fritz failed to unseat Saltzman, but Beetle credits her for the appointment of a labor voice to the Portland Development Commission (PDC). After Fritz made that and other pro-union positions centerpieces of her 2006 campaign, Columbia-Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council Executive Secretary-Treasurer John Mohlis got appointed to the PDC, which had a long history of antagonism with local unions.

With so many candidates running, odds are slim that any will get more than 50 percent, so the top two vote-getters will likely face off in the November election. While AFSCME made no endorsement in the Position 1 race, Hester said it might come back to make an endorsement in the

general election.

For Position 2, Fish got the two unions' backing because of his understanding of union issues. Fish has spent much of his career as a labor lawyer representing workers in civil rights cases. He once successfully represented an AFSCME member at Multnomah County in an arbitration. He's run twice before for City Council, and had many union endorsements in 2004 when he lost to Adams.

A number of other unions have also weighed in on city races this year.

In the mayor's race, Adams is also endorsed by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901, the District Council of Laborers, National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82, Portland Association of Teachers, Service Employees Local 49, and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council (NOLC). And Adams, who has been a vocal opponent of a proposed Wal-Mart, has the endorsement of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the union most engaged in fighting the anti-union retailer.

Dozono, his opponent, has criticized Adams' stance toward Wal-Mart, saying it sends a bad message to the business community.

Dozono has the support of Carpenters Local 247 and 1388; Joe Baron, chair of the Metro-wide Endorsement Committee of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, said the union was looking for a business-

man who will manage city finances better.

In the race for City Council Position 1, Amanda Fritz is also endorsed by CWA Local 7901, NALC Branch 82, the Oregon Nurses Association, and Portland Association of Teachers.

Former union leader Mike Fahey is backed by the NOLC, Teamsters Joint Council No. 37, UFCW Local 555, the Portland Association of Teachers, and the Carpenters Council. Fahey is a

former financial secretary-treasurer of the Portland Metal Trades Council and a member of Pile Drivers, Divers and Shipwrights Local 2416.

For Position 2, Fish also has the support of NOLC, UFCW Local 555, IBEW Local 48, the Carpenters Council, the Teamsters Council, and the Portland Association of Teachers.

Middaugh is backed by CWA Local 7901.



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