

Building trades miffed at Metro for bypassing Shiprack

Building trades unions are miffed at the Metro Council for not appointing Bob Shiprack, recently retired executive secretary of the Oregon State Building Trades Council, to fill a vacant seat in District 6.

Councilors of the regional government voted 5-1 on Feb. 17 to have former Oregon governor Barbara Roberts complete the unexpired term of Robert Liberty. Liberty is a former director of the environmental group 1000 Friends of Oregon who resigned in mid-January to take another job.

Union officials aren't sore at Roberts, a labor-endorsed Democrat who was elected the state's first woman governor in 1991. They're more perturbed by how the process played out that led to her appointment.

"It's a bit disconcerting," Shiprack told the Labor Press a week after the vote. "After going through this process, I definitely have a clearer understanding of why it's so hard to get things done in this region."

Here is what happened:

Following Liberty's resignation, Metro solicited applications for the vacancy through Feb. 9. Shiprack, a former six-term state legislator, was one of the first to announce his candidacy. Another was Bob Stacey, Liberty's successor at 1000 Friends of Oregon (and his next door neighbor). In November, Stacey lost a close election for Metro president to labor-endorsed winner

Tom Hughes. Six others applied to fill the vacancy, including Roberts — who did so eight minutes before the filing deadline.

Prior to Roberts' filing, Shiprack and Stacey were considered the front-runners.

According to news reports posted by a Metro writer on Metro's website, Roberts was recruited for the position based on concerns that there might not be a majority (four votes) for any candidate. Roberts said "people connected with Metro" gauged her interest in the position; she wouldn't say who recruited her to apply.

Metro also reported that within minutes of applying ... Roberts called Stacey, who worked for her administration. They didn't connect right away, but when they talked, she laid out the dynamics of her application.

"The first phone call came at 8:30 in the morning, from a councilor who told her that none of the applicants for the vacancy — including me — could get majority support from the council," Stacey said in a post on his website.

"This councilor asked Gov. Roberts to apply so that the council logjam could be broken. During the day more councilors called her, urging her to fill out the application form and submit it by day's end."

Roberts filed at 4:52 p.m. on Feb. 9.

Stacey withdrew his application, but not before declaring his candidacy in 2012. Roberts said she did not intend to run for election.

Shiprack, meanwhile, was out garnering support from business groups and labor organizations. Campaigning on "job creation," he met with each councilor individually and hand-

billed the entire district, which includes portions of Southwest, Southeast and Northeast Portland. He said he received "strong signals" of support from some of the councilors, although no outright endorsements.

At a public hearing/job interview on Feb. 16, more than a dozen people testified on his behalf. Representatives of neighborhood associations and school districts also testified before Metro councilors that their Number One concern was job creation.

"Bob offered knowledge, a concrete plan on how to create jobs, and ways to make it better for workers," John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, told the Labor Press. "With their vote, Metro councilors basically told all of the out-of-work residents in District 6 'screw you.'"

"What can you say?" Shiprack said. "When you have both labor support and business support and that's not good enough, I now understand why we've lost 26,000 jobs in Multnomah County."

Shiprack expressed gratitude for the broad support he received in such a short period of time. "I really want to thank all the people who got behind me on this. The support was overwhelming."

Shiprack said he won't run for the seat in 2012, but he believes labor and business "should pay a lot of attention to this agency. They have a lot of say in the way things operate."

Metro is a regional government that serves more than 1.5 million residents in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties, and 25 cities in the Portland metropolitan area. Its responsibilities include urban growth boundary management, transportation planning, waste disposal planning and management, recycling, preservation of natural areas, long-range planning, habitat restoration, operating the zoo,

and venues for conventions, exhibits, and performing arts.

Roberts was sworn in March 1. She will serve the remainder of Liberty's term, which ends in January 2013. Three seats will be open in 2013, as term limits prohibit councilors Carl Hosticka and Rex Burkholder from running again.


The election will be held in May 2012, and if no candidate in their respective district receives more than 50 percent of the vote, the two highest vote getters in each district will advance to a run-off election that November.

(Editor's Note: Metro President Tom Hughes was the lone vote for Shiprack. Following the initial vote, Councilor Carl Hosticka moved for a unanimous vote and Hughes supported Roberts in the second round.

Roberts chaired Metro's charter review committee in the early 1990s. In 1992, in her second year as governor, voters approved the charter, which established Metro's role in regional land use planning. Roberts served as governor from 1991 to 1995 and as secretary of state from 1985 to 1991. She also served in the Oregon House of Representatives, as a Multnomah County commissioner and on the Parkrose School Board. Since leaving public office, she has served in leadership positions at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and in the Executive Leadership Institute at Portland State University's Hatfield School of Government.)

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