

AFSCME, labor council back water district recall effort

Front line employees of the Clackamas River Water (CRW) District and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council are supporting the recall of water district board members Patricia Holloway and Grafton Sterling. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 350 represents 30 non-managerial staff at CRW, which serves about 51,400 homes in Clackamas County, primarily in Oregon City.

The water district has been unable to accomplish even routine business since July, due to well-publicized in-fighting among its board members. Board members have been hostile to one another and openly yelled during meetings. In one instance, a board member took out a local newspaper ad to disparage fellow members.

The board of commissioners consists of five volunteers who reside within the water district and are elected by voters within the geographical boundaries of the district. The board hires and oversees the general manager, determines policies and regulations for the district, and approves the operating and capital budgets.

According to the Clackamas Review newspaper, in the past decade the water

district has gone through six general and interim managers and, because of recurring accusations of mismanagement, submitted to three expensive special audits and a half-dozen ethics and workplace complaints. A recent analysis by the Oregonian newspaper found that the water district racked up about \$1 million in legal bills in the past four years.

In mid-July, Mike Cardwell, who had been a commissioner since 2001, resigned, leaving the board with a 2-2 split.

"What began as an embarrassing media circus has now moved to the point of placing the district in serious jeopardy," said Kyle Yancey, president of the Local 350 sub-chapter that represents the district's workers. "The district was recently notified that they will lose their liability insurance at the beginning of next year. Without liability insurance, our members cannot perform their jobs. If this happens the district will be unable to operate and 51,000 people will be without water, including many commercial customers."

The union workers took a unanimous vote of "no confidence" in the entire board and called for the resignation of all its members. Two commissioners

— Tami Kehoe and Barbra Kemper — did so. Holloway and Sterling did not.

"These two board members have demonstrated they do not have the best interests of the CRW at heart," said Stacy Chamberlain, an Oregon AFSCME Council 75 union representative for Local 350. "The water district employees have called for their resignations, and it appears at this time that they have no intentions of resigning. We see no other option than to actively support the recall effort."

On Dec. 1, union members took part in a neighborhood canvass to gather signatures to get the recall on the ballot. Their goal is to collect 4,000 signatures by the end of January.

Meanwhile, three interim board members were appointed to the water district by the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners. [It took a court order to make that happen because Holloway and Sterling believed they were responsible for appointing interim board members. They actually appointed two board members during a six-hour special meeting they called Oct. 30. At that meeting they also fired the water district's attorney Dean Phillips and placed General Manager Lee Moore on administrative leave.]

The interim board members are Larry Sowa, a former county commissioner, Kenneth Humberston, and Hugh Kalani. They will serve until an election can be held.

"We hope these appointments begin to bring some much needed stability back to the board," said Yancey. "However, we are still calling for the immediate resignations of Holloway and Sterling, a necessary step towards restoring order and accountability on the CRW

board."

Chamberlain said the union and its members "want the new commissioners to understand we are very much behind the effort to turn things around and get Clackamas River Water back on track. We are the people who do the district's work, and no one wants things straightened out more than we do."

"That simply won't happen as long as Holloway and Sterling remain on the board," she said.

Donations of toys, cash sought for Yule party

Labor's Community Service Agency (LCSA) and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council are accepting donations of toys and cash for their 16th annual Presents from Partners Holiday Toy Party.

The event is for families of unemployed union members and includes a luncheon, a visit with Santa Claus, and lots of toys. The party will be Saturday, Dec. 15.

Donations can be dropped off at LCSA, 1125 SE Madison St., Suite 103B, Portland, or at the IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union, 9955 SE Washington St., Suite 100, Portland. Toys will be accepted now through Dec. 12.

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