

Ludlow, Smith have harsh words for Teamsters, AMR

Clackamas County Commissioner Tootie Smith had some harsh words for the Teamsters Union, and County Chair John Ludlow took a potshot at American Medical Response (AMR) during recent meetings of the Board of Commissioners. The two elected officials were on the losing end of a 3-2 vote to award a new multi-year ambulance service contract to AMR.

Approximately 140 paramedics, emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and dispatchers at AMR are members of Teamsters Local 223. They have provided ambulance service in Clackamas County since 1993.

The Board of Commissioners opened the contract last year, and AMR was the only company to submit a bid. Nonunion rival Metro West Ambulance had a proposal written, but missed the deadline to submit it.

Metro West also is a rival of the Teamsters Union. Local 223 tried unsuccessfully to organize its employees in 2012. The company, which provides ambulance service for Washington County, hired an expensive anti-union consultant who ran a classic "union avoidance" campaign. Several unfair labor practice charges were filed and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) determined that Metro West broke the law when it threatened, demoted and fired union supporters. The company was ordered to reinstate a terminated employee and reimburse him back pay with interest.

As AMR was the sole bidder, a majority of the Board of Commissioners

voted in May 2013 to accept AMR's bid and issue an intent to award the contract. The vote was 3-2, with Smith voting with the majority (Commissioners Paul Savas and Martha Schrader). Ludlow and Commissioner Jim Bernard were opposed. Clackamas County then posted AMR's bid on its website.

Shortly thereafter, Smith changed her vote to award the contract to AMR, saying she wanted to see more bids. The reversal outraged employees, the Teamsters Union, and Clackamas County residents, who flooded weekly board meetings to testify against the Board's action. The reversal also led to AMR filing a \$20 million tort claim against the County.

Arguing amongst commissioners went back and forth for months.

Finally, at a Feb. 4, 2014 Board meeting, Commissioner Bernard announced that after talking to his wife, he had a change of heart and now supported awarding the contract to AMR. He made a motion to do so, and Savas and Schrader concurred.

Ludlow and Smith, both first-term commissioners supported by the Tea Party, were furious.

Smith, who is running for Congress in the 5th District, faulted AMR employees, unions, and the media for the contract controversy. "I have tried to exercise due diligence and maintain our oversight responsibilities while resisting the environment of political pressure, judgment, accusations, and biased media scrutiny," she said.

"I'm really sad to say that over the weekend, I believe, the pressure was



On the losing side of a 3-2 vote to award a new ambulance contract to AMR, Clackamas County Chair John Ludlow and Commissioner Tootie Smith had some harsh words for the company and its workers' Teamsters union.

exerted so great by the Teamsters Unions with threats, accusations to family members and friends, of which I have received, that one of our board members has thrown in the towel.

"Although this may be a Pyrrhic victory for the Teamsters at the moment, you can just take it at that, because it will not stand."

She wasn't finished.

At a Feb. 6 Commission business meeting, Smith said that during the course of the contract award process she had received anonymous phone calls threatening to kill her, "wanting to off me. I take that personal."

"And I know some of the tactics of the Teamsters Unions have been very vicious," she continued. "I know people's tires who have been sliced, twice. And you're all sitting there acting inno-

cent and the people saying, 'oh, that didn't happen to us.'

"I intend, to my dying days on the commission, to shine a light on union tactics. Just because I disagree with you does not give anybody permission to do bodily harm or threaten any commissioner — because many commissioners have been threatened with what you can't even believe. I'm going to put a stop to that on my dying day."

Savas later responded, saying it was unfair for Smith to associate the Teamsters Union and AMR with any threats she might have received.

"I just think that without any evidence to show an association, somewhat casts an aspersion on that group, that I think is unfair. Especially when those folks are out there saving lives. I just think that — unless there's evidence that says otherwise — people are going to make linkages that I don't think will be fair."

Ludlow then took a potshot at all AMR emergency responders. He told a story of a man who approached him just last week, and said:

"Mr. Ludlow, if you were in need of help, I would put aside my personal feelings about you and I would give you the same outstanding service that we give everybody."

"That very day, on this floor, one of our employees went down," Ludlow continued. "I mean down to the ground writhing in pain, moaning. And American Medical Response was late. We have the tapes. We know everything about that, and how long it took them to get here."

Ludlow said the Fire District responded within six minutes, and that he came to the scene "even after the ambulance arrived and the man was still hurting badly and needing to be transported to a hospital."

"So, I hope that good service that was promised continues," he said scornfully. "And I pray to God I don't have a heart attack."

At the next Board of Commissioners meeting on Feb. 27, AMR employee and Teamsters Union steward Charles Savoie used the public comment period to go over the dispatch log with Ludlow, before asking that Ludlow apologize to

AMR and the responding paramedic "which were vehemently denigrated."

Savoie told commissioners that AMR was not late too the call to help the Clackamas County employee. The 9-1-1 call was for medical assistance for a person with non-traumatic back pain.

"Accordingly, an ambulance was dispatched Priority 2, no lights and sirens," Savoie said.

The closest ambulance was headed to the scene, Savoie continued, when it was diverted to another call that had been triaged as potentially life-threatening. The next closest ambulance was assigned to the call, and it arrived within 12 minutes, which is within the time frame established by the county.

"Therefore, the ambulance was not late, contrary to what Commissioner Ludlow so authoritatively stated," Savoie said, before asking for an apology.

"All I know, is I know the tapes Ludlow responded,

Ludlow stammered briefly, and responded:

"All I know is that — and I know the tapes and what time you got into the elevator, etcetera. I don't care about non-life-threatening. I've never seen, or I've rarely seen, anybody in that kind of agony. I don't care what the fire department said to you."

"I've said my piece about ambulance service and I'll say it again, I pray to God I don't have a heart attack. Because I saw a man writhing in pain, worse than I've ever seen, and I thought the response was late. I'll still stick with that. So you won't get an apology from me today."


Commissioner Savas said he also looked into Ludlow's allegation. Savas said there was a response and an assessment of the patient right away by the fire department. "I do know that they decided to stabilize the employee, and they took their time about how they approached it. So there was no need for immediate transport. The appropriate actions and activities occurred with no compromise."


"I don't know what compromise means," Ludlow retorted. "All I know is what 'late' means, and I'll still say it, that they were late."


(Editor's Note: In preparation for the competitive bidding process, AMR employees and the Teamsters agreed to open their collective bargaining agreement mid-contract — at which time they voted to forgo a 2 percent wage increase that was due in June 2013. Those wage concessions, along with concessions on profit and efficiencies gained in sub-contracts, allowed AMR to reduce its costs by 19 percent. The five-year, multi-million-dollar contract goes in effect May 1. After that, the Board can extend its terms for up to five additional years.


AMR's union contract with the Teamsters expires in June 2014. The sides are currently in bargaining.)


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