

AFSCME #88 backs Francesconi for Multnomah County chair

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

Former Portland City Commissioner Jim Francesconi won AFSCME Local 88's endorsement in his race for Multnomah County Chair Feb. 19. The endorsement came after Francesconi squared off against two-term county Commissioner Deborah Kafoury at a candidates forum for Local 88 members. Local 88 represents about 3,000 Multnomah County employees, and the candidates are vying to succeed Jeff Cogen, who resigned after exposure of an extramarital affair with a County employee.

Chances are, most voters don't know much about the government of Oregon's most populous county, but Local 88 members do. It's a \$1.5-billion-a-year operation with a broad portfolio of responsibilities: Not only bridges, libraries, courts, jails, and elections, but public health, animal control, restaurant inspections, property tax collection, policing and road maintenance in unincorporated areas, and services for seniors, the developmentally disabled and mentally ill, domestic violence survivors, addicts and ex-offenders. Whoever is elected chair will be responsible for all that, and will be the boss of Local 88 members' bosses.

After intensive candidate interviews, Local 88's volunteer Political Action Committee was evenly split over whether to endorse Francesconi or Kafoury. That left the decision wide open Feb. 19 at the union's monthly general membership meeting. Members packed into Oregon AFSCME's Portland office to hear Francesconi and Kafoury answer their written questions. [A third candidate — restaurant manager and Dominican immigrant Aquiles Montás — also took part in the candidates forum, but didn't get serious consideration for endorsement.]

In the members-only debate afterward over who to endorse, several Lo-



Jim Francesconi (standing), a former Portland city commissioner, and Deborah Kafoury, a two-term Multnomah County commissioner, squared off at a candidates forum Feb. 19 sponsored by Multnomah County Employees Local 88, an affiliate of AFSCME. Both are vying for the open seat at Multnomah County chair.

cal 88 members said they were impressed by Francesconi's self-presentation as a champion for minority opportunities and for Multnomah County's impoverished outer east side.

Members described Kafoury as a known quantity with a strong understanding of the County, and said she's always had a good relationship with Local 88.

But members had a hard time identifying any specific achievement during her time in office. Reelecting her would bring "more of the same," members said, whereas Francesconi would be more likely to shake things up.

Francesconi told the Labor Press he was deeply honored to get Local 88's endorsement. The race for chair is his first return to politics 10 years after he suffered a humiliating defeat in a race for Portland mayor. Francesconi was endorsed by AFSCME Local 189 and other unions in that 2004 campaign, but

got 38 percent of the vote in the general election — after outspending former police chief Tom Potter more than 15-to-1. The defeat came up at the Local 88 candidates forum when the candidates were asked to identify their biggest mistake.

"During the mayor's race, I took too much money from downtown interests," Francesconi said. "That wiped out 25 years of working in the community and created the impression that I only cared about them."

Francesconi spent 18 years representing plaintiffs in personal injury cases, including migrant farmworkers and public employees. At one time, now-labor-commissioner Brad Avakian was his law partner. In 1996, he outpolled former state representative Gail Shibley to win a seat on Portland City Council, and was re-elected in 2000. In 2002, Francesconi sponsored a living wage ordinance to improve wages and

benefits for janitors, security guards and parking attendants employed by City contractors, after a three-year campaign by Portland Jobs With Justice.

After losing the mayor's race, Francesconi joined the Haglund Kelley law firm and took personal injury and medical negligence cases. He also represented minority contractors and a pair of unions, Operating Engineers Local 701 and the Pacific Northwest District Council of Carpenters, in crafting a "community benefits agreement" endorsed by the Portland City Council, which sets out requirements that public construction projects use union la-

bor, minority contractors, and apprentices. The Carpenters have endorsed his bid for County chair. Local 701's endorsement interview was rescheduled to March 9 because of snow.

Kafoury, meanwhile, is backed by dozens of current and former city, county, and state elected leaders, and four labor organizations thus far: International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council, the International Longshore & Warehouse Union, and Oregon Nurses Association.

Unionists to bowl for Muscular Dystrophy Association on April 13

The 25th annual Labor Bowl Challenge for the Muscular Dystrophy Association will be held Sunday, April 13, at Sunset Lanes in Beaverton.

The Labor Bowl Challenge consists of four-person teams that compete for prizes. Money is raised through pledges and from a silent auction, and goes to buy wheelchairs and braces for children, as well as for research and summer camps.

Muscular dystrophy is a hereditary condition marked by a progressive weakening and wasting of the muscles over time.

Since its inception in 1989, union members have donated \$351,025.75 to MDA.

The event is coordinated by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82 and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

For more information, or to sign up and receive fundraising packets and instructions, call Jim Falvey, president of Letter Carriers Branch 82 at 503-493-

5903. To donate silent auction items, call NALC's MDA Coordinator Debby Burbank at 971-404-5384.

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