

# Unions split over who to back for Multnomah County chair

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

Local unions are split over who to back for Multnomah County chair this year. Deb Kafoury and Jim Francesconi each have union endorsements, and each has a public record with pluses and minuses from a labor perspective.

Francesconi served two terms on Portland City Council from 1996 to 2004, then returned to lawyering after losing a 2004 campaign for Portland mayor. Courting union support, he cites two principal achievements: A “living wage” ordinance at the City of Portland, and a “community benefits agreement” that City Council adopted in 2013 as a template for large City construction projects.

- The living wage ordinance, which Portland City Council passed unanimously in 1998, set a minimum wage of \$9.50 an hour for janitors, security guards and parking lot attendants employed by City contractors. Francesconi was its sponsor, but leaders of Portland Jobs with Justice, the group that led the living wage campaign, say working with him was a frustrating experience. Jobs with Justice wanted the ordinance to also include “neutrality” language to bar city contractors from opposing employee efforts to unionize, but Francesconi balked at that provision, and it was left out of the ordinance. Francesconi says he doesn’t remember that detail.

- The community benefits agreement, meanwhile, is a pledge by the City of Portland to use union construction workers — and women and minority workers and contractors — on City construction projects over \$15 million. Francesconi crafted the agreement as an attorney with the firm Haglund Kelley working for two unions: the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters and Operating Engineers Local 701. Francesconi says he’d like Multnomah County — and developers of a proposed convention center hotel — to adopt a similar agreement. But the agreement has been criticized by other construction unions, says Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council Executive Secretary Willy Myers. Minority- and women-owned businesses, which are supposed to get at least 20 percent of the work, may bring their nonunion “core” employees to projects. Also, the agreement says 18 percent of the work will be performed by minority workers, and 9 percent by women workers, but union hiring hall procedures, which are spelled out in collective bargaining agreements with employer groups, don’t usually permit members to be dispatched on the basis of race. Myers said the Building Trades Council is working with stakeholders on possible changes to the agreement to address such concerns.

Kafoury, meanwhile, was a two-term state representative from Northeast Portland, and then County commissioner for Southeast Portland, until she resigned in 2013 to run for County



**Jim Francesconi speaks at a candidates forum sponsored by AFSCME Local 88. Members, impressed by his focus on opportunities for minorities and low-income residents, voted to endorse him.**

Chair. To labor audiences, she touts her record in the Oregon House and her efforts at the County Commission to get funding for construction projects.

- Kafoury had a pro-union voting record in the Oregon House, as rated by the Oregon AFL-CIO. She says the legislative achievement she’s most proud was a fund to provide services for survivors of domestic violence. But as leader of the minority House Democrats in 2003, she backed a plan by then-governor John Kitzhaber to cut costs in the Public Employment Retirement System (PERS), at a time of significant state budget cuts. Some of the changes to PERS were later overturned by the Oregon Supreme Court. Kafoury says public sector unions may have been unhappy with her at the time, but the then-majority House Republicans wanted even bigger cuts to PERS.

- At the County, Kafoury used her legislative connections to help win state funding for the Sellwood Bridge replacement project, and later a project for a new County Courthouse. Francesconi has criticized both projects. He faults Kafoury for the Sellwood Bridge project being awarded to a nonunion out-of-state general contractor. But Oregon Building Trades Executive Secretary John Mohlis says that’s unfair: Kafoury wasn’t personally responsible for making the contract award, and she worked with fellow commissioner Judy Shiprack and then-chair Jeff Cogen to persuade the company to employ local union workers. As for the Courthouse project, Kafoury secured \$15 million in state funds, but Francesconi said the County doesn’t have the money for such a project, and he would prefer the County prioritize roads in eastern Multnomah County.

Kafoury was eager to propose a sick leave ordinance at Multnomah County when advocates approached her in 2012. But a legal opinion came back that such a regulation was outside the County’s charter, so instead, she testified in support of an ordinance at the

City of Portland.

If elected, Kafoury pledges to improve the County’s record on its current responsibilities. Francesconi says he wants to refocus County attention on jobs.

Francesconi’s campaign slogan is “It’s all about jobs.” His six-page Jobs Plan consists of “partnering” with other public and private sector entities. He wants to partner with job-training institutions to develop joint training programs. He’ll ask the state to increase the minimum wage. And he will ask the county’s 50 largest employers to



**Deborah Kafoury attends groundbreaking for the union-funded Lloyd District Commons residential complex. She is pictured talking with building trades officials Willy Myers and John Mohlis.**

add 10 new entry-level jobs each. Francesconi pledges to “re-deploy” three existing employees in the chair’s office to create a County Chair’s Office of Economic Development and Equality, a primary focus of which will be “how to assist the cities of Gresham, Troutdale, Fairview and Wood Village in their economic development efforts.”

The Jobs Plan also calls for the County (and the City of Portland and Portland Public Schools) to require that on public works projects, 20 percent of all project hours within each construction trade be performed by “local” res-

idents, and 10 percent by “disadvantaged” workers. That would increase over seven years to 50 percent and 25 percent respectively.

Francesconi also said — in a candidate questionnaire for the Service Employees International Union — that the County should require that all buildings it rents or owns are served by union-represented janitors and security guards, and he pledged to work with SEIU and AFSCME to assist in unionizing non-profit county contractors that

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