

At BOLI, a labor champion takes the reins

By Don McIntosh

SALEM — In a House chamber packed with union officers and other well-wishers, Val Hoyle raised her right hand and took the oath of office Jan. 7 as Oregon labor commissioner.

“I am fundamentally committed to fulfilling this office in every way,” Hoyle declared, calling it “the most important job nobody has ever heard of.”

The Oregon Labor Commissioner is a statewide elected office that oversees the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), the state agency that enforces wage-and-hour and civil rights laws, sets the prevailing wage on public construction projects, and oversees state-registered apprenticeship training programs.

“This is going to be good for us,” said Matt Eleazer, president of Bricklayers Local 1, one of the dozens of union leaders who turned out to the event. “She stands up for workers rights, and she knows what’s right. She’s been a champion for workers her whole life.”

Boyle has had lifelong ties to the union movement. Her grandfather was active in the New York Laborers union, and her father



On the floor of the Oregon House, Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum administers the oath of office to Oregon Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle.

Dan Toomey was a firefighter and the president of Fire Fighters Local 789 in Nashua, New Hampshire. [In a happy coincidence, Toomey was sworn in the same day to a seat in the New Hampshire House of Representatives.] In college she worked as a lobbyist for Massachusetts building trades unions. And during seven years as an Oregon state representative from Eugene, she earned accolades from labor for

her work; the Oregon AFL-CIO named her “Legislator of the Year” in 2011.

Hoyle also named several current and former union staffers to her executive team. Her deputy commissioner will be Duke Shepard, who was Oregon AFL-CIO political director from 2006 to 2010, and then served as labor policy adviser to Oregon governor John Kitzhaber from 2011 to 2014. And her executive services



“We’re really excited to have someone at BOLI who comes from labor,” said Oregon Building Trades Executive Secretary Robert Camarillo (right), who witnessed Hoyle’s swearing in. “Having her there gives us confidence that workers safety and rights are going to be important.”

director is Sabrina Balderama, who was the membership coordinator for the Portland State University branch of the American Association of University Professors. Hoyle is conducting nationwide searches for administrators of BOLI’s Civil Rights and Wage and Hour divisions.

Only three other states have an elected labor commissioner — Georgia, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. In the rest of the

country, state labor and civil rights laws are enforced by agencies directed by administrators appointed by the governor.

PAST LABOR COMMISSIONERS

Brad Avakian 2008-2018
Dan Gardner 2003-2008
Jack Roberts 1995-2003
Mary Wendy Roberts 1979-1995
Bill Stevenson 1975-1978
Norman Nilson 1955-1974

Trump labor bureau appointments: Still vacant

At the Labor Department, half the top jobs remain unfilled.

Donald Trump promised to hire only the “best people” to head government agencies, but two years into his four-year term, as many as a third to half of the federal agency executive positions he’s supposed to appoint are vacant, either because they resigned, were never confirmed by the Republican-led Senate, or were never nominated to begin with. The nonprofit group Partnership for Public Service has been keeping tabs on key executive branch nominations that require Senate confirmation — including Cabinet secretaries, deputy and assistant secretaries, chief financial officers, general counsels, and agency heads. Of the roughly 700 positions they’ve been tracking, only 433 have been confirmed.

And within the Department of Labor, fully half of the executive-appointed positions are still vacant two years in. Judging by the people Trump nominated to those posts, that might be for the best.

At the close of 2018, with the 115th Congress at an end, all pending nominations were returned to the president. He’ll now have to decide whether to renominate



these folks. As of mid-January, none of the following had been re-nominated.

OSHA: Scott Mugno To head the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Trump nominated Scott Mugno, a former FedEx executive with a career-long history of opposing new OSHA regulations. At a January 2018 confirmation hearing, Mugno couldn’t name a single new OSHA rule he had supported during his two decades as safety chief at FedEx. The Republican-led committee

approved him anyway, but his nomination never came up for a vote by the full Senate.

Wage and Hour Division: Cheryl Stanton The Labor Department’s Wage and Hour Division is responsible for regulating and enforcing minimum wage, overtime, and family leave requirements, as well as prevailing wage laws for construction employees on federal contracts. To lead it, Trump nominated Cheryl Marie Stanton, a South Carolina workforce agency executive and member of the board of

the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce. Stanton formerly clerked for federal judge Samuel Alito (the labor foe who later became Supreme Court justice and wrote the anti-union Janus decision.) She also worked as a White House lawyer for President George W. Bush, serving as the administration’s liaison to the Labor Department and the National Labor Relations Board. Her nomination passed out of the Senate Health, Labor and Pensions Committee in January 2018, but never got a Senate floor vote.

Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation: Gordon Hartogensis To head the federal government’s pension insurance agency, Trump nominated Gordon Hartogensis, a wealthy private investor and Republican donor with no experience in government or pension fund management. Hartogensis, 48, retired at age 29. He has spent the last seven years managing his family’s money. He’s also married to Grace Chao, the sister of Trump’s Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, and is thus the brother-in-law of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky). spends most of his time now managing his family’s money.

Employment and Training Administration: John Pallasch To head the agency in charge of job training and apprenticeships, Trump nominated John Pallasch, a Kentucky state workforce director and former Bush Jr. administration Labor Department official who also worked for anti-union education reformer Michelle Rhee.