

# PortlandTribune

## Union has toppled chief before

*As no-confidence vote looms, officers hope to repeat 1981 feat*

BY JIM REDDEN

*The Portland Tribune, Nov 26, 2009*

**The last time the police union authorized a no-confidence vote on a Portland police chief and police commissioner, it got what it wanted — a new chief and a new commissioner.**

That was in 1981, when Chief Bruce Baker resigned and Mayor Frank Ivancie took the Portland Police Bureau from Commissioner Charles Jordan.

There is no guarantee the same thing will happen this time, however — despite the large and loud protest sponsored by the Portland Police Association on Tuesday. In the wake of the demonstration, the City Council closed ranks behind Chief Rosie Sizer and Commissioner Dan Saltzman.

Hundreds of police officers, family members and supporters rallied outside City Hall to press the no-confidence vote that the union has called on Sizer and Saltzman. Speaking to the cheering crowd, Sgt. Scott Westerman, union president, accused the chief and commissioner of not supporting officers who follow bureau policies, but find themselves in controversial situations.

The union executive board authorized the vote after Saltzman suspended Officer Christopher Humphreys for shooting a 12-year-old girl in the leg with a beanbag round after the girl resisted arrest. Saltzman had previously suspended Humphreys for not requiring that James Chasse be taken directly to a hospital after being arrested three years ago. Chasse died of injuries sustained during the arrest after first being driven to the Justice Center jail.

“This is not about a single incident, a single officer, a single chief or a single commissioner. It is about public safety,” said Westerman, who insists Humphreys followed bureau policies in both cases and was punished by Saltzman for political reasons.

The no-confidence vote is under way and the results will be announced on Nov. 30. But even as Tuesday’s rally was taking place, Saltzman released a statement calling Sizer a “great chief and civic leader.” Before the vote was authorized, Mayor Sam Adams and Commissioner Randy Leonard expressed support for Saltzman’s authority to suspend Humphreys. Following the protest, commissioners Nick Fish and Amanda Fritz joined their fellow commissioners in supporting Sizer and Saltzman.

Despite those developments, there still are remarkable similarities today to the events that led to the last no-confidence vote in 1981. After Adams took office in January, he broke with tradition and gave the bureau to Saltzman. Twenty-eight years ago, Ivancie was not in charge of the bureau, either. Instead, he had left it with Jordan, who had been assigned it by previous Mayor Neil Goldschmidt.

Back then, the chief was Bruce Baker, who had been appointed by Goldschmidt. Sizer also was appointed by a previous mayor — Tom Potter.

In April, four months after Ivancie took office, two young police officers created a public controversy by dumping four dead possums at a black-owned Northeast restaurant called the Burger Barn. Although the officers said they were protesting frequent police calls to the restaurant, the Black United Front saw the incident as racist and led a large protest march on City Hall.



L.E. BASKOW / TRIBUNE PHOTO

Police union President Scott Westerman speaks passionately as members of the Portland Police Association rally in support of Officer Chris Humphreys outside City Hall on Tuesday.

Baker, who resigned shortly after the results were announced. When Jordan said that he was going to conduct a national search for a replacement, Ivancie took the bureau from him in June and promoted Capt. Ron Still to chief.



CITY OF PORTLAND PHOTO • Mayor Neil Goldschmidt observes as City Auditor George Yerkovich swears in Police Chief Bruce Baker on Jan. 14, 1974. Baker eventually resigned after a union vote of no confidence.

### How will chief respond?

It is hard to predict how Sizer will react to the no-confidence vote if it goes against her. So far, she has not directly commented on it. Other factors may have influenced Baker's decision to step down when he did, including his health — he had undergone open heart surgery the previous year. And a 190-page report on misconduct among bureau drug and vice officers had just been released.

An arbitrator later reinstated the officers and gave them 30-day unpaid suspensions. Today, Jordan is a retired parks administrator serving on the board of The Conservation Fund, a national preservation organization. Although he is aware of the current police protest, Jordan says he does not know enough details to have an opinion on it.

“What we went through, we went through, but I'm so busy with other things that I don't have an opinion about who's right or wrong now,” Jordan says.

A longtime local political commentator, Russ Dondero, says the Portland Police Association is doing what it is suppose to do — rallying the troops in a time of crisis.

“It's a union and it reflects the thinking of its members. It's not an objective point of view,” says Dondero, a political science professor emeritus at Pacific University and former adjunct professor at the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University.

Dondero has watched the union clash repeatedly with chiefs and the City Council since moving to Portland. Most of the confrontations occurred after officers did something that segments of the public considered to be use of excessive force.

“Portland police have a pattern of perceived excessive force, and I use the word perceived because I am not a law enforcement expert,” Dondero says. “But in politics, perception is reality.”

As Dondero sees it, the repeated confrontations have created the impression that the union is not accountable to the council or the public.

“The police union has come to be seen as a force of its own,” Dondero says. “It's playing a game of political chess. It's not about who's right and wrong.”

bureau. Westerman and other union officials called for Adams to resign in January, after he admitted lying about having sex with an 18-year-old.

---

### **Gang party led to incident**

The most recent incident involving Humphreys began on 10:47 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 14. Humphreys and other officers were called to assist with a large party, involving known gang members, that had broken up near the Northeast 162nd Avenue MAX station. Information provided to the officer said that a gun had been recovered in the area.

When Humphreys and Officer Aaron Dauchy arrived on the scene, Dauchy recognized a girl who had been excluded from the transit system getting on a westbound MAX train. The two officers followed the train to the 148th Avenue station, where Dauchy recognized and arrested, without incident, a juvenile male he knew to be excluded from the transit system.

When Dauchy tried to arrest the girl, however, she allegedly struck him in the face and began struggling. The two fell to the platform, where the girl continued to fight back. Humphreys, who was carrying a shotgun with 1.4-ounce beanbag rounds, then shot the girl once in the leg. She immediately stopped resisting and was arrested.

The incident on the platform was captured by a TriMet security camera. When Sizer announced Humphreys' suspension on Nov. 19, the bureau released the tape. But the bureau has not released the police report on the incident, because it involves a juvenile. Westerman has seen the report and says it exonerates Humphreys — revealing, among other things, that the girl's mother apologized for her daughter's behavior.

The Albina Ministerial Alliance held a press conference on Wednesday afternoon to criticize the beanbag shooting and what it called other examples of use of excessive force by Portland police.

— *Jim Redden*

---

Copyright 2009 Pamplin Media Group, 6605 S.E. Lake Road, Portland, OR 97222 • 503-226-6397