

High-profile disputes divide Portland City Hall veterans

By [Janie Har, The Oregonian](#)

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Torsten Kjellstrand/The Oregonian

Portland City Commissioners Randy Leonard (left) and Dan Saltzman spent most of October sniping at each other in public or not talking in private. Their political and personal friendship goes back 16 years, when Saltzman helped elect Leonard to the state Senate. Sixteen years ago, a Multnomah County commissioner cast the crucial vote that would launch the political career of an untested union boss.

City commissioners

Leonard file

Age: 57

Home: Southeast Portland

Education: Portland State University

Previous occupation: Firefighter

Elected: Portland City Council, since 2002; Oregon Legislature, 1993-2002

Bureaus: Water, Development Services, Fire

Saltzman file

Age: 55

Home: Southwest Portland

Education: Cornell University; Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Previous occupation: Engineer

Elected: Portland City Council, since 1999; Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, 1993-99

Bureaus: Police, Environmental Services, Children's Levy

The commissioner was Dan Saltzman, and the man he backed was Randy Leonard. Through separate routes they would both wind up on the [Portland City Council](#), the measured engineer and the reactive firefighter who for all their apparent differences shared one trait: an unerring belief in their rightness.

That confidence has resulted in a rocky October for the two veterans of City Hall. Saltzman and Leonard have argued publicly over whether to buy a rescue boat, how best to guard Portland's reservoirs and what to do with the Police Bureau in the wake of the death of James P. Chasse Jr.

Their rift has co-opted attention from the rest of council, delayed decisions and in the case of Chasse, whose family has filed a federal lawsuit against the city, could put Portland at greater liability.

"Both Dan and Randy can be stubborn. They're both passionate," said Jeff Cogen, a Multnomah County commissioner who once served as Saltzman's aide.

"They have had a history of getting into clashes; they also have a history of getting over it."

But this time the feuding has lasted longer than usual. The two men stopped speaking weeks ago, after Leonard walked out -- or stormed out, depending on perspective -- of Saltzman's office Oct. 22.

Complicating matters, Leonard oversees the Water Bureau, which Saltzman supervised before him. Saltzman oversees the Portland Police Bureau, which Leonard would have supervised had Police Chief Rosie Sizer not balked. Portland Mayor Sam Adams, who heads the five-member council and holds the traditional role of peacemaker, has had his own problems.

And while Leonard disputes that a pending divorce has anything to do with his calling out Saltzman, he will acknowledge this:

"I've learned it is more important than ever for me to be forthright and honest in all of my interactions, and to have that same expectation of others toward me," he said.

In the nearly seven years they've served together on the council, the two men have parted ways on major issues such as pulling out of the FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Force in 2005 and whether UV or sand filtering is the best method to treat the city's drinking water.

But on a council as left-leaning as Portland's, they have agreed more often than not. They've even tackled contentious issues together, such as how to reform the disability system for firefighters and cops.

Saltzman was elected to the City Council in 1998, making him the longest-serving member of the current board. His big issues have been sustainability and the children's levy, which voters approved in 2002 and in 2008 for after-school, mentoring and other children's programs.

Leonard was elected to the council in 2002 after nearly a decade in the Legislature. He is the second most senior person on the board with a focus on customer service and public safety. He has an unusual knack for grabbing headlines, whether it's for banning duct tape at the Rose Festival parade or spray paint from store shelves.

Leonard also wears his heart on his sleeve, which Saltzman does rarely. But parking garage owner Greg Goodman says the two are similar in that "what you see is what you get" with them.

"They have very different styles but you always know where both of them stand on an issue," Goodman said.

"They're literally not talking?"

No, they are not, although their chiefs of staff, Ty Kovatch and Brendan Finn, continue to communicate.

The chronology of the freeze is as follows: On Oct. 7, Leonard requested council money to fund a \$367,000 high-speed fire rescue boat.

Saltzman criticized the request as an "emotional" response to the case of a mother accused of throwing her two children off the Sellwood Bridge. Saltzman was the lone no vote.

A week later, Leonard came out with a plan to arm water security guards. Saltzman, who had used private security when he was water commissioner, called Leonard's plan unnecessary, possibly dangerous and way too hurried.

"I'm sure we'll have a good reason from Randy why it has to be done right now," Saltzman said at the time.

On Oct. 22, the two commissioners met for their regular check-in. Leonard said he gave Saltzman a detailed account of his frustration over the rescue boat debate. He said he felt Saltzman had questioned his motives. Leonard was also unhappy with Saltzman's comments earlier this year likening him a bully for threatening to condemn the "Made in Oregon" sign.

Saltzman's response, according to Leonard:

"He sat back and he said, 'I'm going to call things as I see them, and I intend to continue criticizing things I don't think are appropriate.'"

Leonard said that's when he stood up, wrapped up the remainder of his sandwich, picked up his juice and left.

"I thought it was the most responsible thing to do at that point, given my loyalty to him for initiating my political career."

It didn't stop there.

A week after that, Saltzman released his alternatives to Leonard's Water Bureau security plans in a memo circulated to press and fellow commissioners. Leonard, at that week's City Council meeting, blasted the police and the city in their response to Chasse's death, saying that he could no longer keep his mouth shut.

Chasse, 42, died of massive internal injuries while in police custody in 2006. His death has sparked outrage in the mental health and homeless advocacy communities.

In the last week, Saltzman has steadfastly declined requests to talk about Leonard. When approached outside City Hall, he didn't say much.

"I don't want to feed the fire of Dan and Randy," Saltzman said. "I just want to focus on the issues."

But he has maintained that as a commissioner, he has the right and responsibility to ask questions on any policy matter.

"Randy and I? People say we're too much alike," Saltzman said. "We have our points, and tend to believe we're right."

The other council members aren't talking.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz declined to comment, sticking to a policy of not discussing her colleagues' behavior. Commissioner Nick Fish did the same.

Adams was in Japan on a trade mission all last week.

Last week also saw one of the briefest meetings on record, clocking in at 45 minutes. Leonard announced a donation to the Oregon Food Bank and Saltzman announced his "treebate" program. There were no outbursts.

Someone suggested that Saltzman should be replicated for his good work, prompting Leonard to quip: "I can only handle one Dan. I would resign today if there were 100 Dans."

Former Gov. Barbara Roberts said she doesn't see the two men as being alike. But she understands why they would get worked up over hot-button issues such as firearms and police shootings.

"If something is that important to you, you step forward," she said. "Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing."

In 1993, her husband, Frank Roberts, resigned his seat in the Oregon Senate, citing his poor health. Leonard was one of three finalists, but he didn't think he had the votes on the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners to clinch the nomination.

What he didn't know was that Saltzman hadn't made up his mind. In typical Saltzman style, he was going to wait until he had heard from all three candidates.

Saltzman voted for the person with the best speech. That was Leonard. The final vote was 3-2.

Leonard reminded him of that on Sept. 23.

Saltzman responded, "I've never regretted it since."

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