

# north shore news

## LAUTENS: Metro gorillas made monkeys of the rest

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The fix is in. As always. I just keep hoping it gets a little more artistic. I am always disappointed.

The waltz orchestrated by a Gang of Three — stacking the deck as high as possible to grease the Yes vote on the regional transportation improvement plan — was all sour notes.

First step, ousting District of North Vancouver Mayor Richard Walton as chair of the Metro mayors' council.

Walton had held that office for the last four years. One of the most decent, widely respected municipal politicians of our time, Walton was acclaimed in November's elections.

He supported, and still supports, the Yes vote. But Walton doesn't have the back-alley, go-for-the-jugular instincts carefully hidden from public view by most political infighting. In an interview,

I used all my treacherous journalistic tricks to get Walton to reveal a little perfectly human bitterness about being replaced. Failed.

To shove Walton, Port Coquitlam Mayor Greg Moore pushed the 23-municipality mayors' council for a weighted vote to select the chair and vice-chair — meaning jettisoning the one-municipality, one-vote model.

This weighted vote resembled George Orwell's Animal Farm, where some animals were more equal than others.

Lo, the "more equal" animals obviously were the City of Vancouver and the City of Surrey. Metro's two population gorillas, given more vote power than the 21 others collectively, thus reduced the rest to sad little chattering monkeys, maybe having fun hurling feces, as monkeys tend to do, but far too low to reach the top bananas.

Next waltz-time step: Gregor Robertson, Vancouver's socialist mayor with the looks of a matinee idol and widely believed to have a brain to match, was nominated for chair by Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner, the third of the Gang of Three, ensuring Robertson's victory.

Hepner in turn was cosily nominated for vice-chair by — wait for it — Moore, ousting Delta Mayor Lois Jackson. Jackson was the nominee of Maple Ridge's Nicole Read, one of the three Metro mayors opposing the transportation package set for referendum in March.

If politics still had the legendary smoke-filled backrooms, this one would have reeked of ten-cent El Stinkos.

Robertson — "Mayor Moonbeam" to CKNW's Bruce Allen, Vancouver's last remaining rude guy among politically correct media pantywaists — didn't exactly win a nomination for Gracious in Victory Award of the Year after Walton's calculated ouster.

"This is about ramping up our campaign and making sure we get strong support," Robertson bluntly said, quoted by Vancouver Sun reporter Kelly Sinoski.

For those who missed it, he hit the immodesty button harder: "I felt it was important to ensure Vancouver was represented as well as bring my campaign expertise to the region." Who let this braggart into the room?

The other day at the Red Lion, West Vancouver Mayor Michael Smith, over a (shudder) Diet Coke — he's engaged in a weight-reduction program — went over his reasons for supporting a No vote on the referendum.

High on Smith's list is the sheer complexity of the \$7.5-billion 10-year transit and transportation package. He scorns TransLink's impenetrable unaccountability, notorious waste and swollen payrolls.

Smith apparently is less likely these days to cite the parochial. As in, what's in it for rich West Vancouver? Answer: Throw in plenty (\$), get back little.

The naturally conservative Smith smiles at joining the three-mayor No faction alongside Burnaby's Derek Corrigan, Metro's most truculently left-wing — and rather adorable — mayor. Smith quotes the old adage: "Politics makes strange bedfellows."

Put aside, for another day, whether the bulging transportation plan and added sales tax are a good, indeed best, idea: The point is that the Yes side quickly fouled its own nest with its backroom machinations. Voters have a funny way of punishing an establishment crudely trying to swift one past them.

And a footnote regarding Walton: He's recently been knocked for supposed multiple conflicts of interest — as mayor, Metro regional representative, etc. Especially TransLink board member.

For once, pity the politicians: Bureaucracies that exclude them are pronounced undemocratic, but if given chairs at the table the appointed politicians are stained by this bizarre interpretation of conflict — which would sweep out every MP, MLA, and councillor named to a library board, everyone but a saint in a cave. So, damned if they do, damned if they don't.

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The Paris bakeries can't bake enough French loaves to match the crust of MLA Jenny Kwan in aiming to "move forward" from Victoria to Ottawa.

She took almost \$35,000 in family trips to Disneyland, Britain and Vienna, billed by her then-husband to the supposedly do-good Portland Hotel Society.

Strange how politicians dedicated to the public business can't detect swill right under their snouts. Not even a "dear, can we really afford it?"

Caught out, Kwan paid back the money. The "issue has been dealt with." Any politician with this much crust should be toast.

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The "solution" to the dilemma is that the council representatives (the mayors) should have retained their respective hats and voted in accordance to the wishes of their respective council and residents - as they are required to do by regulations. - cjk