



Toni Atkins Named First Woman President Pro Tempore Of State Senate

by Rusty Selix

This Is Normally a Very Quiet Time--But Not This Year.

December is ordinarily a very quiet month in Sacramento. There's only about two weeks of work activity followed by vacation for just about all those around the state Capitol. This break in activity prepares all of us for the very hectic pace that starts in January.

This year is very different in so many ways. Time magazine, which I guess is only relevant to those of us over 50 named five women who came forward to tell their stories of sexual assault in the workplace as "Person of the Year".

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Though she was the leading candidate all along, it's not a coincidence that this was the month the state Senate chose Senator Toni Atkins, Democrat from San Diego, to serve as the next President Pro Tempore. She succeeds Kevin de Leon who is termed out in 2018 and was preceded by Darrell Steinberg who served as the President Pro Tempore from 2009 through 2014. Senator Atkins will be the first woman to lead this office and, the first person to have served both as Speaker of the assembly and President Pro Tempore of the Senate; the two most powerful positions in the state legislature.

She is someone who has shown a great deal of interest in our issues with a focus on homelessness, somewhat similar to that of Darrell Steinberg. However, very clearly, housing is her greatest passion and her most significant legislation was the creation of a permanent funding source for housing through a fee on recording of real estate transaction documents. Senator Atkins will be a friend to our community especially if we can show how investments in behavioral health prevent homelessness and help those who have become homeless. With our priorities aligned, we will gain greater support from her in her new role. But for now, her focus and that of the entire legislature has to be on sexual assault in the workplace.

The Year of Workplace Sexual Assault Reaches the State Capital with Two Legislators Resigning

This is very clearly the biggest public policy issue for 2018. Two Los Angeles Democratic members of the California legislature, Raúl Bocanegra and Matt Dababneh, have both resigned within the last month due to allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior. I have been a lobbyist in the state capital for 40 years. During that time, there have of course been scandals such as affairs and other inappropriate relationships between members of the legislature and staff and/or lobbyists. No doubt they have gone on for a long time, but the women who experienced them have not felt safe to talk about what happened to them until now. Indeed, some of the stories from the past showed that the few women who did come forward may have received a modest financial settlement but then lost their opportunity to continue their career at the Capitol while legislators who were the perpetrators went unpunished.

The Legislature created a special committee to deal with this issue and has held an initial public hearing. This is a good start and begins the process to make members of the legislature, senior staff, and others



in positions of power accountable for their actions. It also makes it clear that this type of behavior (aside from being bizarre and abhorrent) will not be tolerated any longer.

The mental health impact on the victims must be part of the conversation if we are to make significant progress in addressing sexual misconduct in the workplace. The harm that these instances have caused and continue to cause must be addressed to draw attention to unacceptable acts, improve mental wellness, and promote emotional safety in the workplace.

This is such a new topic for us and we will share further developments as we become aware of them.