

A top Teamster splits with Hoffa



• Longtime Twin Cities labor leader Tom Keegel dropped out of the union's leadership campaign after running three times as Hoffa's No. 2 man.

By MIKE HUGHLETT • mhughlett@startribune.com

Veteran Twin Cities labor leader Tom Keegel has been at James P. Hoffa's side in the Teamsters union for 12 years.

The Hoffa-Keegel ticket — with Hoffa as president and Keegel as the No. 2 man — has won three elections and was gearing up for the 2011 campaign for leadership of the giant union.

But earlier this month, Keegel abruptly announced his impending retirement and his departure from the 2011 Hoffa ticket, questioning the direction of the union in a letter circulated to the union's leadership.

It marked the second recent outcropping of dissatisfaction among longtime — and high-ranking — Teamster supporters of Hoffa.

In May, Green Bay Teamsters leader Fred Gegare, a member of the union's executive board, announced he would challenge Hoffa in the 2011 election for president. At the time, he criticized Hoffa for surrounding himself with appointees who weren't elected by Teamster members.

"Hoffa is listening to the wrong people," Gegare said in an interview. "He's not listening to those who brought him to the dance, the [union] locals."

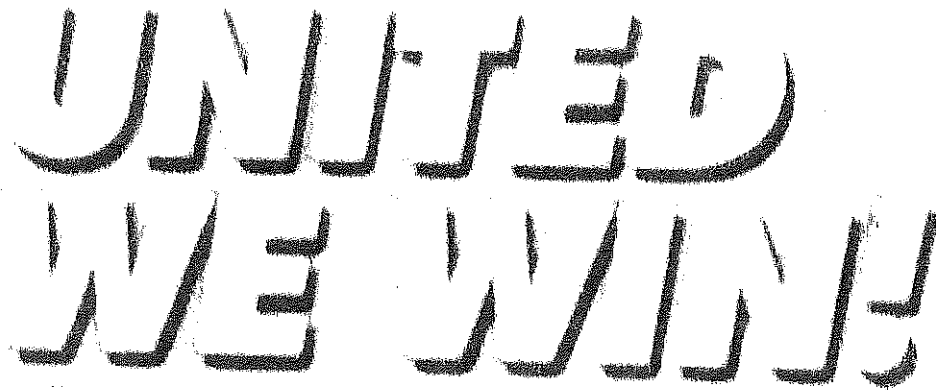
Then, this month, Keegel announced in a letter to the union's general executive board that he would retire when his term ends, and that he was dropping out of a 2011 campaign that was already well underway.

In the letter, Keegel stated that the union "should be run by the elected Teamster leaders in whom the members have placed their trust, not by outsiders or anyone else."

"Likewise, our 2011 election campaign should be directed by elected Teamster leaders, and not individuals over whom we have no control," he wrote. "The repeated election rule violations must stop."

Keegel, the son of a Teamster, has been a member of the union for more than 50 years.

Teamsters continues on D2 ▶



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Tom Keegel, left, stood with Teamsters President James P. Hoffa in 1999 when Hoffa announced a new contract with auto dealerships. Now Keegel is retiring and questioning the union's direction.

« I DO NOT CLAIM TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, BUT I DO KNOW THAT CONTINUING DOWN THE SAME ROAD AS THE [UNION] HAS TRAVELED FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS WILL NOT LEAD US OUT OF OUR PRESENT DIFFICULTIES OR HELP US AVOID THE PROBLEMS YET TO COME. » Tom Keegel



Top Twin Cities Teamster Keegel leaves Hoffa ticket

◀ TEAMSTERS FROM D1

He started out as a Teamster truck driver in 1959 and became a full-time union officer in 1978, eventually becoming head of Teamsters Local 544. That local merged in 1998 with Local 120, which Keegel then ran before Hoffa picked him as a running mate. He's since served as the union's general secretary-treasurer.

Keegel declined to be interviewed to elaborate on his letter.

Bret Caldwell, the Teamsters communications director, said "the leadership of the union is all elected," but he declined to comment further on Keegel's letter.

A Hoffa campaign official declined to comment on either Keegel's or Gegare's criticisms. Keegel has been replaced on the Hoffa ticket with

Ken Hall, an international vice president from West Virginia.

Brad Slawson Sr., another national Teamsters leader from the Twin Cities, is running on Gegare's slate for vice president at large, also breaking with Hoffa. Slawson, who didn't return calls for comment, is secretary-treasurer of Blaine-based Teamsters Local 120 and a member of the international union's 26-member general executive board.

In his letter, Keegel said he would be speaking to Teamster members in the coming months about how the union can meet its challenges. "I do not claim to have all the an-

swers, but I do know that continuing down the same road as the [union] has traveled for the last few years will not lead us out of our present difficulties or help us avoid the problems yet to come."

Keegel's letter was obtained by the group Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and posted on its website along with an article entitled "Keegel Distances Himself from Hoffa." TDU is a reform group that is typically critical of Hoffa's administration. It has not yet endorsed any candidate for the 2011 election.

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