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Central Point Republican is minority whip now

By SANNE SPECHT

In the wake of the Republicans' loss of control of the Oregon House in this week's election, State Rep. Dennis Richardson has shifted jobs.

The Central Point Republican traded in his former position as Republican speaker pro-tem to become the Republican minority whip for the 2007 legislative session. The selection of Richardson by his fellow House Republicans puts him second in command behind minority leader Rep. Wayne Scott of Canby.

Acknowledging the majority of the country voted for Democratic candidates across the nation, Richardson said Tuesday's general election was "a vote against Republican leadership in Washington (D.C.) that has reverberated to the Oregon coast."

"I think that the shift in majority is a consequence of disgust citizens feel with what is going on in Washington, D.C.," he said.

Richardson noted Oregon House Republicans held onto 29 seats even as the Democrats gained a slim majority with 31 seats. That's not exactly a sweeping mandate, Richardson said. "They have to work closely with us and we have to work closely with them or we have gridlock," said Richardson.

Having the majority in the Senate, House and governorship gives Democrats the opportunity to "see if they can perform," he said.

Richardson said he expects it will take House Democrats some time to get their agenda in order "because they haven't been expecting to be in the majority."

"I think Tuesday night was a shock for Republicans and Democrats," Richardson said.

Richardson said he hopes to see an end to partisan nastiness in Salem.

"There is too much political bickering in the Legislature," said Richardson. "We can be obstructionist or work with the majority."

Richardson promised to work closely with the new Democratic majority on health care, education and economic issues.

"The Democrats are the lieutenants of Gov. Kulongoski and we are the loyal opposition. But we will all work for the betterment of Oregon."

In addition to electing Richardson minority whip and Scott as minority leader, the caucus selected Rep. Bruce Hanna of Roseburg as deputy minority leader and Rep. Gene Whisnant of Bend as deputy minority whip.

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