

Thompson fails to show

Crews remove personal effects from office space

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CHARLESTON — Kevin Maynus thinks Ron Thompson watchers may have better luck catching a glimpse of the legendary Bigfoot than spying the long-missing delegate.

Maynus found an envelope of humor in Thompson's protracted absence, accented Wednesday by his failure to take the oath as a 27th District delegate.

Thompson hasn't been at his desk since the last session ended in March, skipping every single interim session, without a detailed explanation, other than to say he was mired in unspecified "family issues."

Of late, a labor leader has vowed to bring a lawsuit to block his pay if he continues to stay gone.

One by one, as the clerk read off the names to assess a quorum in the House of Delegates, no voice answered when he stopped at Thompson's name.

"Delegate Thompson, Ron, appears to be absent," House Clerk Greg Gray said, prompting knowing smiles from a number of delegates in the House.

Thompson was chair of the House Banking Committee, but he has been replaced by Delegate Cliff Moore, D-McDowell, who now occupies his former office.

Crews removed Thompson's personal effects and stashed them in an office across from his old one in the East Wing, now shared by new Delegate Mel Kessler, D-Raleigh, who hasn't seen the missing lawmaker, either.

"It would be easier to find Sasquatch than Ron Thompson," Maynus quipped as he stood outside the House chamber before the ceremonial mass swearing-in.

Maynus placed sixth in balloting in November for the five-delegate district and feels he deserves the slot if Thompson ultimately throws in the towel.

"I've tried not to have sour grapes from the election," he said.

"But I feel like this really impacted me, because if he had dropped out of the race like he should have, there would have been a good chance that I would have won the election."

Maynus already has approached Democratic leaders in Raleigh and Summers counties that comprise the 27th District, putting his hat in the ring for consideration if it comes down to picking a successor.

"I let them know I'm interested in the job, if and when it becomes available," he said.

Maynus said he deserves first recognition based on the results of the general election.

Thompson placed third, despite running a low-profile campaign in which he shunned public events and spent a mere \$600.

"I think the people spoke," Kessler said. "We're paying for five delegates. I think we ought to have five delegates. I have nothing personally against Ron. He ought to make up his mind and do the right thing. He ought to show up for work, or Kevin ought to be the delegate."

A 30-day notice, required when the state and its entities are sued, was lodged Monday by the Affiliated Construction Trades Council, preparatory to a threatened lawsuit to block Thompson's pay.

Steve White, the council's director, said his group is "absolutely serious" about taking Thompson to court.

"We have members in the area and they deserve representation," he said.

"Workers of West Virginia have to show up for work to get paid. We don't see why it should be any different here."

Without identifying anyone, White said the union is aware of "a number of folks who are able and willing" to succeed Thompson.

"What we're feeling is, if he's not willing to serve, he should resign his seat and allow someone who is willing and able to serve and let the citizens of that county make the decision," he said.

White said the council feels it has the authority under law to seek to block Thompson's annual \$15,000 pay as a legislator if he doesn't take the oath.

"It's not just about pay," White said. "It's about representation. If he's not willing to serve, Delegate Thompson should get out of the way and let someone who is willing take care of the job."