



Remembering workers killed on the job

More than 100 people attended a Workers Memorial Day ceremony April 28 at Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church in Southeast Portland to remember workers killed on the job in Oregon in 2005. A flag was raised and bell rung in memory of the 51 Oregonians who died last year. Similar services were held worldwide, including Washington state, where 112 workers were killed on the job in 2005. In 2004 (the latest year for which Bureau of Labor Statistics figures are available), 5,703 workers died in the U.S. from workplace injuries and illnesses, compared to 5,575 the previous year, according to the AFL-CIO report, "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect." The rate of on-the-job fatalities (4.1 per 100,000 workers) was up by 2 percent from 2003. The last year the rate went up from the previous year was 1993. The Portland memorial service was sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

Oregon Supreme Court upholds earlier ruling that custodians were illegally fired

SALEM — The Oregon Supreme Court has once again sided with former custodians at Portland Public Schools by refusing to reconsider a ruling that the school district violated state labor law when it fired 320 custodians and contracted with a private company for janitorial services.

The custodians were represented by School Employees Local 140, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union. The layoffs in 2002 decimated the union, and it was eventually dissolved and merged with SEIU Local 503, Oregon Public Employees Union. Local 503 currently represents approximately 300 cafeteria workers at Portland Public Schools.

Before the merger, Local 140, led by President Grant Walter, filed lawsuits charging that the school district violated the state civil service law when it fired the custodians. That law requires the Civil Service Board to hire and fire any custodians directly employed by the school district.

The Employment Relations Board, Multnomah County Circuit Court and Oregon Court of Appeals disagreed. The union appealed all the way to the Oregon Supreme Court.

On Oct. 12, 2005, the high court

ruled 4-3 that the school district did, indeed, violate the civil service law. Portland school officials then asked the court to reconsider its decision and on April 25, 2006, the court denied that request.

"I'm just thrilled with the news," Walter told the NW Labor Press. "We have argued all along that we were fired illegally. Now we'll wait for the penalty phase to kick in."

The school district reportedly paid custodians approximately \$16 million in the last year of their contract, which

included benefits and retirement under the Public Employees Retirement System. "A lot of custodians haven't found work, and those who did haven't received the same pay and benefits (as the school district contract)," Walter said.

The former custodian and Local 140 president said four months ago potential back pay stood at \$50 million. Newspaper reports indicate the tab might be as much as \$64 million.

Walter said attorneys from both sides are meeting in hopes of brokering a deal as quickly as possible.

Three to go for House majority on Employee Free Choice Act

Representatives Jim Gerlach of Pennsylvania and Chris Smith of New Jersey became the 14th and 15th Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives to sign on as co-sponsors of the labor-backed Employee Free Choice Act, bringing the number of co-sponsors to 215 — just three shy of a majority.

The EFCA is federal labor law reform designed to restore the freedom to join unions.

Among the co-sponsors of the bill Oregon's and Washington's entire De-

mocratic congressional delegations.

Missing are signatures from Republican Reps. Greg Walden of Oregon, and Dave Reichert, Cathy McMorris and Richard "Doc" Hastings of Washington. Oregon U.S. Senator Gordon Smith also hasn't signed on to the legislation.

Some 57 million U.S. workers say they would join a union if they could, based on research by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. But when workers try to form a union, employers routinely respond with harassment and retaliation.

Diane Linn has Earned Our Support!

"Managing Multnomah County is a job full of challenges. There is only one person in the race for Multnomah County Chair with the political savvy and practical experience to accomplish what our citizens want and deserve. That person is Diane, and she has my support."

Governor Barbara Roberts

**Re-Elect Diane
Our County Chair**
Real Leader ★ Real Results

★ Democrat ★

Respected Labor organizations and leaders are endorsing Diane:

- Dan Gardner, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor & Industries
- Randy Leonard, Commissioner, City of Portland
- Representative Diane Rosenbaum
- SEIU Local 49
- Amalgamated Transit Union #757
- Oregon Nurses Association
- Portland Firefighters Local 43
- Multnomah County Deputies Association
- Portland Association of Teachers
- Multnomah Co. Democratic Party
- International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 8

**May 16th, Join us in voting to Re-Elect
Diane Linn for Multnomah County Chair.**

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