



Nearly 1,000 turn out for Providence Hospital union vigil



Close to 1,000 people took part in a March 21 “candle-light vigil for justice” outside Providence Hospital in Northeast Portland. For two years, Service Employees International Union Local 49 has been trying to unionize about 6,000 employees at several Providence locations in the Portland area, but has faced opposition from hospital management. Providence Health & Services, with 27 hospitals in five states, does recognize unions for some workers at some locations, but also has a history of energetically opposing union drives.

The vigil was called to put public pressure on Providence to agree to a set of union campaign ground rules that have the endorsement of Oregon’s highest elections official, Secretary of State Bill Bradbury. Bradbury (pictured at left in the cart) was one of a handful of elected leaders who attended the vigil. Also there in support were Rep. Jeff Merkely

(walking next to Bradbury), speaker of the Oregon House, and Rep. Tina Kotek, who chairs the House Health Care Committee.

“No one has ever challenged Providence in this way,” said Local 49 spokesperson Jeremy Wright.

Wright said Providence stepped up a public relations counter-offensive in the weeks prior to the vigil, sending e-mails to employees, and even handing out fliers to parents at a Providence-run day care center. The message, which also was repeated in an ad in the Catholic Sentinel newspaper, was meant to warn people against things they might hear from SEIU. Providence Health & Services is owned by the Sisters of Providence, a Catholic religious order.

Nearly a dozen religious leaders also participated in the vigil.

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