

Oregon House votes against improving safety for firefighters, police and corrections officers

SALEM — About 300 firefighters, police officers and corrections employees watched March 21 as Republicans in the Oregon House voted to defeat a bill that could improve safety conditions on the job.

“Today, we found out who supports public safety officers and who does not,” said Mary Botkin, a lobbyist for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

Senate Bill 400 would make “safety issues” a mandatory subject of bargaining for public safety workers. That right was stripped of them by lawmakers in 1995 under SB 750.

Two weeks ago, the Senate voted to restore that right, but on March 21 the House rejected it 29-27. Only one Re-

publican — State Rep. Scott Bruun of West Linn — voted in favor of the bill, and only one Democrat — Rep. Jean Cowan of Newport — voted against it. Four Republicans were excused.

In the House it takes 31 votes to pass a measure.

Police and fire bureaus and many city and local municipalities oppose the measure because it also allows unions to bargain staffing levels. Many of the government entities argue that it would be too costly to hire more manpower.

Firefighters, police and corrections officers are barred from striking, so if they fail to reach agreement on a contract (which happens less than 10 percent of the time) it goes to an independent arbitrator for settlement.

The bill isn't dead just yet.

In a parliamentary maneuver, Rep. Jeff Barker, a retired police officer and former president of the Portland Police Association, changed his “yes” vote to a “no” for the purpose of possible reconsideration. Only those on the prevailing side of a vote can request such action. Lawmakers later voted to reconsider SB 400, and it was sent back to the House Business and Labor Committee.

Kelly Bach, president of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council, told the Oregon AFL-CIO Update, “Firefighters pride ourselves on being nonpartisan and supporting candidates of both parties. But today, the Republicans clearly showed us that they do not stand with firefighters.”



Bricklayers Union awards pins

Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1 held its annual pin dinner March 10 in Northeast Portland. On hand to distribute 50 and 40-year membership pins was International Secretary-Treasurer Jim Boland (back row, center). Pin recipients from left to right (front row) are Lyle Taylor, Ed Salchenberg Sr., Steve Chambers, John Bromley, Charlie Smith and Buzz Gagne (second row, left). Pictured at the right is Local 1 Business Manager Keith Wright. Not present to receive pins were 25-year members Jeffery Dick, Bryon Hellickson and Jack Lee; 40-year members Robert Fisher, Glenn Heisler (deceased) Richard Peterson and Tim Walsh; and 50-year Gold Card members Kenny Aho (deceased), Alf Bergly, Robert Green, Ray Stoltz, James Thien, Mike Weeks and Bob Zavodsky.

Crowded court docket gives Carpenters' Cobián more time

Due partly to a crowded immigration court docket, former union organizer José Cobián (aka José Luis Mendoza) will remain in the United States at least five more months.

Cobián, who was on staff for five years at the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, pled guilty to passport fraud in September 2006 and is facing deportation as an unauthorized entrant to the United States.

At a March 15 hearing before an immigration law judge, Cobián was represented by attorney David Shomloo — thanks to \$2,900 raised at a March 10

fundraiser for his legal defense. Shomloo presented the judge a two-inch-thick stack of legal arguments backing a request for “preconclusion voluntary departure.” In plain English, that means court permission — before the actual deportation hearing — for Cobián to leave with his family instead of being deported under custody. The prosecuting attorney said the government would oppose that. A hearing was set for Aug. 24 to decide on the request.

Until then, Cobián is free to come and go, but can't work or leave the country.

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