

# ...Major contract bargaining under way this summer

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selective salary increases for particular classifications, to reflect market rates. DAS proposes to pay the full insurance premium the first year; and any increase up to 8 percent the second year.

"We'd like to get a raise that actually keeps up with inflation," said Michael Ellis, a carpenter at Portland State University and member of the union bargaining team. "Most of the time, we get 1 to 2 percent. That starts hurting bad if you're one of the lower-paid employees."

SEIU's wage proposal also contains a "floor" to help raise the lowest-paid even more. It's proposing the raise be at least \$125 a month for full-time employees — a provision that would end up benefiting employees making less than \$37,500 a year. Plus it wants to eliminate any step on a pay scale at which a full-time worker would make less than \$26,000 a year — the food stamp eligibility threshold for a family of four.

The current contract, which helped workers catch up after a two-year wage and step freeze, contained 2 percent annual cost-of-living increases, plus a make-up step on the wage scale, for a total of up to 8.5 percent. And the state agreed to pay the full cost of health insurance the first year, and any increase in premiums up to 12 percent the second year. Increases end up being less than that figure, so full-time state workers didn't have to begin paying monthly premiums.

"We have lots of members in poverty that are working hard for state of Oregon, and we don't think that's right," Ellis said.

Bargaining has also been under way since March for around 10,000 home care workers who are negotiating their third two-year contract. The workers, who bathe, change, shave, brush teeth, and otherwise care for people in their homes, face a June 30 contract expiration. Their aims are modest — chiefly, raising their current hourly pay of \$9.76 by 45 cents, keeping fully-paid employee-only health

care, and adding one more day of paid time off (they get four a year now). The employer's counter-offer: a pay freeze, instituting a \$50 to \$80 a month health premium, and eliminate workers' compensation insurance coverage.

Most Oregon AFSCME members work at county and municipal governments, but the union also represents about 7,000 state workers, in several bargaining units, whose contracts expire June 30.

Contract bargaining is moving at a glacial pace for a unit of 4,400 regular state workers, said Ken Allen, Oregon AFSCME Council 75 executive director. AFSCME asked for a 6 percent raise July 1, an inflation-based cost-of-living increase a year later, and continuation of current benefits.

"We're the last state in the country to have fully-paid family health care," Allen said, "and we expect to keep it."

Allen said he thinks the two sides are likely to reach agreement on contract language that would make it more difficult to contract out; Governor Ted Kulongoski has said he opposes further privatization.

Though the two unions negotiate separately with the state, Allen and SEIU 503 Executive Director Leslie

Frane said they are sharing information.

AFSCME also represents two units in the Department of Corrections totaling about 2,800 workers, but bargaining for them is on hold altogether until June 15, when a representation challenge from an independent union is resolved. Also up for AFSCME, on July 1 the contract between AFSCME Local 88 and Central City Concern, with 430 employees, expires. And negotiations are troubled at Metropolitan Education Service District for the second time in a row.

Other SEIU contracts expiring June 30 include Oregon Public Broadcasting (167 workers), several nursing homes, several local governments, including Wilsonville and Beaverton, and a contract covering over 500 cafeteria workers and custodians at Portland Public Schools.

**IRON WORKERS** — Close to three-quarters of the members of Iron Workers Shopmen's Local 516 also have contract bargaining this summer. A contract at Fought & Company (134 employees) expires July 31; contracts at Columbia Wire & Iron Works (58 employees) and Oregon Iron Works (295 employees), expire Aug. 31; and

agreements with Canon Western Constructors (110 workers) and GTE Metal Erectors (25 workers) expire Sept. 30. The companies manufacture structural steel used in bridges, buildings, barges, streetcars, and missile silos. The industry is doing well thanks to the continued construction boom, said Local 516 Business Manager Michael Lappier, and the union hopes to win decent economic increases for members.

**HOSPITAL WORKERS** — June 30 is also the contract expiration date for 642 nurses at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, 380 nurses at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center in Corvallis, and 320 support staff at McKenzie Willamette Hospital in Springfield. The nurses are represented by Oregon Nurses Association; the support staff by SEIU Local 49. At St. Charles, ONA is proposing a wage increase of 7 percent per year over a two year contract.

**HOTEL WORKERS** — UNITE HERE LOCAL 9 has contracts expiring in August at major hotels in downtown Portland. The union hotels include the Hilton, Benson and Paramount.

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