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AFSCME reaches tentative deal for 4,000 state workers

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Oregon Council 75 has reached a tentative agreement on behalf of some 4,000 employees at the State of Oregon.

The two-year agreement includes a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment retroactive to July 1 and a 3.2 percent COLA on Nov. 1, 2008.

State employees will continue to receive fully-paid health insurance for the life of the contract.

Other improvements include:

- Selective salary adjustments for 16 job classifications, affecting some 200 workers.
- Shift differential of at least 75 cents per hour for shifts occurring between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- Contracting out language that sets up a situation where those who are potentially at risk of being contracted out will have the opportunity to "bid in" on the work, plus prior notification of any

potential contracting out decisions.

• Improved union-leave language that will make it easier for union officers to get time off for union business.

"This is a good settlement," said Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Ken Allen, the union's chief negotiator. "Fully-paid health insurance is a huge deal for us. We are the last state in the U.S. that pays 100 percent of the health care costs for its state employees, so it is no small feat to keep that for another contract."

Oregon Department of Corrections employees represented by AFSCME are not covered under this agreement. Separate negotiations are continuing for both Security and Security Plus units.

Earlier this year the State of Oregon reached a similar agreement with Service Employees Local 503. That union represents about 18,000 state employees.

Carpenters organizer allowed to leave U.S. on his own

A federal immigration case against a local union organizer came to a close last month. Mexican national José Cobián, known to friends by his assumed name José Luis Mendoza, was allowed to leave the United States on his own rather than be forcibly deported.

Cobián, a union organizer for the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, pled guilty to passport fraud last September and spent two weeks in jail. Then for almost a year, he remained in the United States while his deportation case moved through a series of court appearances. He was unable to legally work, but he and his family were maintained by donations from union co-workers. Cobián was able to sell his house in Molalla.

On Aug. 24, a federal judge gave him a deadline of Aug. 31 to leave the country. His wife and two U.S.-born children had left earlier to stay with her parents in Tampico.

Cobián told the Labor Press he planned to oversee shipment of the family's belongings, and then return to Mexico to look for work.

"Unless the law changes," Cobián said, "I don't think I'll ever be able to come back."

"I hate to see him go," said Carpenters organizer Cliff Puckett, a former co-worker who attended the final court appearance. "For all intents and purposes he was just an honest human being trying to provide for his family."

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