

# Labor ally to leave Congress

Union leaders will be paying close attention to Oregon's 5th Congressional District this year. Democratic Rep. Darlene Hooley announced Feb. 8 that she'll retire at the end of the year, meaning her seat is up for grabs in the November 2008 election.

For organized labor, it means a scramble to replace a reliable union ally, and keep the seat in worker-friendly hands. Hooley's district encompasses Marion, Polk, Tillamook and Lincoln counties, and parts of Clackamas, Multnomah and Benton counties. Registered Republicans outnumber Democrats, and yet Hooley has won election six times, starting in 1996 with the defeat of Republican Jim Bunn.

Hooley may be best known as a staunch defender of veterans' benefits and an activist for doing something to combat methamphetamine addiction. But she's also been a friend of labor, with an 86 percent favorable rating from the national AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education.

"She called them as she saw them," said Tim Nesbitt, former Oregon AFL-CIO president who is now an adviser to Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

Nesbitt cited Hooley's 2003 vote against the Medicare prescription drug bill as a turning point. The bill split Democrats, many of whom wanted a drug benefit for seniors but saw this bill as an expensive giveaway to drug companies.

"It took a lot of courage for her to go that way," Nesbitt said.

A notable black mark in labor's tally was Hooley's 2002 vote for a law that made it harder for people to escape debt by declaring bankruptcy.



**DARLENE HOOLEY**

But as Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain pointed out, Hooley was an early co-signer of the Employee Free Choice Act, the union-backed reform of the nation's basic labor law.

"She's been beyond accessible," Chamberlain said. "If we needed to get in, we could see her. And she was never afraid to give me a call and ask how I feel about an issue."

Chamberlain said Hooley has been good on the minimum wage, and she came around on NAFTA-style trade agreements, voting for several early on, but opposing recent trade agreements that have come up for a vote.

Chamberlain predicts an exciting race to replace Hooley. Several Democrats will compete in the May primary, including Paul Evans, an Iraq war veteran who had labor's backing in his unsuccessful 2006 run for the State Senate. Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48, said he also is considering running.

Whoever wins the primary will face off against the Republican nominee in November.

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# Underpaid professors plan to picket PSU

Anyone who thinks being a college professor is a cushy middle-class meal ticket probably hasn't gotten up close to Oregon's higher ed system lately.

At Portland State University, a quarter of the classes are taught by part-timers working on term-to-term contracts. Hundreds of PSU adjunct professors have PhDs in their fields and yet gross less than \$15,000 a year, with no benefits of any kind.

During any given term, PSU employs over 600 faculty who work half-time or less. About two-thirds are paid the minimum, union-negotiated rate — \$676 per credit per term, which works out to \$2,704 for a typical four-credit class. While some have full-time employment elsewhere, many others make ends meet by piecing together part-time teaching assignments at PSU and at other area

colleges and universities.

Last year, embarrassed at the prospect of malnourished state college professors, the Oregon Legislature approved an 18 percent increase in higher ed funding. PSU, for example, got \$23 million more, including \$10 million earmarked for faculty raises. So why is PSU's part-time faculty union having such a terrible time getting an acceptable contract?

The Portland State University Faculty Association Local 3571, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, wants what amounts to 7.5 percent annual raises in base pay in its next two-year contract, which the union estimates would cost \$1.4 million.

The PSU administration is offering about 4.5 percent, and says the first raise wouldn't be retroactive to the June 30, 2007 expiration of the previ-

ous contract.

Units at other Oregon colleges have already settled contracts with raises of up to 12 percent, said AFT Staff Rep Eban Pullman. "Why they're standing so firm is kind of a mystery to us," Pullman said.

Chief negotiator and unit Vice President Margie McCue says faculty are feeling discouraged; they thought because of the funds released by the Legislature for bringing up faculty salaries that the two sides would be able to come to agreement. "We're trying to get adjunct salary brought up to a living wage," McCue says.

After more than nine months of unsuccessful negotiations, the two sides began mediation Feb. 11. The union planned to put up informational picket signs outside Smith Memorial Center on Feb. 14, Valentine's Day — after this issue went to press.

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