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AFL-CIO appeals for peace in Iraq

Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, flanked by union members opposed to the war in Iraq, spoke at a March 15 peace rally in Portland to mark the fifth anniversary of the start of the current war in Iraq. “Billions of dollars that should have funded health care for all, that should have rebuilt this country and provided good jobs for working families, have instead gone for war,” Chamberlain said. Most U.S. labor organizations have taken stands against the war or calling for speedy troop withdrawal. In a statement adopted last March, the national AFL-CIO Executive Council declared: “The men and women risking their lives in Iraq come from America’s working families. They are our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our husbands and wives. They have answered their call to duty with the utmost courage and dedication. And the best way now to recognize and honor their service is to take them out of harm’s way.”

Gardner resigns as labor commissioner

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner announced March 12 that he will resign effective April 7 — 15 months into his second four-year term of office. A day later, Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski announced he will appoint State Sen. Brad Avakian (D-Bethany) to fill the vacancy.

Labor commissioner, one of six offices in Oregon that are elected statewide, serves as chief executive of Oregon’s Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), a 106-employee \$10-million-a-year agency. BOLI enforces state civil rights and wage and hour laws, administers the state’s prevailing wage law for public construction projects, and promotes apprenticeship training. So who’s in charge of the agency matters a good deal to the state’s unions.

Gardner gave the governor a short list of recommendations for his replacement, but Kulongoski, after scant consultation with labor leaders, swiftly settled on the choice of Avakian, a fellow attorney.

Avakian was in the middle of a four-way race for the Democratic nomination for Secretary of State. But he didn’t hesitate when offered the job



DAN GARDNER

of labor commissioner. An employee-side civil rights and workers’ compensation attorney, Avakian says at one time he knew every BOLI civil rights investigator by name.

In the 2007 legislative session, Avakian was one of four state senators to get the Oregon AFL-CIO’s highest ranking, and he was named an “all-star” by the Oregon Building and Construction Trades Council. Avakian’s appointment stands until the November election, and he says he intends to run for election.

Gardner said he loves the job of labor commissioner, but is resigning in order to take a legislative and policy job for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in Washington, D.C. Gardner is a third-generation journeyman electrician and longtime IBEW member, and was vice president of Portland-headquartered IBEW Local 48 before he was

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Machinists to lobby lawmakers on Air Force tanker deal

The Machinists Union is lobbying lawmakers to overturn a \$35 billion multi-year contract the Air Force awarded a European consortium to build the next generation of aerial refueling tankers.

Boeing, a union company based in the U.S., was favored to win the contract based on its 50-year history of supplying the Air Force with refueling tankers. Company and union officials, and political leaders were stunned when it went to a consortium consisting of the government-subsidized European Aeronautic Defense and Space Co. (Airbus) and Northrop-Grumman.

“Every U.S. citizen should be outraged. They are using our tax dollars to boost the European economy when ours is in a critical tail spin now,” said Tom Buffenbarger, general president of the Interna-

tional Association of Machinists.

The Machinists Union represents about 35,000 Boeing workers in Washington, Kansas, Oregon and other locations across the country. The Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) represents another 24,000 engineers and technical workers. SPEEA members were instrumental in the design and engineering of Boeing’s KC-767AT (advanced tanker) that was in competition for the contract. Airbus will base the tankers on its A380.

“I’m surprised the Air Force chose an unproven technology and an inferior product for this important program that supports the men and women in our armed forces,” said SPEEA President Cynthia Cole.

Union officials said the 179 tankers called for in the contract would be built with over 85 percent domestic U.S. content and would support more than 44,000 U.S. jobs and 300 contractors in over 40 states.

It was expected to create 9,000 jobs in Washington and about 225 jobs in Oregon. Machinists Lodge 63 represents 1,200 workers at Boeing of Portland, where they produce key components for the 767.

Airbus says it will create 2,000 jobs in the U.S. by building a new

factory for the tankers in Mobile, Ala. Parts for the tanker, however, will be assembled by 40,000 unionized French workers at the Airbus plant in Toulouse, Buffenbarger said.

Boeing filed a formal protest March 11 with the Government Accountability Office, the federal government’s non-partisan auditing arm. The GAO has 100 days to make a ruling.

“How we could turn over the crown jewel of support for our nation’s Air Force to foreign manufacturers is beyond me,” Buffenbarger said. “We’re going to take this on tooth and nail and get this decision overturned. We’re going to see that America gets what it deserves in the form of economic justice and fairness for American workers.”

The AFL-CIO Executive Council called on Congress to “defund” the contract, as well as conduct a full investigation about how the contract was awarded to a foreign contractor.

Since the announcement, Boeing workers and taxpayers have held several rallies protesting the Air Force’s decision. The latest was March 19 (after this issue went to press) in Everett with members of District Lodge 751 and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray.

The Machinists Union is asking union members and all taxpayers to call Congress and urge them to “defund” the contract with Airbus and to support U.S. jobs by choosing a U.S.-made tanker.