

# Top Democrats left off WSLC convention guest list

SEATTLE — About 300 delegates will gather at the Coast Wenatchee Center Hotel in Wenatchee Aug. 6-8 for the 2009 convention of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. WSLC has over 500 local union affiliates, representing about 400,000 rank-and-file union members.

The convention's keynote speaker will be Arlene Holt Baker, the number three official of the national AFL-CIO. Holt Baker is running for re-election as executive vice president on the slate of Richard Trumka at the AFL-CIO convention Sept. 13-17 in Pittsburgh.

Conspicuously absent from the guest speaker list at WSLC's convention are any top Democratic state politicians. At last year's convention, Democratic Gov. Christine Gregoire and House Speaker Frank Chopp were honored guests. But in March, those two plus Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown bowed to pressure from Boeing Co. and refused to al-

low a vote on WSLC's top-priority bill, which they had promised to support. Adding insult to injury, the three called for a police investigation of an internal e-mail in which a WSLC staffperson reported a comment at a meeting — that Democrats wouldn't get another dime from labor if they didn't pass the bill. The Washington State Patrol found no laws had been broken.

Because of the rift with state Democratic leaders, convention delegates are expected to discuss significant changes to WSLC's political program — to better target union support to legislators who stick by labor, regardless of their party affiliation.

Besides Holt Baker, guest speakers include Sal Roselli, Bob Baugh and John deGraaf.

• Roselli is a former president of United Healthcare Workers West, a division of Service Employees International Union. Roselli was removed from

office last year in a widely-publicized fight with SEIU President Andy Stern. Stern led a group of unions to break away from the AFL-CIO and form the Change to Win labor federation. Now Roselli is leading a breakaway from SEIU with the formation of a new independent labor organization, the National Union of Healthcare Workers.

• Baugh, a former Oregon AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer, is the head of the

national AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Council, the group of unions that represent workers in manufacturing industries. Together with Andrea Buffa of the University of California Berkeley Labor Center, Baugh will talk about "cap and trade" legislation in Congress, which will limit emissions of greenhouse gases but also fuel the growth of new industries. The issue is important enough that WSLC is also holding a

day-long pre-convention "Cap-and-Trade and Green Jobs Conference" Aug. 5.

• DeGraaf is national coordinator of Take Back Your Time Day, an annual event on Oct. 24 that draws attention to the problem of overwork in America. His group backs a bill in Congress that would guarantee workers get three weeks paid vacation after a year with an employer.

## AFT trustees Kaiser nurses Local 5017

Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals Local 5017 was placed in trusteeship July 7 by its parent organization, American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The 17-member local union Executive Board plus three senior officers, including President Kathy Geroux, were removed from office. Florida labor lawyer Mark Richard was brought in as trustee.

Local 5017 represents more than 2,500 registered nurses and health care professionals at Kaiser Permanente and Providence Milwaukie Hospital.

The local was organized as an AFT affiliate in 1979.

Local union leaders were moving to disaffiliate from AFT, and announced a July 7 membership meeting to discuss it. But Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals' bylaws specify five membership meetings a year, and

specifically state that no meetings can be held in July. That, and alleged unauthorized use of dues money to promote disaffiliation, gave the national union grounds to trustee the local, said AFT spokesperson Jamie Horwitz.

AFT International President Randi Weingarten said, "AFT members have the right to disaffiliate, drop out of a bargaining coalition or make other changes their local union leaders may want, but the leaders must follow the steps outlined in the union constitution."

In a press statement, the ousted leadership said that while membership meetings are not ordinarily scheduled in July, as specified in the local bylaws, the Constitution also says that special meetings can be called.

"We believe that everyone on the Executive Board will be vindicated of all the charges made," Geroux said.

"We are looking forward to leading our local again after this misunderstanding is cleared up."

Geroux said she has a meeting scheduled with Weingarten in Portland on July 20.

Contract negotiations are scheduled to begin at Kaiser Permanente in 2010. Horwitz said if Local 5017 were to disaffiliate, it would no longer be a part of a 15-union coalition that bargains together with Kaiser. That could jeopardize what may be tough negotiations in any case: Kaiser has lost revenue in the recession because many laid-off workers are losing health coverage.

Horwitz said AFT doesn't have a timeline, but hopes to return Local 5017 to local control as soon as possible.

He said it is only the fourth time in AFT's 93-year history that it has trustee a local union.

## OPEIU Local 11 members at NW Natural ratify pact

Workers at NW Natural ratified a new five-year contract July 2. The vote, by members of Office and Professional Employees Local 11, was 394-161.

Workers rejected the gas company's first offer 206-230. Those ballots were counted May 28.

Stakes were a bit higher on the second ballot, as a "no" vote also represented authorization for the bargaining unit to call a strike if needed.

"I'm happy for the membership and for five years of labor peace and harmony at the gas company," said Local 11 Executive Secretary-Treasurer Mike Richards.

The contract — retroactive to May 31 — includes wage increases the first year that bring job classifications to "market value." The average increase is 2.3 percent, though some classifications will receive more than that while others receive less, Richards said.

Annual wage increases the following four years will be based on a cost-of-living-adjustment formula ranging from 1 to 3 percent.

Workers will not see any increases in their health insurance co-payments over the next two years, and no more than a 3 percent out-of-pocket increase annually between 2011 and 2014. Any increases will be based on cost of living.


The pact also guarantees no layoffs for workers hired before April 1, 2004 (approximately 75 percent of the workforce). Union members did, however, agree to up to 20 furlough days per 12 month period. Every worker will be subject to furloughs, but not until negotiations are held between the company and the union, Richards said.

Furlough days were a key sticking point in the rejected proposal. NWN initially sought 45 days per 12 month period for every employee.

Richards said each bargaining unit member also received \$400 to cover a change in pay periods.

Local 11 represents approximately 700 workers, including office staff and outside gas and construction workers.

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