

SEIU leader warns of 'coordinated attack' on public workers

ALBANY — Right-wing and corporate interests are waging a coordinated attack on public employees and their unions, warned the recently-installed president of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) on a visit to Oregon.

"They are feeding people a steady diet of lies and half-truths that pits the public against the services they rely on and those of us who provide those services," SEIU President Mary Kay Henry told Local 503 members gathered in Albany, Oregon.

The occasion was the Aug. 5-7 biennial meeting of Local 503 General Council. About 300 delegates interacted with their union's new national leader; heard a farewell from their own outgoing executive director, Leslie Frane; and

were bused out of their meeting space — Linn County Fair and Expo Center — to picket a nearby Bank of America branch. On the meeting's third day, three candidates were nominated to succeed Frane. Local 503 has about 52,000 members; most are employees of the State of Oregon or one of 30 unionized nursing homes.

In May, Henry (a longtime California SEIU official) succeeded Andy Stern as head of the 1.9-million-member national union, after his favored successor, Anna Burger, failed to muster majority support. The following month, Henry announced that Frane would become national director of SEIU's 850,000-member Public Division.

Frane began the new job the week after the Albany meeting. She has said

she plans to keep her residence in Woodburn and travel to meet the requirements of the new job. Frane has been Local 503's executive director since 2002.

Her assistant, Rich Peppers, is serving as interim executive director until an official replacement takes office in November.

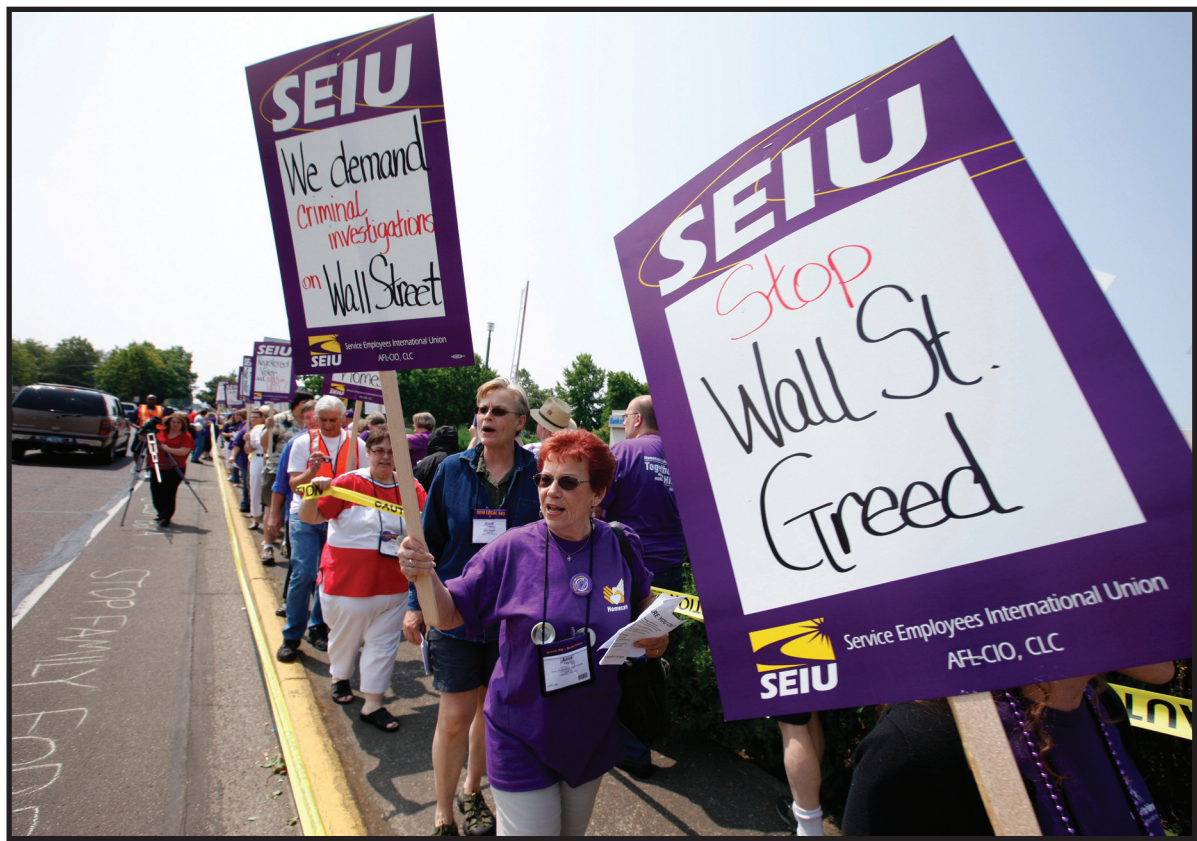
Henry called on union members to mount a coordinated response to public employee bashing. Public employees are being scapegoated for having decent benefits in a time of economic crisis. And the economic fortunes of working people overall are in decline, Henry said, thanks to Wall Street and the big banks.

"This recession is a glimpse of what will happen if we leave the future to Wall Street,"

Henry said. "They will suck the economy dry until we have total collapse."

Local 503 members took that message to a picket outside a nearby Bank of America. And they didn't have far to look to find a victim of the bank's practices. Delegate Sandy Huckleberry, a Coos Bay area Local 503 member and an employee of the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), lost her home of 25 years after her husband had a heart attack and couldn't work. When she asked her Bank of America credit card for a change of terms, they alerted her mortgage holder, which foreclosed.

Labor will need to unite, Henry said, if things are to turn around. Henry spoke of efforts to mend fences with other unions, and build closer alliances with environmental and civil



Above, SEIU Local 503 members picket at an Albany, Oregon, Bank of America branch. Below, longtime Local 503 executive Leslie Frane addresses the general council meeting before beginning her new position as national head of SEIU's Public Division.



It's time to respond to the public bashing of public employees, Mary Kay Henry, SEIU's new president, tells SEIU Local 503 General Council delegates meeting in Albany.

rights groups. And she called on SEIU members to be ambassadors for public services and public service workers.

"Focus on the people we serve," Henry said. "Look for ways to improve public services and deliver them more efficiently. Oregonians ... need to know you don't just work for the government, you live in their communities and go to work every day to make those communities stronger, safer, and better for families."

The Albany meeting ended on an emotional note as 20 members stood to pay tribute to Frane.

Running to succeed her are: Heather Conroy, the local's public sector field director, and a staff member for the last 13 years; Maggie Neel, president of the Oregon State Univer-

sity sub-local and a former member of the Executive Board; and current Executive Board member Michael Simpson, a DHS employee. Simpson said he doesn't seek the office for himself

but would run a national search to find Frane's replacement. Members will vote by mail in early October, and the top vote-getter will begin serving a two-year term in November.



Anna Burger retires from top posts at Change to Win, SEIU

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Anna Burger, who as recently as May had aspirations of leading the 2.2 million-member Service Employees International Union, retired abruptly Aug. 11 from her job as its secretary-treasurer. She also resigned as chair of the Change To Win labor federation.

"From my days as a rank-and-file activist to my service as an elected officer, I have had the amazing opportunity to watch hundreds of thousands of hardworking women and men learn, grow, build and lead through our union," Burger said in an SEIU press release.

Burger stepped down from both posts only a few months after she planned to succeed Andy Stern, who also retired unexpectedly in mid-term as SEIU president. Burger was Stern's selection to succeed him, but her campaign for the union presidency was hurt by withdrawal of support first from SEIU locals on the West Coast, and then from the politically influential 1199 Hospital and Health Care Workers in New York. The loss of support led Burger to withdraw from the race, yielding to challenger Mary Kay Henry.



ANNA BURGER

"Our union has benefitted from her tenacity and unwavering commitment to every convention decision since 1980 and most recently, our Justice for All program," Henry said of Burger. "We look forward to continuing to draw upon Anna's talents and service to the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board as we look for long-term policy solutions to the crisis confronting all working people."

Burger began her career with the union in 1972 as a rank-and-file Pennsylvania state caseworker and union activist. She was elected in 1983 as SEIU Local 668's first female president.

After a stint running Pennsylvania's statewide political program, Burger became SEIU's national field director and, in 1995, she ran John Sweeney's successful campaign for president of the AFL-CIO.

In 2001, she was elected secretary-treasurer of SEIU.

In 2005, Burger became the first woman to head up an American labor federation following the formation of Change to Win by seven unions representing six million workers who left the AFL-CIO. Since then, three unions — Carpenters, UNITE HERE, and the Laborers — have left the union coalition.

Burger said she will continue to consult and work with SEIU on economic solutions for working families. She will remain on President Obama's Economic Recovery Advisory Board and be active in a variety of other organizations in social and economic justice.

Henry will handle responsibilities of secretary-treasurer until the International Executive Board votes on a successor. A vote has been scheduled for September.

Heads of the remaining four unions in Change To Win — SEIU, Teamsters, Farm Workers, United Food and Commercial Workers, and Laborers — selected UFCW President Joe Hansen to succeed Burger.