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State, private contract bargaining abounds in 2011

A number of large union contracts will be coming up for renegotiation in Oregon in 2011.

To defend their living standards, union members will need to come together in support of their bargaining teams, as employers — both private and public sector — propose takebacks in a bad economy.

Contracts covering around 25,000 state workers will expire June 30. The two major unions representing state workers — Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) — will have their hands full just holding on. The state will be grappling with a projected shortfall of over \$3 billion during the next two year budget cycle.

Also expiring June 30 is a contract covering about 3,000 members of AFSCME Local 88 at Multnomah County. The county budget isn't in as bad shape as the state's. Bargaining is expected to start Feb. 1.

The state's largest private-sector union, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555, will be trying a new approach in pattern bargaining with its grocery employer group. Contracts covering over 600 grocery workers in Eugene expire Feb. 19. The Eugene units are the first in line in a

contract bargaining cycle that affects much of the region.

In the past, the big three unionized grocery employers — Fred Meyer, Safeway, and Albertsons — have pushed for the terms worked out in the Eugene contracts to be the model for contracts in other units. This time, Local 555 will be inviting representatives from all the other bargaining units to sit in on the negotiations — since they're affected by the deal reached in Eugene.

All told, about 5,000 members in Vancouver, Longview, Salem, Coos Bay, Newport, Medford, Roseburg, and Grants Pass have contracts coming up for renewal, and thus a stake in the Eugene negotiations.

Local 555 also continues to bargain a contract for 600-plus employees at Bay Area Hospital in Coos Bay and Lower Umpqua Hospital in Reedsport.

United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters (UA) Local 290 will be bargaining for 1,500 members employed by members of the Plumbing and Mechanical Contractors Association. The current contract expires March 31.

The contract between Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) and the local chapter of Associated General Contractors will expire on May 31.

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 125 has been engaged in tough bargaining over a contract covering 417 workers at PacifiCorp that comes up for renewal Jan. 25. PacifiCorp, parent company of Pacific Power, is a multi-state electric utility and a subsidiary of Warren Buffett's Mid-American Energy Holdings Company. The company proposed a long list of takebacks, including: cutting the percentage it contributes to health benefits; eliminating bereavement leave and three family sick days; and shifting a group of older workers who still are in a traditional pension plan into a 401(k) instead.

The contract between Cascade General and the Metal Trades Council of Portland and Vicinity expires July 1. Cascade General operates the Portland shipyard, one of the world's largest ship repair facilities, and employs between 300 and 600 union members at any one time. Eleven unions are party to the contract. Bargaining is slated to begin in March.

At unionized hotels in the Portland-area, contracts covering about 400 workers will expire in June and July. UNITE HERE Local 9 will be pushing for wage increases in the negotiations.

UA Local 290 and Fire Fighters promote home fire safety

Apprentices and firefighters face off for 'broomball' at Winterhawks hockey game

Apprentices from Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 battled members of Fire Fighters Local 43 to a 0-0 tie in their annual "broomball" hockey game to promote residential fire sprinkler systems.

The game was held Jan. 8 between periods of the Portland Winterhawks-Seattle Thunderbirds hockey game at the Rose Garden. Local 290 and the Portland Mechanical Contractors Association are sponsors of the Winterhawks. Each year they, along with Local 43, promote fire safety through the broomball event. In broomball, contestants don tennis shoes and plastic brooms and try to slap a foam ball into the net. Local 290 is the defending champion, having beat the firefighters

last year 1-0.

And though the event was meant for fun and camaraderie, the more serious issue at hand was promoting home fire sprinkler systems.

According to a study by the Fire Protection Research Foundation, more than 8 in 10 fire deaths occur in homes, yet the likelihood of someone dying in a home fire is cut in half when sprinklers are present.

Studies by the U.S. Fire Administration indicate that residential fire sprinkler systems can eliminate hundreds of millions of dollars in property losses and, of course, make it safer for firefighters, too.

Members of Local 290 and their signatory contractors are trained to install home fire sprinkler systems.

"Local 290 provided classes on fire sprinkler code, design, calculations, and installation for well over 500 of our members," said Jed Scheuermann, assistant coordinator at the training center. "We have some 20 contractors well qualified to do installations. They include approximately 10 in the metro-

Portland area, 10-plus in Astoria, Bend, Coos Bay, Eugene/Springfield, Klamath Falls, Medford, and even Eureka, California."

As part of Local 290's Winterhawks sponsorship, the union promotes its state-of-the-art apprenticeship training center. For the past several years it has

held a "Local 290 Player of the Month" contest, whereby fans vote via the Winterhawks website for the hardest working player for the month. The winner is announced at a pre-game ceremony and an apprentice is selected by the Local

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Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 apprentices retained the broomball hockey trophy following a 0-0 tie against a team from Fire Fighters Local 43. Joining in the celebration with Winterhawks mascot Tomahawk are, back row left to right: Travis Henke, Shane Halifax, Carla Braun, Perry Wright, Kurt Cronin, David Allen-Schublin and Sean Gustavson. In the bottom row, left to right are: Andrew Cheney, Zach Reinhardt, Jimmy Myers, Akuila Ramaqa and Zach Wright. More than 10,000 fans watched the broomball match between periods of the Portland-Seattle hockey game Jan. 8 at the Rose Garden.