

... New contract adds right to 'Flextime'

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point of view of trying to have management get a 'win,'" Cogen told the Labor Press. "My goal was to find a win-win."

Details were mailed to members Sept. 9. About 85 percent of those covered by the contract are full-fledged union members; only members may vote on the contract.

The new agreement includes individual step increases as well as across-the-board cost-of-living increases: 1.2 percent immediately, retroactive to July 1; 0 percent in the second year; and 1 to 4 percent in the third year, linked to the Consumer Price Index. A side agreement commits the county to use savings from the second year cost-of-living freeze to prevent layoffs of Local 88 members.

And in a non-binding side agreement, the county will aim for a county-wide ratio of one manager for every seven or eight workers. Currently the ratio is 1 to 6.5, Hanna said. Cogen said the change would save at least \$3.5 million over the next two years. The idea of slimming down management ranks was first raised as a union issue at the state level earlier this year, and a new state law calls for a 1 to 11 ratio at large state agencies.

"[Local 88] understood that these are tough times, and that everyone needs to sacrifice," Cogen said. "But they wanted to make sure that it was fair and equitably distributed — that labor would feel it, management would feel it, and we'd try to do it in a way that will preserve services to the com-



Can you hear me now? Above, a participant at a June 30 rally calls Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen. On Aug. 31, Cogen intervened in bargaining and was able to reach in a few hours the agreement that had eluded the parties for six months.

munity."

The contract also preserves existing health and retirement benefits, as well as the right of laid-off workers with seniority to "bump" into positions elsewhere in the County that they are qualified for. And it continues the county's "Project Save" policy, in which workers slated for layoff may take a demotion into a vacant position.

New non-binding language in the contract commits Local 88 to support the county's sustainability principles, which include energy efficiency, recycling, and resource reduction measures; the contract also continues the county's commitment to provide an annual bus pass as an employee benefit.

And the contract includes a non-

monetary benefit that Local 88 members had identified as a priority: A committee composed of representatives of labor and management will work out details of a policy to allow employees flexibility in their work schedule. Under the policy, which will be implemented July 1, 2012, employees will have some choice in how they set their schedule unless management can show a strong business reason not to allow it.

"To me it's just a good idea," Cogen said. "We think it's better for family life. There are times when it's better for customer service. And it will make our employees happier."

Once members approve the contract, it will go to the county board for ratification.

...Prison bread

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Moreover, to work in the bakery, inmates must apply and be interviewed, must have served at least the last six months of their sentence without infractions, and must have a high school diploma or GED or be working toward one. As for safety concerns, Wiles says civilian staff supervise the inmates and follow all USDA and health regulations. To prevent inmates from using the bakery operation to import contraband, Wiles said, supplies are also handled by staff.

Sometimes, Lansing's letters get a response. "The state of Washington does not fully fund education," Walla Walla school board president Cindy Meyer replied in a letter. "Yet our expectations for quality remain high in every area. We would not be good stewards of the limited tax dollars we receive if we were to spend more for a quality product than we had to."

Lansing has also found support among union members who serve the food, such as Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). Last October, the OSEA local at St. Helens School District in St. Helens, Oregon, wrote to the school board formally requesting that the district's nutrition program buy baked goods from Oregon providers,

not Washington inmates.

Lansing also got the Southwest Washington Central Labor Council to include the issue in a questionnaire given to candidates seeking labor's endorsement.

Is the Bakers' campaign paying off? Several Oregon and Washington school districts that served prison-made baked goods last year have backed off as of this school year. It could be because of concern about bad press. Or it could be that — as several third-party distributors told the Labor Press — Franz is dropping its prices to win back the business. Lansing and the distributors also said districts have complained of poorly cut bread and other quality problems. Plus, Airway Heights bread and rolls come frozen; districts may prefer to serve fresh bread.

Lansing intends to continue the campaign.

At the upcoming Oregon AFL-CIO convention, Bakers Local 114 is introducing a resolution calling on union members to tell the Bakers Union if they see prison bread in schools, and for the Oregon AFL-CIO to demand its removal.

"It's one thing to have your child sit on a chair made by inmates," Lansing told the Labor Press. "It's another to have them consume food."

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