

Rich Ahearn, NLRB regional director, retires

Ahearn's replacement is Ronald Hooks, from the NLRB's Memphis office

Rich Ahearn — northwest regional director of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) — retired Dec. 30 after 37 years with the agency.

NLRB attorney Anne Pomerantz will serve as acting regional director until Ronald Hooks replaces Ahearn in April. Hooks, a 40-year NLRB employee, currently directs the Memphis, Tennessee, regional office.

The NLRB is an independent federal agency that administers the National Labor Relations Act, the law that spells out the union rights of most private sector employees. The NLRB conducts elections to determine if workers want a union, and it investigates accusations of "unfair labor practices," its term for employer or union violations of the act.

NLRB's northwest region, Region 19, has a staff of 48 that is responsible for Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Northern Idaho and Western Montana. It's headquartered in downtown Seat-

tle, with satellite offices in Portland and Anchorage, Alaska. The job of regional director is to oversee NLRB staff, and to make all decisions about elections and about whether to issue a complaint in unfair labor practice cases.

Two very famous NLRB cases bear Ahearn's signature: last year's Machinists vs. Boeing case, and the 1997 Kentucky River case.

Ahearn, 65, told the Labor Press he learned about unions at the dinner table growing up in Northampton, Massachuset. His father, a custodian at Smith College, was a member of Service Employees International Union. Ahearn studied political science at Columbia College in New York City, graduating in 1968. For a time, he taught American history at the Dalton School in Manhattan. Then in 1973, while attending Northeastern University School of Law, he went to work at the NLRB Boston office as a student assistant. He later worked at the NLRB's Albany, Baltimore, Buffalo,



RICH AHERN

and Cincinnati offices, before becoming regional director in Seattle in 2003. Ahearn was Cincinnati regional director when the Kentucky River case came to his desk. Kentucky River Community Care argued that its registered nurses were supervisors and therefore had no right to be in a union under the law. Ahearn looked at the facts and determined that they were employees, not supervisors. But the case was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which overruled the NLRB by a 5-4 majority in 2001.

Then, last year, Ahearn's office handled the Machinists vs. Boeing case. With the backing of the NLRB's top prosecutor, Ahearn issued a complaint against Boeing for having built a new assembly line in South Carolina specifically because its union workers at other locations had exercised their right to strike. A furious reaction by Republicans in Congress threatened to take the NLRB down, but in the end, the union settled with Boeing and dropped the charge.

Unionists may think of the NLRB as an agency that defends workers' union rights, however weakly. But agency staff look upon themselves as neutrals when it comes to disputes between workers and employers.

One of Ahearn's final decisions was to issue a complaint against a union, the

(Turn to Page 5)



Stumping for Bonamici

Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer of Maryland (left) joined Oregon 1st Congressional District candidate Suzanne Bonamici (right) for a luncheon with union officials Jan. 13 at the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters office in Northeast Portland. With them is Paul Riggs, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council. Hoyer said electing Bonamici in the Jan. 31 special election is the first step in getting Democrats back in charge and the first step to start revitalizing America's middle class. "The whole country is focused on this race," Hoyer said. "What happens in Oregon will make an impact on 434 other House districts in this country." Hoyer said for the last two years House Democrats have pushed jobs bills, only to have them bottled up by the Republican leadership. "They won't consider our plans, and they put nothing up of their own," he said. Hoyer believes Republicans are "holding the American people hostage" in order to damage the re-election efforts of Democratic President Barack Obama this November. Bonamici has been endorsed by most of organized labor, including the Oregon AFL-CIO, where she attained a Gold Star rating during her time in the Oregon Senate. The 1st Congressional District is comprised of Columbia, Clatsop, Washington, and Yamhill counties, and a piece of Multnomah County. Ballots must be mailed back or turned in to the Elections Division by Jan. 31.

Laborers Local 320's Guetzloe-Parker tapped to lead building trades council

Jodi Guetzloe-Parker of Laborers Local 320 has been elected executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council. She defeated Paul Riggs, a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48 in an election of affiliated delegates held Jan. 3.

She will be sworn into office Feb. 7.

Riggs has served in the post since Aug. 30, 2010, filling the unexpired term of John Mohlis, a member of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1. Mohlis vacated the seat to become executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, following the retirement of Bob Shiprack, a member of IBEW Local 48.

Guetzloe-Parker, 51, is an 18-year member of Laborers Local 320, which represents workers in heavy and highway construction, at industrial plants, non-profit pre-school child care, and some public sector workers. Guetzloe-Parker started in the trade as a flagger. She was hired to Local 320's staff in 2005.

She is one of only a handful of women in the country leading a construction trades council.



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