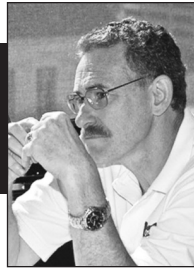


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Oregonians in the 1st Congressional District (CD 1) have received their ballots in the Oregon special election, which the whole country is watching. This is the first congressional election of 2012, and the pundits have already claimed that the results will set the tone for the year.

I hope that they're correct. Here's why:

First, Oregonians vote in higher numbers than average. If we want a pro-worker Congress who will stand up to corporations and help us create more jobs, working people must vote. I know I can count on union members in CD 1 to vote. But it's up to all of us to talk to our friends and family in Northwest Oregon and make sure they turn their ballots in before Jan. 31.

Second, the two major-party candidates in our election give us a clear choice between an irresponsible business owner, and a consumer-advocate who has stood up for workers' rights and working people for her entire career.

There's still a lot of work to be done and ballots to be cast before we'll know the winner. But I hope that every election this year focuses on the important economic issues

that we've seen the candidates talk about in CD 1.

When you pay attention to those issues, there's a clear winner for union members in Oregon.

Suzanne Bonamici started her career standing up to predatory lenders' illegal practices — and she won. She first got involved in Oregon politics as a citizen activist, calling for better investment in our schools. And in her three terms in the Oregon Legislature she has been a tireless advocate for workers' rights, a strong education system for our kids, and for keeping in line the same predatory lenders and financial institutions who she took to court at the start of her career.

Most importantly, though, Suzanne is committed to a job creation plan that puts working people and small business owners first.

Rob Cornilles, her main opponent, says his primary qualification is his time as a business owner in Oregon. But if he plans to run Congress like he ran his business, we're all in for hard times. Rob claims he's created 60 jobs in Oregon.

That's true, in that he's employed a total of 60 people over 16 years. Currently, his company doesn't even own building space. And during

those 16 years Cornilles has had to pay a settlement to past trainees who claimed they'd been treated as employees, working hundreds of hours without ever being paid; he has had staff forget to pay the company's share of payroll taxes for employees; and he recently let his business registration lapse for over a year.

Let's prove the pundits right. This month, let's show the country that in Oregon we vote — all of us. And that in Oregon a commitment to middle class families and working people matters. Let's elect Suzanne Bonamici with an overwhelming victory, and tell the rest of the state — and the country — that in November it'll be their turn to send pro-worker representatives to Congress.

Suzanne Bonamici has been on our side her whole career. Let's send her to Washington, D.C., and see what it's like to have a strong congresswoman on our side.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

New contract: Two-year pay freeze for 1,200 Portland Public Schools support staff

Support workers at Portland Public Schools (PPS) will get no wage increase or cost-of-living adjustment in a new two-year contract between the school district and Portland Federation of School Professionals (PFSP) Local 111. With the cost of living rising just over 2 percent a year, the 1,200 workers are likely to fall behind economically. They'll also have to pay more out of pocket for health insurance. The district agreed to increase its monthly health insurance contribution by \$50 in 2013, to \$1,026 a month. But costs for the district's self-insured health trust are expected to increase more than that amount — and that's *after* a reduction in benefits.

"Our members are just thankful to

have jobs," said PFSP President Belinda Reagan. "Our group has been so hard hit by layoffs."

PFSP numbered 1,400 several years ago, but 130 members were laid off in summer 2010, and 60 in summer 2011, in what Reagan, a former library assistant at Fernwood Middle School, described as an annual ordeal of "un-assignments."

"We're seeing clerical workers, some of whom have been with the district 25 years, laid off," Reagan said, "and that's very frightening for people."

The tentative agreement was announced Jan. 9, after nearly a year of bargaining. It covers the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. Members voted to approve the contract Jan. 11, and the school board will ratify it at a later date.

PPS Superintendent Carole Smith, in the district's press statement, said the contract is "grounded in the reality that we all must make sacrifices in order to maintain the maximum number of staff in our schools who support students."

PFSP — formerly known as Portland Federation of Teachers and Classified Employees, is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers. The union represents PPS workers in about

60 occupational classifications, the most numerous of which are paraeducators (450 employees) and school clerical staff. Paraeducators — special education teacher assistants — are paid \$14.04 to \$19.45 an hour.

The new contract is retroactive to July 1, 2011. The previous four-year agreement contained some cost-of-living increases and some step increases. Step increases — which reward workers for longevity as they move up a pay scale — used to be automatic, but now must be bargained for.

Still, Reagan said, district negotiator Brock Logan bargained fairly. Non-represented employees have had no raises either, including PPS Superintendent Smith, who has had no raise since she began in 2007, though she does make \$190,000 a year. Logan, a former negotiator for AFSCME Council 2 in Washington, went to work as PPS' director of labor relations in March 2010. Having little to offer in economic issues, the district agreed to some union proposals that don't have an economic impact, including rules that give workers more vacation time sooner than they do now.

Reagan said members are likely to demand pay increases in the next contract.

STAT OF THE WEEK

Since 2000, says a new GMI research group study, 21 U.S. CEOs have pocketed severance packages worth over \$100 million. The chief executives averaged only 13 years with the companies they exited.

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