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## Planned Walmart in Oak Grove draws protesters

The community organization “No Oak Grove Walmart” (NOGWal) held a rally July 14 against the corporate giant’s proposal to open a 63,500 square-foot grocery store at the vacant G.I. Joe’s building on McLaughlin Boulevard. More than 75 people attended, including speakers Jefferson Smith, who is running for mayor of Portland, and City Commissioner-elect Steve Novick. Walmart has targeted the Portland metropolitan area for 17 new stores, many of them near unionized grocers.

Lisa Brinson, a member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 employed at Fred Meyer, said the encroachment of Walmart into communities brings down wages and benefits of all grocery workers. “Walmart would be a bad investment in this neighborhood of Oak Grove,” she said.

Valerie Chapman of NOGWal said some businesses are worse than an empty building. “We know people desperate to take care of their family will take any job,” she said. “But Walmart is a race to the bottom for everyone.”

Chapman said local residents have been working for several years on a plan to revitalize the economy of Oak Grove by including local businesses, walkable neighborhoods, tree-lined streets and open spaces not dominated by large parking lots. “Walmart was not part of our dream,” she said. “In fact, Walmart represents a nightmare for our hopes.”

More rallies are expected in Oak Grove, as well as at other locations where Walmart stores are being proposed.

Walmart has already opened grocery stores this year in West Linn, Beaverton, and Gresham.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM CIVILETTI

## ERB judge’s ruling contradicts TriMet’s win at arbitration

Five days after an arbitrator imposed TriMet’s contract proposal on 2,000 members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757, an administrative law judge with the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB) issued an order that appears to contradict it.

Since 2007, state law has barred Oregon public transit workers from striking; instead, if contract bargaining reaches impasse, union and management present their final offers to an arbitrator, who picks one side’s offer in its entirety. After much delay, on July 13, 2012, arbitrator David Gaba picked TriMet’s offer, and ordered that its terms be retroactive to Dec. 1, 2009 — when the previous contract expired.

Under TriMet’s contract proposal, it continues to pay the full premiums for Kaiser Permanente and Regence Blue-Cross BlueShield health plans, but it reduces the benefit level of the Regence plan, which 58 percent of TriMet’s union workers are enrolled in. Under the previous contract, the Regence plan paid virtually all health expenses; under the new contract, it has what’s known as a 90/10 benefit level: Employees pay 10 percent of health care expenses — after a deductible of \$150 per individ-

ual (or \$450 per family) — up to an out-of-pocket maximum of \$1,500 a year per individual (or \$4,500 per family).

But a reduced benefit level is pretty tricky to implement retroactively, because it changes payment terms for benefits that were already used. It makes matters still more complicated that TriMet continued the old Regence benefit level for 13 months after the old contract expired — and paid an increased premium for 12 of those months. Then as of Jan. 1, 2011 it made workers who wanted to continue with Regence choose: keep the old generous benefits and pay the premium increase, or accept the new 90/10 benefit structure. So to impose TriMet’s offer retroactively requires some complex accounting. Workers who chose to keep the old benefit structure get a refund of the premiums they paid, but if they used any of the health insurance benefits, they have to pay the deductible and 10 percent coinsurance that they would have paid if the 90/10 structure had been in place.

However, all this appears to be contradicted by the ruling issued July 18 by ERB judge Wendy Greenwald.

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## GOP filibuster threat shoots down another jobs bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Once again, a planned Senate Republican filibuster brought down a jobs bill, the Bring Jobs Home Act.

The 56-42 vote on July 19 to open debate was not enough to cross the 60-vote threshold lawmakers needed to halt the scheduled Republican filibuster against it. Had the vote been allowed, it would have garnered a majority of senators’ support. Instead, the bill died.

The bill banned firms from deducting from their taxes the expenses of shifting U.S. jobs overseas, while giving firms that bring outsourced jobs back to the U.S. an additional 20 percent tax credit for doing so.

Four Republicans joined 50 Democrats and both independents in voting to debate the measure

introduced by Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.). The AFL-CIO pushed for the bill and asked members to call and e-mail senators and encourage them to support it.

“Too many of our tax and trade policies continue to reward multi-national companies who off-shore jobs,” AFL-CIO Legislative Director Bill Samuel wrote senators. “This important legislation will create and keep jobs here at home.”

“Every other major industrial country has a strategic plan to create and keep good jobs. It’s time for the U.S. to implement a real plan ... to put our people back to work and end the tax breaks and flawed policies that encourage rampant off-shoring,” he added. “The Bring Jobs Home Act is the first step” in doing so, Samuel said.

Before the vote, Stabenow, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), and other backers discussed the jobs bill, anyway.

“In the last decade, companies shipped 2.4 million jobs overseas,” Stabenow said. “To add insult to injury, American taxpayers were asked to help foot the bill. It is amazing. When I explain that to folks in Michigan, they say you have to be kidding — or they say other things I cannot repeat on the floor of the Senate.”

“Just imagine if you are one of those workers in Michigan or Virginia or Ohio or Wisconsin or anywhere who maybe was forced to train your overseas replacement before you were laid off ... When an American worker is asked to subsidize the moving expenses and costs so their own job can be

shipped overseas,” as they do now, “there is something seriously wrong with our tax code and our priorities.”

“This is about making sure we see the words ‘Made in America’ again,” Boxer said. “We need the jobs here. Shipping jobs overseas became a trend and a lot of important voices were heard saying: ‘That is just the way it is.’ It is not just the way it is. If we have policies in place that incentivize manufacturing and production here, we are not going to lose those jobs.”

The AFL-CIO said the U.S. Senate had a golden opportunity to fix some of the policies that have resulted in millions of American jobs being outsourced abroad, but Republicans stood with those who ship U.S. jobs overseas.