

Portland to discuss paid sick leave proposal in January

Backers of a paid sick leave ordinance say Portland City Council won't take up the issue until next year.

The Everybody Benefits coalition, which includes labor, community, and business groups, wants Portland to require employers to provide paid sick leave, as San Francisco and several other cities do.

City Commissioner Amanda Fritz said in October she aimed to pass such an ordinance by the end of 2012. Now, Jeff Anderson, secretary-treasurer of United Food & Commercial Workers

(UFCW) Local 555, said he expects Fritz will come out with a draft proposal the first week in January.

Up to 40 percent of Portland workers — 260,000, including nearly all restaurant workers — have no paid sick leave of any kind, said Andrea Paluso, coordinator of the Everybody Benefits coalition. Without paid sick leave, workers lose wages and may even face discipline in some workplaces if they stay home because they or a child is sick. Workers who lack sick leave are more likely to go to work sick or to

send their kids to school sick, and that spreads illness to others.

Paid sick leave is a big issue for Anderson's union, which represents 17,000 grocery workers in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Local 555 is engaged in tough contract negotiations with grocers, and one issue of contention is employers insistence that workers not use paid sick leave until the third day of an illness.

Under the San Francisco ordinance, workers can use paid sick days starting on the first day of an illness. They ac-

crue an hour of sick leave for every 30 hours of work, and can use up five or nine days a year, depending on the size of the workplace.

"We're pushing for Portland to take the leadership role and enact a good piece of legislation," Anderson said.

One possibility would be a City ordinance set to go into effect in September, after the Oregon Legislature had a chance to consider a statewide paid sick leave law.

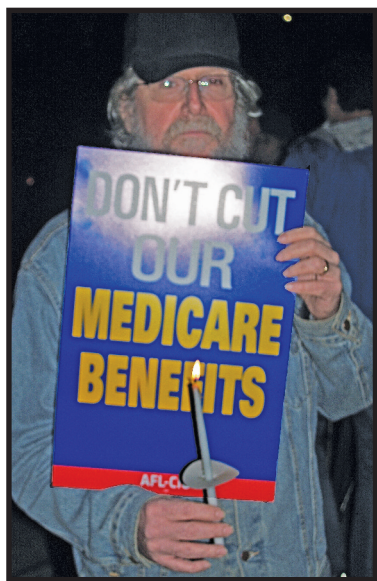
An Aug. 24 poll commissioned by Local 555 showed 60 percent of Portland voters favored "a law that would guarantee all workers in Portland a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or their immediate family members." Of 528 Portland voters, 60 percent were in favor, 15 percent opposed, and 25 percent undecided. The poll had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percent.

Labor to Congress: Don't fall for 'fiscal bluff'

Sometimes a bad deal is worse than no deal. The national AFL-CIO wants Congress to renew a set of tax cuts for working people, but not at the expense of continuing tax cuts for the rich or cutting Social Security or Medicare.

Starting immediately after the November election, the AFL-CIO has been campaigning to stiffen the backbones of the president and Congressional Democrats as the so-called "fiscal cliff" nears. Fiscal cliff was the phrase Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke used to describe the consequences if Congress fails to reach agreement on tax and budget policy by year's end. Several sets of tax cuts expire then, and so does funding for programs like extended unemployment insurance. And under a law passed in 2011, across-the-board cuts in federal spending are scheduled to take effect Jan. 1 if Congress doesn't find ways to reduce the deficit. In short, it's a manufactured political crisis, and it could use a political solution.

But it must not be used as an excuse to cut benefits that working people have paid for all their lives, AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka has argued. Republicans have proposed smaller cost-of-living adjustments for Social Security



George Slanina joined nearly 250 people at a candlelight vigil Dec. 10 to protest proposed cuts to Social Security and Medicare as a way to avoid the "fiscal cliff."

recipients and raising the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67 as part of a deal.

Organized labor has been lobbying, rallying, and running ads to tell Con-

gress "No tax breaks for the richest 2 percent" and "no Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid cuts."

In Portland, 250 unionists and community activists held a candlelight vigil Dec. 10 outside of U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden's office in Portland, "to shine a light on the truth about the fiscal cliff."

"While there are major consequences for not striking a deal, the consequences of a bad deal are even worse," read an AFL-CIO flier. "It's not worth bargaining away our financial security, or health security, or our retirement security. It's not worth a bad deal."

The Portland vigil called on Sen. Wyden and U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader to not "buy into a deal because they think it's the only option. It's not the only option."

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