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Unanimous City Council: Portland workers will have sick leave

How a labor and community alliance improved life for over a quarter million workers ... and might keep you from getting sick next year

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

In a 5-0 vote March 13, Portland City Council guaranteed the right to sick leave to all who work in Portland. The ordinance, which takes effect Jan. 1, 2014, will make life a little better for an estimated quarter million Portland workers who don't currently have sick leave, plus many thousands more who

have it but can't use it when they need it. The ordinance is expected to curb the spread of contagious illnesses in restaurants, schools, and daycare centers, because workers will be able to stay home when they or their children are sick.

The ordinance's passage was the product of a year-plus campaign by a coalition of labor, business, and community groups. Key to the campaign's success, supporters say, was the group nature of the effort — and the decision of Commissioner Amanda Fritz, a former nurse and proud nurses union member, to champion the measure.

The sick leave campaign began with

Andrea Paluso, a 36-year-old former community health clinic social worker and mother of two.

Paluso and her group, Family Forward Oregon, got educated on paid sick leave and quietly assembled a coalition in support. At first the plan was to pass something in Multnomah County, where Commissioner Deb Kafoury was eager to take up the cause. But a legal opinion came back that such a regulation was outside the county's charter. Municipalities, however, have much greater latitude, and the activists turned their attention to Portland City Council.

Commissioner Fritz recalls that it was the grocery workers union, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555, that first brought the sick leave idea to her attention — in a candidate endorsement interview for the 2012 primary.

"It was pretty shocking to learn that Fred Meyer grocery workers and deli

(Turn to Page 4)

'Right-to-work' initiative aims at Oregon ballot

The 2014 measure, backed by millionaire Loren Parks, would make public employee union dues strictly voluntary

The first 1,000 signatures have been submitted on a "right-to-work" initiative for the November 2014 ballot.

The initiative, dubbed the Public Employee Choice Act, would remove any requirement that public employees pay union dues or any share of the costs that unions incur to represent them. Under current law, public employees who are represented by unions pay either union dues, if they choose to be members, or reduced "fair share" fees which cover the union's cost of negotiating contracts and representing workers in discipline cases.



The chief petitioners on the initiative are Keizer resident Braeda Libby and Beaverton attorney Jill Gibson Odell, a former legislative director for the Oregon House Republican caucus.

After the campaign turned in the ini-

(Turn to Page 12)

Rally to save U.S. Postal Service delivers big crowd in Portland



Portland area letter carriers, postal workers, and community allies marched through the streets of downtown Portland March 17 in a show of support for saving the U.S. Post Office from massive cuts. (Photo by Jamie Partridge)

An estimated 600 postal workers and community allies rallied in the streets of downtown Portland March 17 to save postal jobs and services.

U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced earlier this year plans to end Saturday mail delivery, beginning in August. Cutting delivery to five days will eliminate 80,000 jobs, according to the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), hundreds of them in the Portland area. USPS has already cut 168,000 jobs since 2006 and projects the outsourcing of most postal trucking, and closure of 30 percent of mail processing plants and hundreds of post offices by June, cutting another 100,000 jobs and slowing delivery standards.

"It's a manufactured financial crisis that happened when the 2006 Congress mandated the USPS pay for 75 percent of future retiree benefits in a 10-year period," said Jim Cook, president of NALC Branch 82, which represents 1,200 carriers in the greater Portland area. "Without this 'stamp tax' of \$5.5 billion each year during the recession, the USPS would be financially sound, expanding services — not shrinking the universal postal service into oblivion."

Besides the Letter Carriers, an additional 800-plus postal workers in the Portland area are members of the American Postal Workers Union; the National

Postal Mail Handlers Union, a division of the Laborers Union; and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association.

Cook and others said with new USPS leadership and appropriate legislation, the Postal Service can become financially stable and continue long into the 21st century.

Most of Oregon's congressional delegation supports legislation to save the Postal Service, and not dismantle it. U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden have co-sponsored S. 316 and U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio has sponsored a companion bill, HR 630. These will modernize the USPS, save Saturday delivery, reinstate overnight delivery standards to speed mail delivery, prevent shutdown of mail sorting facilities, and protect rural post offices.

"And these are tax-free solutions," said Cook, pointing out that the USPS has not operated on tax dollars since 1982.

The rally began at Pioneer Courthouse Square, and protesters marched through the streets of downtown Portland on a busy St. Patrick's Day to the Main Post Office several blocks away.

March 17 is the anniversary of the Great Postal Strike of 1970, a two-week wildcat strike by thousands of postal workers protesting unbearable working conditions and poor pay. President

(Turn to Page 11)