

# Oregon Nurses Association joins American Federation of Teachers

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

At a specially-called delegates meeting March 16 in Portland, elected officers of 10,400-member Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) ratified a proposal to affiliate with 850,000-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The move is the latest in a series of realignments in which unionized nurses have consolidated into several national formations.

## Benefits of belonging

RN Paul Goldberg, ONA's assistant executive director of labor relations, said affiliating with AFT will enhance the voice and power of nurses within Oregon and across the country, at a time when hospitals are consolidating and becoming more formidable adversaries. Goldberg said nurses are headed for turbulence with the changes to the health care industry brought about by the Affordable Care Act. Hospitals are reacting to uncertainty with cost-cutting measures, Goldberg said, including tightened nurse staffing levels, and efforts to have less skilled workers do the work of RNs.

Though designated as AFT Local 5905, ONA remains autonomous, keeping its name, leadership, staff, and by-

laws. It also continues as a part of NFN, which becomes a new unit of AFT.

ONA thus becomes the fourth autonomous AFT affiliate in Oregon. The others are 8,700-member AFT-Oregon (which represents community college faculty and support staff at K-12 schools); 18,600-member Oregon

School Employees Association (OSEA), an independent union of K-12 classified employees that joined AFT in 2008; and 3,100-member Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, which represents most RNs at Kaiser Permanente. [ONA represents 10,400 RNs in about 50 separate bar-

gaining units around the state, including Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU), and most hospitals in the Providence chain.]

Through all the reorganizations, ONA never left the Oregon AFL-CIO. ONA's affiliation brings AFT's membership total within the Oregon AFL-

CIO to 40,800; that makes AFT the 110,000-member state federation's most populous union.

Legacy Health Systems is the only major hospital chain in the Portland area where RNs are nonunion, and outside Portland, Salem Hospital is the only other large hospital with nonunion RNs.

## Fracture and reunion as nurses unions shift alignments

Once upon a time, "nurse organization" meant the American Nurses Association (ANA). ANA is a professional association for registered nurses (RNs), and has state-level affiliates, like ONA. But in recent decades, many RNs came to feel they needed not just professional development but the workplace protections of a collective bargaining agreement. Some state ANA affiliates became more like labor unions. That created tension within the ANA, which also had as members academics and RNs in management. That tension led the California Nurses Association (CNA) to leave ANA in 1995. So in 1999, United American Nurses (UAN) was formed as the

union wing of the ANA for state affiliates engaged in collective bargaining.

Meanwhile, national unions like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the Teamsters had been engaging in their own organizing campaigns among RNs. With so many unions seeking to represent RNs, conflicts sometime arose, along with accusations of "raiding." In union parlance, a raid is an attempt by one union to represent workers who are already represented by another union.

UAN affiliated with the national

AFL-CIO in 2001, in part to stop raiding, since AFL-CIO has rules barring affiliated unions from raiding each other.

Then in 2005, SEIU, UFCW, the Teamsters, and several other unions left the AFL-CIO. Though UAN contemplated joining them, it remained in the AFL-CIO. CNA affiliated with the AFL-CIO in 2006.

In 2007, amid fears that UAN leaders were considering joining SEIU (and leaving the AFL-CIO), UAN affiliates in Montana, New York, Ohio, Washington, and Oregon (ONA) left. The following year they formed a new group, the National Federation of Nurses (NFN). NFN sought to affiliate with the AFL-CIO,

but AFL-CIO rules say breakaway groups can't get their own charter for at least three years.

CNA and its National Nurses Organizing Committee then merged with UAN and Massachusetts Nurses Association to form National Nurses United (NNU) in December 2009.

Last year, NFN's New York affiliate voted to secede.

In February, NFN announced affiliation with AFT, which was then ratified by its remaining affiliates. ONA was the final NFN affiliate to approve joining AFT. The addition of the four NFN affiliates adds 35,000 members, bringing AFT's health care division to 82,000.

# Voters recall water district commissioner in union-backed campaign

Residents of the Clackamas River Water (CRW) District voted overwhelmingly March 19 to recall Commissioner Patricia Holloway. The vote was 8,155 to 563.

Turnout in the special election was

28.4 percent. CRW serves about 51,400 homes in Clackamas County, primarily in Oregon City.

Thirty front-line employees of the water district are represented by the American Federation of State, County

and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 350. Following years of internal fighting, expensive lawsuits, and general dysfunction among the five-member volunteer Board of Commissioners, late last year union workers took a

unanimous vote of "no confidence" in the entire board and called on all its members to resign. Two commissioners — Tami Kehoe and Barbara Kemper — did so. Holloway and Grafton Sterling did not. [In mid-July, Mike Cardwell, who had been a commissioner since 2001, resigned, leaving the board with a 2-2 split.]

Union officials pointed to Holloway and Sterling as instigators of most of the internal problems. Holloway has

served on the board for seven years.

That prompted water district ratepayer Naomi Angier, a member of sister AFSCME Local 88, to file for an election to recall the two commissioners. She got support from the Northwest Oregon Labor Council and the Oregon AFL-CIO's constituency group, Working America. Together, they collected more than 5,000 signatures for the recall petitions. A clerical error, however, disqualified the Sterling petition.

Since then, three interim board members were appointed to the water district by the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners. They are Larry Sowa, a former county commissioner, Kenneth Humberston, and Hugh Kalani. They will serve until an election can be held.

The water board commissioners will appoint someone to serve the last two years of Holloway's term, as soon as the election is certified.



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