

UO at \$320,000 (and counting) in talks with union

EUGENE — An outside law firm has billed University of Oregon over \$320,000 to handle first-time contract bargaining with United Academics of the University of Oregon, the university's new faculty union. The negotiations have been under way less than five months. The firm — Harrang Long Gary Rudnick P.C. — is the same one that the university hired to stymie the union's organizing drive last year, until Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber intervened to put the kibosh on further use of public money to fight unionization.

Details of the university's legal bills are the fruit of a relentless public records fight by University of Oregon economics professor Bill Harbaugh,

who writes the blog UO Matters and serves as an economic consultant to the union bargaining team. In a counter-bill, the university administration disputes Harbaugh's tally, saying as of late April that the Harrang firm had only billed the university \$266,245.

By Harbaugh's reckoning, four-fifths of the firm's billings are for hours worked by Sharon Rudnick, a partner in the firm, who charges the public university \$305 an hour. But also at the trough is retired UO president and law school dean Dave Frohnmayer. Frohnmayer now works for the Harrang firm, where he charges \$275 an hour (a "discount" on his official rate of \$550 an hour) to advise the university in labor

negotiations — at the same time that he collects a \$100,500 salary for part-time work teaching several courses at the university. And that's on top of the more than \$250,000 a year that Frohnmayer collects in Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) benefits. Frohnmayer, a former Republican state representative and state attorney general, is the public pension system's fifth highest individual recipient.

The university pays the Harrang law firm to lead bargaining despite the fact that it has its own in-house attorneys and human resources administrators.

United Academics of the University of Oregon — which is affiliated jointly with American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and American University of University Professors — says UO faculty salaries are at the very bottom of a peer group of 62 leading research universities. In bargaining, the union is seeking annual raises of 3.5 percent. The administration's counter-offer is 1.5 percent.

Harbaugh, who "live blogs" the union bargaining sessions, said the university has stonewalled and delayed responding to his public records requests, and charged him \$300 for copies of the most recent Harrang invoices, which were heavily redacted.

"One of the strangest parts of this," Harbaugh told the Labor Press, "is that

not only is the university administration paying the lawyers to do the negotiating, but because my blog makes the lawyers look bad, the lawyers are now paying consultants to try to make the lawyers look good."

"Now they're trying to charge me — I'm not making this up — \$293 just to see the full names of the consultants that the university is paying."

State representative Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who's also a long-time leader within AFT, says that in his experience, for employers to spend money opposing efforts to unionize is poison to the relationship, and makes it

that much more difficult to negotiate a first contract. A bill sponsored by Dembrow in the current legislative session would bar public entities from spending money opposing unions during the organizing phase, though not during negotiations. The bill, HB 3342, passed the House and is pending in the Oregon Senate.

If anything, the Legislature appears poised to give the university even more autonomy this year: Senate Bill 270 would give University of Oregon (and Portland State University) their own boards, independent of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education.

IBEW Local 48's Joe Esmonde nominated to TriMet board

Joe Esmonde, a business representative for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48, has been nominated by Gov. John Kitzhaber to a seat on TriMet's board of directors.



JOE
ESMONDE

The TriMet board has been without a labor voice since mid-2012, when Teamster Lynn Lehrbach was not reappointed to a second four-year term.

TriMet has been embroiled in a bitter dispute with Amalgamated Transit Union that dates back to 2009.

Esmonde's nomination is subject to Senate confirmation. The Senate Rules Committee will hold confirmation hearings May 29.

The District 3 seat representing outer Southwest Portland, Tigard, King City, and parts of Beaverton has been vacant since January. The post was held by Steve Clark, former president of Community Newspapers, Inc., which publishes the Portland Tribune. He left the newspaper in 2012 for a marketing job at Oregon State University in Corvallis. He remained on the board until the end of 2012.

The seven-member volunteer board serves at the pleasure of the governor. Board members represent, and must live in, certain geographical districts. The board sets the direction and policy of TriMet and manages its budget. The term of office is four years.



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Oregon University System prevailing wage bill passes Senate, 27-2

SALEM — The Oregon Senate passed a bill May 14 that calls for prevailing wage pay on all construction work done on property that the Oregon University System (OUS) owns, will own, will use or occupy — regardless of where the funding comes from to build it.

The vote on HB 2646 was 27-2, with no debate on the floor. The bill passed in the House in March, 47-10.

The legislation was a top priority for building trades unions this session. It comes in response to the construction of several buildings in recent years on public university land, but done with private funds to avoid the requirement to pay the prevailing wage.

HB 2646 passed with an emergency clause, which means it will become law as soon as it is signed by the governor.

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