

# Kitzhaber eyes special session, more PERS cuts

SALEM — Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber is targeting Sept. 30 as the date for calling the Legislature back for a special session to enact a revenue package that would both raise some taxes and create deeper cuts to the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) — and possibly implement a new strategy for the Columbia River Crossing I-5 bridge project.

The tax and retirement package is a continuation of the so-called “grand bargain” that failed to come about when the Legislature adjourned in July. Kitzhaber and fellow Democrats want an additional \$200 million in tax revenue, almost all of which would go to

K-12 schools. The Republicans’ price for agreeing to new taxes is a deeper cut into PERS.

The Columbia River Crossing was on its death bed in June after the Washington Legislature failed to vote on a transportation funding package to pay for its portion of the bridge replacement. Oregon lawmakers had agreed to pay its \$450 million share, but only if Washington did the same.

Oregon is now considering a revised bridge plan that doesn’t include Washington. But in order to proceed, lawmakers first must remove the requirement for matching funds from Washington.

Kitzhaber has been traveling the state, meeting with lawmakers from both parties trying to broker a deal on the “grand bargain.” Oregon’s constitution requires a two-thirds majority for tax measures, so the governor needs help in both chambers to strike an accord. The tougher of the two will be the Senate, where it will take 18 votes. The Senate has a 16-14 Democrat majority, but the 14 GOP members of the Senate are a tighter caucus than their House counterparts.

While the plan is apparently still fluid, it is expected that the PERS piece would entail additional cutbacks to retirees’ annual cost-of-living adjust-

ments (COLAs), plus possibly lower payments to inactive PERS members — people who have money in PERS but are not currently employed by a PERS employer.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 Political Director Joe Baessler says the governor’s proposals on PERS go too far.

“We’re opposed,” Baessler told the Oregonian newspaper. “We were opposed then [during the regular session], and we’re still opposed.”

*(Editor’s Note: Don Loving, communications director for Oregon AFSCME Council 75, contributed to this report.)*



(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)  
Established in 1900 at Portland, Oregon as a voice of the labor movement.  
4275 NE Halsey St., P.O. Box 13150,  
Portland, Ore. 97213  
Telephone: (503) 288-3311

Editor: Michael Gutwig  
Staff: Don McIntosh, Cheri Rice  
Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co. Inc., a non-profit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and SW Washington. Subscriptions \$13.75 per year for union members.

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## Oregon University System workers file strike notice

Some 4,200 classified workers at the Oregon University System’s (OUS) seven state universities could strike Sept. 30 — the first day of class for fall term. The non-faculty employees, which range from secretaries, custodians, and electricians, to cafeteria workers, Internet technicians and others, are represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503.

OUS is comprised of the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon State in Corvallis, Portland State, Eastern Oregon in LaGrande, Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls, Southern Oregon in Ashland, and Western Oregon in Monmouth.

After six months of bargaining, wages and salary steps are a key sticking points.

The union declared an impasse Aug. 19. Strike authorization was given Sept. 12 and the union’s bargaining team filed a 10-day notice to strike.

The sides bargained unsuccessfully

throughout the weekend Sept. 14-15. They met again Sept. 18, after this issue of the Labor Press went to press.

Following the notice to strike, the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon and the American Association of University Professors, which represent OUS faculty, said they will support the classified workers.

Presidents of student associations at the University of Oregon, Oregon State, and Portland State announced their support as well. Sam Dotters-Katz, president of Associated Students of the University of Oregon, issued a press release stating that on the first day of the strike, students at every OUS campus will engage in different actions, joining picket lines and holding educational events with students and faculty.

Since the recession began in 2009, support staff at OUS campuses have taken dozens of furlough days and their ranks have suffered many layoffs.

Marc Nisenfeld, a development en-

gineer at Portland State University and chair of the SEIU Local 503 bargaining team, said classified employees have fallen so far behind that nearly one quarter of them meet the threshold for food stamp eligibility for a family of four.

He said that some administrators in the OUS “literally make more money in one month than some of our workers make all year.”

“The economy has turned around, and people are moving forward. All we ask is that we don’t fall further behind,” he said.

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