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To show support for Portland Association of Teachers (PAT), Portland Public Schools teachers and community supporters lined both sides of the Burnside Bridge in Portland at evening rush hour Nov. 22.

Portland Public Schools declares impasse, triggers timetable for a strike

Portland Public Schools (PPS) declared impasse Nov. 20, triggering a timeline that could result in a teacher strike as early as Jan. 6, when students return to school from Winter Break.

Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) bargaining chair Bill Wilson said the district's move came as a shock.

"We really felt we were making progress," said Wilson, who teaches chemistry at Grant High School. The two sides had just met Nov. 18, and had talked about setting dates later in the week.

At a press conference announcing the move, PPS human resources director Sean Murray said impasse is a "bargaining tool" that the district used successfully in 2010 to bring about agreement.

Once impasse is declared, the two sides have a week to deliver their final offers. Then there's a 30-day cooling off period. After that, the district could impose its final offer with seven days notice, and teachers could strike with 10 days notice. The earliest a strike could occur is Dec. 27, but schools are closed for Winter Break until Jan. 6.

During the previous contract cycle, bargaining lasted 22 months. This time, exactly 150 days after the first negotiation session, the district ended face-to-face bargaining and called for mediation. Then 14 days after the first

mediation session, the district declared impasse. Those two time frames are the legal minimum under Oregon's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act.

Why such a rush? Murray told reporters that prolonged bargaining "becomes disruptive to our students, our schools, and community." But neither he nor Board Chair Greg Belisle nor Superintendent Carole Smith had a convincing explanation of how staying at the bargaining table would be disruptive: Murray and Belisle said it would cause "anxiety," while Smith said drawn-out bargaining "distracts people from the business of teaching and learning."

"I think a strike would be much more of a disruption to student learning," said PAT President Gwen Sullivan at a press conference called by the union to respond to the district's declaration of impasse. And, Sullivan added, any time PPS makes quick decisions, it doesn't end well.

Murray said the district is open to further face-to-face meetings, and is not looking to force a strike.

But the two sides will have a lot of ground to cover if and when they meet.

Murray called the district's wage offer "competitive," saying teacher salaries would increase from 6 to 17 percent under its proposal. But Wilson

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In a stand for the middle class, Machinists reject Boeing offer

Taking a stand for good middle class jobs, rank-and-file members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) on Nov. 13 soundly rejected a long-term contract proposal by Boeing Corp. that included large concessions on pensions, wages, and overall workplace conditions.

In exchange for all the takeaways, Boeing offered a \$10,000 signing bonus, and it sweetened the early retirement calculation for those close to retirement. The company also gave a commitment to build its new 777X aircraft in Washington, though that guarantee wasn't iron-clad in writing in its proposal.

The 8-year contract proposal was negotiated secretly, and involved Washington state politicians.

The vote to reject the proposal was 67 percent in Everett, Washington, and 78 percent at the Boeing parts plant in Portland, Oregon, where 1,290 workers are members of Machinists Lodge 63. Some 30,000 workers in Everett are members of Machinists Lodge 751.

The turnout was one of the largest to ever vote a contract, union officials said.

Machinists still have three years remaining on their existing contract. That pact also was bargained secretly — and

presented to workers in mid-contract (December 2011). The deal included a signing bonus, wage and pension increases, and a commitment from Boeing to build the 737 MAX in the Evergreen State. In return, workers agreed to pick up more of the cost of their health insurance premiums, and the union agreed to drop a high-profile National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) complaint it made after Boeing relocated a Dreamliner 787 assembly line to a nonunion plant in South Carolina. The NLRB found Boeing did so in retaliation against workers for striking in 2008. It's illegal to threaten or penalize workers who engage in concerted activity.

Union members accepted the deal — which extended their contract to September 2016 — by a 74 percent margin.

This time around, IAM leaders said the talks were more like an ultimatum than a negotiation. Boeing officials said that if workers rejected their offer, the company would look elsewhere to build the 777X airliner.

According to Labor Notes, staff and business agents of Machinists District Lodge 751 initially were divided on the proposal, voting 18 to 10 not to present it to members, but they were overruled

by the international.

The threat of leaving Washington prompted Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee to call a special session of the Legislature, which in three days — and just days before the union vote — granted the company a \$8.7 billion tax incentive package through 2024. The incentive includes money for workforce training and a streamlined permitting process. It's the nation's largest-ever state tax subsidy for a private corporation.

Nevertheless, rank-and-file Machinists were angry to be presented with such a complex new collective bargaining agreement — not a contract extension as it originally was presented — under such pressure by public officials and the company to accept it.

As Jeff Johnson, president of the Washington State Labor Council explained, workers felt "extorted" by Boeing's offer.

Specifically, in exchange for a promise of keeping production in Washington, Boeing wanted to convert the defined benefit pension system as of Nov. 1, 2016, to a 401(k)-style savings plan (this from a company whose CEO is on track to receive a pension worth more than \$250,000 per month). It wanted to raise the share of health care costs workers paid by more than 30 percent over the life of the contract. It would have required at least 16 years for a newly hired Machinist to move from the bottom of the pay scale to the top (it currently takes six-and-a-half years). And it would have limited wage increases to 1 percent every other year to 2024. Maximum hourly pay tops out at \$35.25.

The modifications reportedly would have saved Boeing about \$2 billion over the eight-year contract. The company recently posted historically high quarterly revenue and profit figures. And shortly after the contract vote, Boeing announced it had pre-orders of 259 777X aircraft worth more than \$95 billion.

The Seattle Times reported that Boeing is currently soliciting proposals from about 15 U.S. locations for bids to build the 777X. The list of sites includes Long Beach, California; Salt Lake City, Utah; Huntsville, Alabama; San Antonio, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri, North

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Several hundred union and community members, including some from Portland, rallied at Seattle's Westlake Park Nov. 18 to support and thank Machinists Union members who work at Boeing Co. for standing up for middle class jobs. On Nov. 13 workers voted to reject contract concessions Boeing said it needed to build its new 777X in Washington. Rallygoers called on Boeing to do the right thing and build the new aircraft in Washington. (Photo by David Groves)