

Boeing controversy fuels challenge to top Machinist posts

The recent contract concessions at Boeing Co. have motivated a Portland-area Machinists Union member to run for office in upcoming international union elections. Pat Maloney — a 15-year employee at Boeing's Gresham aircraft parts plant — is seeking nominations for general vice president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), and is part of a slate that's challenging the incumbent national leadership.



Pat Maloney of IAM Lodge 63 is running for general VP.

IAM held elections in January 2013 for its top officers. But after complaints about election practices, the union is re-doing the election this year under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). A DOL investigation found that the election rules outlined in the IAM constitution violate a federal law governing union elections. Specifically, the DOL found that IAM didn't notify members about nominations, and members didn't have a reasonable opportunity to nominate candidates because some were working during nomination meetings.

The elections complaint was filed by one of the 2013 candidates for general vice president, longtime United Airlines worker Karen Asuncion. In the do-over election, Asuncion is running as part of a slate headed by one time railroad worker and longtime IAM staffer Jay Cronk. Cronk worked for the international as coordinator of IAM's Transportation Division. He is chal-

lenging incumbent international president R. Thomas Buffenbarger in the re-run election. Maloney, the Gresham Boeing plant worker, joined Cronk's slate Jan. 12.

Maloney has been a union activist since 1995, when he supported a union campaign at Precision Castparts. The company fired him in 1997 on trumped-up accusations, and later paid \$100,000 to settle his National Labor Relations Board case. Maloney went to work at Boeing in 1998 as a flight control component tester, became active in the Machinists union, and has served a number of offices in Local Lodge 63.

Cronk's slate includes another member from Boeing — Jason Redrup, a union business representative in Puget Sound's District 751.

Cronk and his slate outline their campaign platform at iamreform.org.

The campaign platform doesn't specifically mention the Boeing contract, but Cronk says it was "very badly mishandled."

"They got themselves involved absent any input from the local leadership, and made commitments to Boeing they couldn't deliver," Cronk said. "I wouldn't have brought that offer to members."

In November, members voted by a 2-to-1 margin to reject a Boeing proposal for an eight-year extension of their current contract, which expires 2016. But Buffenbarger insisted, over local union objections, that a slightly

improved Boeing offer get a vote. The revised deal was approved Jan. 3 by 51 percent of Boeing workers, voting at the end of a holiday break. Under its terms, Boeing commits to build a next-generation aircraft in the Puget Sound in return for workers accepting raises of just 1 percent every other year, increased out-of-pocket medical costs, and an end to their pension in 2016, to be replaced with a 401(k) retirement savings account that would receive much less generous funding. The contract runs through 2024.

Maloney said he was already concerned about leadership decisions, but the Boeing contract in particular made him decide to run.

"Commercial air manufacturing and use is in a boom time right now," Maloney said. "We should never accept concessionary agreements when the

economy is good."

Maloney said the new Boeing contract "radically severs the whole solidarity process," and destroys trust between members and the leadership.

HOW THE VOTE WILL TAKE PLACE

Even under DOL supervision, IAM's system for electing international officers is quite complex. It starts Saturday, Jan. 25, when each "local lodge" will hold special meetings for members to nominate candidates for endorsement by that local lodge. Meetings will be at 6-8 a.m. and 6-8 p.m. so members working every shift can attend. Nominations will be taken for all of the top international offices: international president, general secretary-treasurer and the eight U.S. general vice presidents. [IAM's Canadian members elect their

own general vice president, and eight U.S. general vice presidents are elected at large — and then are assigned to territories or divisions by the international president. In cases where offices receive the same number of nominations as seats available, those nominees are considered to be endorsed by the local lodge. But where more candidates are nominated than positions available, the local lodge then holds "runoff" election meetings Feb. 8 to determine which nominees get the endorsement. All candidates for international office who receive the endorsement of more than 25 local lodges then qualify for the national ballot. The final vote will take places at the first regularly scheduled meeting of each local lodge in April.

IAM has over 800 local lodges. At larger lodges, DOL agents will be present to observe the process.

...Machinists narrowly ratify Boeing pact

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"... the membership deserves the final say ... I have requested the voting process be conducted in a manner that enables the fullest participation of the membership."

Buffenbarger didn't take a position one way or the other on how to vote, though his letter emphasized that several states had tendered "serious offers and incentive packages to the company" and "the timeline for the Puget Sound area is expiring."

Wroblewski and the Lodge 751 staff

unanimously recommended that members reject Boeing's offer.

Many union members and local union leaders questioned the timing of the second vote.

"Our international president forced this vote under the guise of he wanted the members to have the final say on it," Kelliher told Workers Independent News. "Well, if you want the members to have the final say, don't pick a day where you know 25 to 30 percent of them are not available."

Kelliher said since Jan. 3 "there's been a huge outcry" from members calling for a third vote so that a true majority of Machinists members have a chance to cast ballots. She said several members have filed complaints with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and petitions calling for a re-vote have been circulated to collect signatures to send to the international union. Rank-and-file workers held a "Re-Vote Rally" Jan. 9 at the Everett Union Hall.

"We're in uncharted ground," Kelliher said.

The vote to surrender a defined pension plan also spurred some media pundits to predict the end-times for all of organized labor.

Kelliher disagreed, telling Bloomberg News that workers felt powerless because they were in the middle of a contract and, therefore, didn't have their biggest weapon — the threat of a strike — to slow Boeing from its demands for concessions.

[Boeing Machinists are working under the terms of a contract that expires in September 2016. That contract was "extended" mid-term in 2011, also under threat of relocating jobs to another state if it wasn't ratified. The last true collective bargaining took place in 2008. If allowed to stand, the newly extended contract won't expire until 2024.]

Just days before the Jan. 3 contract vote Boeing unleashed a full-scale media campaign to support the deal. Press

conferences by politicians pushed Machinists to accept the deal or else bring financial ruin to Puget Sound.

"We faced tremendous pressure from every source imaginable in deciding how to vote," Wroblewski wrote to members in a post-election letter. "Politicians, the media and others who had no right to get into our business, were aligned against us and did their best to influence your vote."

Kelliher called Boeing's actions "corporate extortion that squeezed both the workers and \$8.7 billion in tax concessions from Washington state."

In a three-day special session in November, Washington lawmakers granted Boeing the largest private corporation tax subsidy in the history of the United States.

And despite the portayal of workers giving up their pensions in return for guaranteed jobs, Kelliher said there is no real iron-clad jobs guarantee in the contract.

"For a two-paragraph language giving us the airplane, the first sentence says we get the work and the next two paragraphs give them loopholes to move it," she told Workers Independent News.

Wroblewski said the union's goal in coming years will be to fight to ensure Boeing lives up to its commitment to its workforce and keeps jobs in Washington state.

"Our members have spoken and this is the course we'll take," he said.

(Editor's Note: Boeing employs about 82,000 workers in Washington. Last spring its engineers and technical employees — represented by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA) — ratified contracts that ended defined benefit pension plans for new hires. In exchange they will have 401(k) style savings plans. Bargaining of those contracts was contentious, with proposals rejected, threats of a strike, and nearly a dozen unfair labor practice complaints filed by the union.)



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