

... Airport worker earns minimum wage, for eight years

From Page 1

The Port may indeed be an excellent working environment, for managers. Executive Director Bill Wyatt's \$394,440 public employee salary puts him in the top 1 percent of income earners. But the point of all the union heat at Port board meetings was to bring PDX closer to other West Coast airports that have raised standards for those on the bottom. UNITE HERE surveyed over 100 concessions workers last fall and found one in four on food stamps, one in six on Medicaid, and a median wage of \$9.30 an hour.

In October, Wyatt told board members he'd bring them a "social equity" proposal to vote on. But in the draft proposal his staff



HOW THE PORT OF PORTLAND WELCOMES PUBLIC INPUT: "Sorry there weren't enough seats for everybody, but we didn't expect such a big crowd," said Port of Portland Commission Chair Jim Carter Feb. 11 as members of the public packed the board room. [The front two rows had been reserved in advance for Port managers.] "Unfortunately, I guess you have to stand," Carter continued. "We are going to take up the 'workplace initiative' last on the agenda." Every month for nearly a year, unionists have waited hours to speak for three minutes to ask the Port for better working conditions for airport service workers.

presented Feb. 11, known as the "PDX Workplace Initiative," the word "equity" was nowhere to be found.

Port of Portland public affairs

director Kristen Leonard, returning a phone call from the Labor Press, explained that the "equity" component will come later in a multi-year process. As

Leonard outlined in her PowerPoint presentation to the board, the "Port Strategic Plan Social Equity Initiative Timeline" will start with a "Social Equity Assessment" this year, followed by "Implement Workplace Initiative Strategy" and "Refine Social Equity Priorities" in 2016. Finally, in 2017, the Port would "Develop Social Equity Plan" and "Begin Implementation."

At the monthly board meetings, Port executives won't stop talking about how Travel + Leisure magazine rated PDX as America's #1 airport (in 2013). But back on the ground, PDX is an airport full of workers who can't afford air travel, or even necessities like health insurance

or electricity. During public comment at the end of the Feb. 11 meeting, Kasil Kapriel, an immigrant worker from Micronesia, told board members that she had to turn to the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization for help with her electric bill. That's because after eight years at her job helping wheelchair-bound airline passengers, she still makes minimum wage.

"We shouldn't have to depend on public assistance if we work at the nation's best airport," Kapriel told board members.

"Eight years and still at minimum wage? That's disgusting," reacted International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 8 President Bruce Holte, one of two union members on the nine-member board.

Board Chair Jim Carter — a former top lawyer at Nike — added his own comment later on: "It's easy to react, 'oh my God, eight years at minimum wage.' Carter said at the meeting. "It's more significant to figure out why that's happening, and in that individual situation, what it is about the workplace, themselves, the culture, the challenges that they have, to address these things. It is not a simple solution."

During Leonard's PowerPoint presentation, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, the other labor voice on the board, sat with his arms folded.

"As written, it doesn't lift workers," Chamberlain told the Labor Press by phone after the meeting. "And it doesn't recognize that many of the policies at the Port ... come at a cost to the workers."

The board will next meet March 11, and a vote on the proposal is scheduled for April 8.

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

To craft a policy to help the poorest, the Port hires a consultant at \$197 an hour

The Port of Portland hasn't done much to help impoverished airport workers, but its new "social equity" initiative is already benefiting some high-paid consultants. Last August, the Port agreed to pay

\$34,869 to a Eugene sustainability consultancy to conduct a "social equity audit." Good Company, the consultancy, will "define and recommend opportunities to further integrate social equity consideration into Port program, practices, partnerships, and planning." The contract for that work specifies a project manager at \$197 an hour, a lead re-

search associate at \$117 an hour, and an administrative support person at \$70 an hour, plus reimbursement for airfare, lodging, and meals as needed. The company will also conduct "external interviews, community outreach, and a presentation to Port" and is supposed to complete the work by April 15.



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