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Belts tighten as ATI lockout of union Steelworkers enters fourth month

The lockout at specialty metals maker Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) is now in its fourth month, with no end in sight. About 2,200 members of United Steelworkers (USW) are out of work in the labor dispute, which affects 12 facilities in six states, including about 180 members of USW Local 7150 at ATI's titanium plant in Albany, Oregon.

ATI locked out its union employees Aug. 15 after USW didn't hold a member vote on the company's contract proposal by the company's deadline. ATI's proposal would cut health benefits significantly; make it easier to outsource union members' work; give one-time \$1,500 payments instead of regular hourly wage increases; and for new hires, end retiree health and life insurance benefits and replace the pension with a 401(k).

ATI is operating its plants at a reduced level using replacement workers provided by Strom Engineering, a company that specializes in staffing during strikes and lockouts. Ron Rodgers, USW staff representative for Local 7150, said every weekday six shuttle vans cross the Albany union picket line, transporting about 60 replacement workers, who are housed by the company in a Salem hotel and paid wages above what union members were making.

Meanwhile, the company's regular employees struggle to get by on \$538 a week in unemployment benefits. That's Oregon's maximum benefit, but it's nearly \$400 a week less than they were taking home when they were on the job. A union strike and defense fund is



Union steelworkers from multiple mills rallied Sept. 1 outside ATI's Pittsburgh headquarters.

providing the equivalent of \$200 per member per week to help members who are in financial hardship, distributed on the basis of need. Company health benefits expired at the end of November, but workers can enroll in a less-generous union health plan.

"The company's intent is to hold us out until our unemployment benefits expire," Rodgers said.

The unemployment benefits are currently scheduled to last six months, and would end in mid-February. But locked-out workers may get help from the Oregon Legislature. When it holds its one-month short session in February, State Rep. Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis)

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Congressman Kurt Schrader turns hostile to union rights

The Oregon Democrat backs bills to diminish workers' right to unionize or take collective action

By Don McIntosh
Associate editor

Oregon's most conservative Democrat, U.S. Congressman Kurt Schrader, is taking increasingly antagonistic stances toward the union movement.

Schrader has had the perennial endorsement of the AFL-CIO — against less labor-friendly Republican opponents — but he's never been truly tight with organized labor. He was the Oregon AFL-CIO's lowest-rated Oregon House Democrat in 1997, and the lowest-rated Oregon Senate Democrat in 2007. He was the only Oregon House Democrat to vote for a 1999 bill that would have created a sub-minimum wage for restaurant workers. In 2007, he

voted with state senate Republicans to kill a paid family leave bill that would have given workers \$250 a week when they leave work to care for a newborn child.

But at least on labor's most basic litmus test issue — whether workers have the right to unionize and take collective action — Schrader said the right things. In 2008, running for Congress for the first time, he told the Oregon AFL-CIO he supported the Employee Free Choice Act, a top priority bill for labor that would have cracked down on employer labor law violations and made it easier for workers to unionize and get a first contract.

Schrader won that race for Congress, defeating Republican Mike Erickson to succeed Democrat Darlene Hooley. In the

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At First Unitarian, a first union contract

Fifteen support workers at First Unitarian Church of Portland have ratified their first-ever union contract. That's a rarity, because U.S. labor law doesn't protect church workers' right to unionize. But it doesn't say they can't unionize either, and in February, the downtown Portland church agreed to accept its workers' decision to join Communications Workers of America Local 7901.

That wasn't church leaders' first reaction. Initially, senior pastor Bill Sinkford rejected the idea, and even published a blog post saying he didn't believe recognizing a union would be in

the best interest of the church. But an outcry by the famously social-activist congregation changed his mind, and the church community rallied to raise funds to increase wages.

The new agreement, which Sinkford announced Nov. 19, raises wages to \$15 an hour, except for a six-month probationary period for new employees. That's a big raise for most of the workers, who were earning \$12 or even \$10 an hour. And the raise is retroactive to July 1.

The contract also maintains the church's existing vacation and retirement policies, and significantly, makes it a "just

cause" workplace, where formerly it was an "at will" workplace. In a just cause workplace, managers can't discipline or fire workers without offering a justification, and workers have some right to defend themselves.

The two-year contract will run through June 30, 2017. It covers administrative staff and sextons (church workers who clean and maintain building and grounds and operate audiovisual systems), but not child care staff. But all employees, not just the union-represented workers, will get at least \$15 an hour under the church's new policy.

Portland bans the box

On Nov. 25 — the day before Thanksgiving — Portland City Council voted 5-0 to approve a "ban the box" ordinance that goes much farther than a state law passed earlier this year.

The Oregon law bars employers from asking via a box on initial employment applications whether applicants have ever been arrested or convicted of a crime. Portland's ordinance says businesses can't conduct criminal background screenings

or ask about an applicant's criminal record until *after* they make a conditional job offer. Employers can rescind the conditional offer if they conduct a background check and determine in good faith that a particular offense is job-related — but they're also supposed to consider the nature and gravity of the offense, and the amount of time elapsed since it was committed.

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