

## PEOPLE

## Challenges ahead at AFSCME Local 88

AFSCME Local 88 — which represents 3,000 Multnomah County employees — has new leadership. Jason Heilbrun, a senior IT specialist at Multnomah County, ran unopposed for president, and was sworn in for a two-year term Nov. 18 along with 19 other officers.

Heilbrun will preside over what could be a pivotal period: Next year the U.S. Supreme Court could ban any requirement for public sector workers to pay union dues, in a case it's hearing called *Friedrichs vs. California Teachers Association*. That means Local 88 may have less than seven months to shore up members' commitment to their union before all bets are off. If a similar Supreme Court decision covering home care workers is any guide, union opponents may follow the court's decision with a well-funded campaign to get workers to stop



Jason Heilbrun

paying union dues.

Heilbrun will also have to prepare for the so-called "Cadillac tax" — an excise tax on high-cost health benefits. It's due to take effect in 2018 under the Affordable Care Act, unless Congress acts to repeal it. Heilbrun said the local will look at wellness programs and other measures to reduce health care costs with a minimum of impact on benefits.

Lastly, Heilbrun and his fellow union members face choices over who to endorse for Multnomah County Commission, the board that oversees Local 88's biggest employer. Three seats are up for election next year.

District 1 commissioner Jules Bailey was expected to run unopposed, but let it be known Nov. 25 that he'll be running for Portland mayor. That throws his

seat wide open. The candidate filing deadline is March 8.

Meanwhile, District 3 Commissioner Judy Shiprack is term-limited and can't run again; Democratic State Rep. Jessica Vega Pederson is the only candidate who has filed to run to replace her so far.

And District 4 Commissioner Diane McKeel is also term-limited. Three candidates are vying to succeed her: Gresham City Councilor Lori Stegmann, American Federation of Government Employees Local 2157 President Amanda Schroeder, and retired Teamsters leader Lynn Lehrbach.

Heilbrun said Local 88 expects to make its endorsements in January or February.

Besides Heilbrun, Local 88's new officers are Vice President Matt Davis; Treasurer Deirdre Mahoney-Clark (formerly president); Secretary Korie Erickson; trustees Gordon Long, Gary Sinnen, and Nellie Stearns; plus 13 Executive Board members.

## Laborers' Ben Nelson new Oregon AFL-CIO organizer

The Oregon AFL-CIO has hired seasoned union organizer Ben Nelson to lead its effort to help affiliates organize nonunion workplaces.

Nelson, 38, started work at the state labor federation Nov. 23, following a 15-year career with the Laborers Union. He fills a vacancy created in September when lead organizer Chris Hewitt went to work for Oregon Nurses Association.

Nelson was most recently the business manager of Laborers Local 737, which was formed Sept. 21 from the merger of Laborers locals 121, 296, and 320. But the newly-created local remains under the supervision of the international union, which removed Nelson as business manager on Oct. 28. For now, the local will be under the direction of supervisor Bob Abbott and assistant supervisor Zach Culver.



Ben Nelson

For Nelson, the new position is a return: in 1999, newly graduated from Willamette University with a degree in political science, he worked at the Oregon AFL-CIO as an intern under then-president Irv Fletcher. Nelson

then went through the national AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute training program, and spent time in Montana helping the hotel union HERE as an underground union organizer, or "salt."

In May 2000 he was hired as an organizer by Laborers Local 483 business manager Jim McEchron, and in 2003 he went to work organizing construction workers with the Laborers Northwest Organizing Fund. In 2013 he was appointed assistant business manager of the Washington and Northern Idaho District Council of Laborers.



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