

## PSU won't fight against a union campaign by its grad students

Portland State University (PSU) administrators won't fight against a union effort among 800 graduate student teaching and research assistants.

On Feb. 1, a union delegation called on PSU President Wim Wiewel to remain neutral and not spend university funds to delay or frustrate the union effort. PSU Director of Communications Scott Gallagher said via email Wiewel met them in the lobby, listened to them speak, and tried to respond that he and administration would be neutral as required by law.

"However, the students and supporters left and wouldn't let him respond," Gallagher wrote.

On Feb. 5, university provost Sona K. Andrews sent a memo to faculty and staff who oversee graduate student employees, offering guidance on the union question.

"We acknowledge and respect their right to consider this important question without interference," Andrews wrote. Oregon law changed in 2013, the memo says. "Now, PSU cannot take a position or proactively provide information to either encourage or discourage a union." That means, so long as it's not disruptive to University operations, graduate assistants can campaign at work on their

own time during breaks and before and after shifts, in lobbies, coffee rooms, locker rooms, and public areas, may wear union insignia, and may use university email and bulletin boards.

Grad student teaching and research assistants are already unionized at University of Oregon and Oregon State University. Now they seek to unionize at PSU as well in a joint campaign backed by American Federation of Teachers and American Association of University Professors. The workers are graduate students who teach courses, conduct research, provide administrative support, mentor students and grade exams.

Graduate Employees Union of Portland State University is still in the preliminary phase of the campaign, but expects to seek formal union recognition later this year.

### HOW TO HELP

The Graduate Employees Union of Portland State University is calling on faculty, staff, students, and community members to sign an online petition supporting the union at [pdxgeu.org/allies](http://pdxgeu.org/allies). And be sure to "like" the campaign on Facebook at [facebook.com/pdxgeu](http://facebook.com/pdxgeu).

## Unable to get a first union contract, Machinists withdraw from Bodycote

Machinists District Lodge W24 on Feb. 11 formally withdrew as the representative of about 40 workers at a Bodycote plant in Camas, Washington. Workers there voted 22-16 to unionize on June 14, 2014, but the union was never able to reach agreement with the company on a first union contract. Negotiations were limited to a once-a-month fly-in by a company attorney based in Oklahoma, and even with the final meetings assisted by federal mediator Darrell Clark, the two sides never agreed on any substantive economic issues.

"The company stalled us out forever and a day," District Lodge W24 union rep Will Lukens told the Labor Press.

UK-headquartered Bodycote is a multinational corporation specializing in heat treatment of aircraft and automotive compo-

nents, with over 190 locations worldwide. Its Camas plant heat treats titanium aerospace parts for Precision Castparts.

Lukens said union support dwindled as contract negotiations dragged on for 17 months, and union supporters quit or were terminated. The union picketed several times, but never struck. On Jan. 22, Tom Barwise, a former union supporter, filed a petition to decertify the union, and an election was scheduled for Feb. 12-13. Knowing it no longer had majority support, District Lodge W24 withdrew to avoid the need for an election.

"It's very frustrating, it's disappointing, but [working people] have to understand it's a fight," Lukens said. "If they don't beat you in organizing campaign, they try to beat you at the table, stalling it out."



### LABOR EDUCATION

## Capacity crowd at 20th Labor Law confab

Another capacity crowd attended the 20th annual Labor Law Conference Jan. 29 in Northeast Portland. The event was founded in 1996 by Norm Malbin, now retired as general counsel for IBEW Local 48. It is co-sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO, Center for Worker Rights, Northwest Oregon Labor Council, the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon, and the Columbia Pacific and Oregon State building and construction trades councils. Each year it sells out, attracting nearly 300 union officers, staffers, stewards and others who participate in workshops, listen to experts, and learn new ways to better represent their members. Among the plenary speakers were Ronald Hooks (pictured right), regional director of the National Labor Relations Board; management attorney Rick Liebman; labor attorney John Bishop; Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain; and Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian.



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