

# ...Instafab hearing on job site safety erupts in shouting match

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part of its Worker Rights Board project. The way the Workers Rights Board works, a panel of prominent citizens — typically labor-friendly elected officials, academics and faith leaders — hears from workers about an issue, and then deliberates and issues a written statement. It's not a trial but a public forum for workers to air grievances, and for members of the community to help resolve their dispute.

Targets of the testimony haven't shown up in the past. But Instafab owner Bruce Perkins has actively debated strikers in the media and even in the online comment section of the Northwest Labor Press — all while refusing to meet them in person to discuss their grievances. Ironically, Perkins backed out of a private meeting with strikers last July because Portland Jobs with Justice executive director Diana Pei Wu was going to be in attendance — only to meet her and strikers April 28 in front of a panel that included Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek.

"For the last 14 months I've put up with gross misrepresentation of what my company is," Instafab owner Bruce Perkins said, addressing Kotek and the strikers. "We've been maligned. We've been insulted.... You guys have an agenda that doesn't include my company."

Wu and other organizers of the event thanked Perkins for attending, but also said he would need to limit his time at the mike.

At that point, Instafab general manager Will Filbeck started yelling "this is a joke," and led a group of workers to walk out of the packed hall.

Moderator Zev Nicholson, an organizer with the Urban League of Portland, explained that the hearing was a chance for strikers to tell their stories.

And they had plenty of stories. As many as a dozen former workers spoke up, telling of dangerously inadequate safety training, falsified drug test cards, and long work hours leading to sleep deprivation that affected safety on the job. Striker Mike James said he came close

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— Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek



to being injured when a forklift driven by a coworker ripped steel off a building and just missed his hand. He also said Instafab never checked his certifications when they hired him, and that he was shown a safety video from Australia that spoke in terms of kilograms and other unfamiliar measurements.

Most of the testimony was about safety, but workers also described flagrantly disrespectful treatment by management — like being called "dumbass" on a regular basis. Striker Laramie Lexow said the breaking point for him personally was when he witnessed a manager verbally abuse a coworker in front of others, causing the worker to break down in tears on the shop floor.

After the strikers, Perkins was

given another chance to speak. He said Instafab is a growing company with a good reputation, a clean safety record, and a by-the-book safety program.

"I see a lot of people testify in my line of work," Kotek replied, addressing Perkins. "What I'm hearing is some really authentic testimony about trying to make a workplace safer. And I hear what you're saying, but there's a real disconnect. I think meeting with them and giving them a second chance is something you need to consider."

Kotek referred to a news story about safety violations at Instafab. On March 18, the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries cited the company for 17 safety violations at its Vancouver fabrica-

tion plant and fined the company \$30,400 for the 10 most serious violations, including lack of effective training on hazardous chemicals, lack of eye-wash facilities, and unsafe practices around flammable vapors.

"Those are some pretty serious allegations," Kotek said. "I don't think those seem made up."

In the end, the panel returned with a statement recommending that Instafab management sit down with striking workers and communicate. It will also send letters to Instafab customers including Anderson Construction and Skanska — asking them to stop working with Instafab because of inadequate safety conditions.

— Don McIntosh

#### WHAT'S NEXT FOR INSTAFAB

The National Labor Relations Board says Instafab broke federal labor law when it fired the first batch of strikers. A hearing before a federal judge is scheduled for Aug. 30.

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## Building Trades support Wheeler in crowded Portland mayoral race

The Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council (CPBCTC) is backing state treasurer **Ted Wheeler** for mayor of Portland. Wheeler is vying for the open seat against 14 other candidates. He must win 50 percent plus one of the vote in the May primary to avoid a run-off in November.

The construction union council, which covers Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Columbia counties, and parts of Hood, Wasco, Yamhill and Clatsop counties, made the following primary endorsements:

- **Steve Novick** for re-election to the **Portland City Council**.
- **Jessica Vega Peterson** and **Amanda Schroeder** in their respective races for **Multnomah County Commission**.
- A dual endorsement for **Jim Bernard** and **Paul Savas**, running for **Clackamas County Chair**. Both are incumbent county commissioners trying to unseat chair John Ludlow. Bernard and Savas will retain their seats on the County Commission if they lose.
- Re-election of **Martha Schrader** to Clackamas County Board.

- **Craig Dirksen** for Metro council, Position 3.
- Re-election of **Dick Schouten** and **Roy Rogers** to the **Washington County Board of Commissioners**.
- Mt. Hood Community College Bond **Measure 26-170**.
- Centennial School District Bond **Measure 26-175**.
- Milwaukie Library general obligation bond **Measure 3-477**.

## Oregon Building Trades endorsements

Following is a list of primary endorsements made by the **Oregon Building Trades Council**:

#### SECRETARY OF STATE

Val Hoyle; Brad Avakian; Richard Devlin

#### Senate District 21

Kathleen Taylor

#### House District 14

Julie Fahey; James Manning

#### House District 26

Ray Lister

#### House District 40

Mark Meek

#### House District 43

Tawna Sanchez, Roberta Philips-Robins