

## Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



### Muhammad Ali — A champion of the people

1964 America was in the grips of racial segregation. In June of that year, three young men — two white and one black — were killed by the KKK in Mississippi for daring to register Black Americans to vote. It was a time of fear and overt prejudice, which permeated every sector of American life. It was a time of knowing your place and station in society. It was the year when the heavy-weight boxing champion converted from Christianity to the Nation of Islam, and changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali. When reporters continued to address him as Clay, Ali responded “Cassius Clay is a slave name. I didn’t choose it and I don’t want it. I am Muhammad Ali, a free name — it means beloved of God, and I insist people use it when people speak to me.”

In the mid-’60s, young American men were drafted and fed into the war machine in Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands — perhaps millions — of Vietnamese and Americans lost their lives while corporatists made billions. Muhammad Ali refused to submit to the draft even though he was assured he would continue to box and would never serve in Vietnam. Ali refused, even when he was sentenced to five years in a federal penitentiary, stripped of his title, and banned from boxing. At his sentencing, Ali made the following statement:

“Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No, I’m not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would cost me millions of dollars. But I have said it once and I will say it again: the real enemy of my people is here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom, and equality. If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people, they wouldn’t have to draft me, I’d join tomorrow. I have nothing to lose by standing up for my beliefs. So I’ll go to jail, so what? We’ve been in jail for 400 years.”

On June 3, after fighting Parkinson’s Disease since 1980, Muhammad Ali died. Some will remember his prowess in the boxing ring, the footwork, speed and strength. His wit and razor sharp tongue that would cut foes inside and outside the ring. I will always remember Muhammad Ali as a champion of the people, who could not be bought, who could not be bullied, who stood his ground knowing the ramifications of his actions.

To me, Muhammad Ali will always be an anti-establishment hero refusing to accept the status quo. He made those in power uncomfortable, perhaps a little fearful. He truly deserved the title he cherished so much. He is and always will be the peoples’ champion.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, a 130,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.

## Doctors at PeaceHealth in Springfield and Eugene plan to picket June 23

Nation’s only hospitalist union fights to improve patient care and safety

Doctors at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Centers in Springfield and Eugene will conduct an informational picket Thursday, June 23, from noon to 1:30 p.m. at RiverBend Medical Center, 3333, RiverBend Drive, Springfield.

The doctors made history in 2014 when they became the first hospital doctors (hospitalists) to organize a labor union—the Pacific Northwest Hospital Medicine Association (PNWHMA), which is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers Local 6522.

But after nearly 18 months of bargaining, they are still without a first contract.

PeaceHealth hired the Seattle-based law firm of Garvey Schubert Barer to handle negotiations.

PNWHMA said in a press statement that negotiations are

stalled due to PeaceHealth’s unwillingness to allow the hospitalists to practice medicine in the safest manner possible, with reasonable patient loads, and without interference from administrators who do not practice medicine.

“Administrators cannot be allowed to continue standing between physicians and their patients and dictating how many patients each physician must see per day—regardless of the complexity or circumstances of each patient’s case,” the statement read.

“We unionized in order to protect our ability to always provide optimal care for those in our community and beyond who seek care at Sacred Heart. We will picket, and even go on strike if necessary, to secure a contract that ensures decisions made by administrators can never impede our freedom to act in the best interest of our patients,” said Dr. Frank Littell, a hospitalist at Sacred Heart Medical Center.

The PNWHMA was formed

in October 2014 in response to PeaceHealth’s plans to out-source patient care to a private for-profit temp agency. The story of the union’s formation, the first of its kind in the U.S., was featured in the New York Times in January 2016 [Doctors Unionize to Resist the Medical Machine].

The PNWHMA is now part of a coalition of unions at Sacred Heart, which includes the Oregon Nurses Association, Operating Engineers Local 701, and Service Employees International Union Local 49. The coalition member unions have all sent letters of support for the hospitalists to PeaceHealth’s administration.

The June 23 picket will be for informational purposes. It is not a strike, and Sacred Heart Medical Center will be open and operating as normal. All participants in the picket will do so on their own time. Community members are invited to participate and show support for their local doctors.

## ...Big union win at PeaceHealth Vancouver

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chance. Give us a year. Vote no.’ They had really shiny shoes and really really expensive suits. And I’m like, ‘Oh, that must be management.’”

Several eyewitnesses described an emotional scene the night of the union vote. In the hospital’s education center, it was standing room only as dozens of union supporters and a handful of managers observed the vote count. Flower says when the result became known at about 8 p.m., she broke down and started sobbing.

“I was so happy,” Flower said. “Other people started to cry. And then they all broke out in applause, hooting and hollering. We stood up and were hugging each other. And management walked out.”

As PeaceHealth Labor Relations Director Scott Allan headed for the exit, OFNHP President Dawnette McCloud approached him with a written request to begin negotiating a first union contract. McCloud says Allan refused to take the letter, but three women unionists spontaneously locked arms and

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— Union supporter  
Danene Flower

blocked his way out. He then tucked it under his arm and walked out.

The new bargaining unit consists of 310 specialists in 27 licensed technical classifications, including licensed practical nurses, physical and occupational therapists, and MRI, surgical, radiology, CT, ultrasound, anesthesia and pharmacy technicians.

AFT organizer Joe Crane said he’s hopeful the momentum of the win will carry forward in a separate AFT campaign among a much larger group at the hospital — service and maintenance workers such as cleaners, food service workers, and certified nursing assistants.

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is also campaigning to represent that group, so the two unions will likely compete as to which would be the most effective. SEIU also sought at one point to represent the hospital technicians, but formally withdrew before the June 2 election. SEIU Local 49 represents a group of 1,082 service and maintenance workers at PeaceHealth hospitals in Springfield and Eugene, Oregon. That unit ratified its first-ever union contract April 25. The contract contains health insurance improvements and across-the-board raises that total 8 percent over three years. But Local 49 says the average worker will see wages rise 21 percent in that time, because equity and catch-up raises are needed in the shift from the existing arbitrary pay system to a new seniority-based wage scale.

At PeaceHealth Southwest, the newly unionized workers will meet June 9 to discuss what they want to bargain for in their first union contract. The list is likely to include improved pay and benefits, and stronger protections for workers rights.