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Trump's Labor Secretary nominee: Puzder withdraws; Acosta up next

A victory for working people: That's what union leaders called the news Feb. 15 that Andrew Puzder was dropping out as Donald Trump's nominee to head the U.S. Department of Labor, after weeks of national union pressure against his confirmation. Labor Secretary is in charge of enforcing federal minimum wage, overtime, child labor and occupational safety and health laws. But Puzder, CEO of the company that owns the Hardee's and Carl's Jr. fast food chains, has been a vocal critic of efforts to increase the federal minimum wage and update overtime rules.

Yet other factors sank his nomination, including revelations that he employed an undocumented housekeeper, and that his ex-wife shared stories of spousal abuse on the Oprah show in the 1980s. As many as a dozen Republican senators were reportedly considering voting against him.

The day after Puzder gave notice of his withdrawal, the White House announced that the new nominee would be Alexander Acosta — dean of the Florida International University School of Law and



Members of the Oregon Education Association, Service Employees, and AFSCME were among the several hundred who turned up on the Oregon Capitol steps in Salem for a Presidents Day rally organized by unions and allied groups. Rallies also took place in Portland, Bend, and Eugene.



OUT:

Andy Puzder

IN:

Alexander Acosta

chairman of a South Florida bank. A Harvard Law grad, Acosta began his career representing employers in employment and labor issues at the Kirkland & Ellis law firm.

Now, according to the White

House press statement, he's "eager to work tirelessly on behalf of the American worker."

Under President George W. Bush, Acosta served briefly on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), then led the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.

After Puzder, Acosta comes as a relief to labor. "Acosta's nomination deserves serious consideration," said AFL-CIO president Rich Trumka. "We've gone from a fast-food CEO who routinely violates labor law to a public servant with experience enforcing it."

OPEIU pension seeks to cut retiree benefits

The proposed benefit cuts of 29 percent are supposed to save a pension plan that would otherwise run out of money in 2035.

By Don McIntosh

Imagine: You're a 67-year-old retiree collecting a \$1,685-a-month union pension, and you get a letter in the mail. It says that to prevent your pension plan from running out of money in 18 years, your benefits are about to be cut by \$489 a month, to \$1,196.

More than 5,000 current and future union retirees in the Pacific Northwest got a letter like

that in February. Under a proposal submitted Feb. 15 by trustees of the Western States Office and Professional Employees Pension Fund, they would have their pension benefits permanently reduced by up to 29 percent. Those affected are current or former members of Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) in Oregon, Washington, and several other Western states.

Until 2014, union-sponsored multiemployer trusts like the Western States OPEIU Pension Fund weren't legally allowed to cut pension benefits once

they were earned, and especially not for current retirees. But under legislation Congress passed with little debate in December 2014, multiemployer pension plans that are headed for collapse can reduce benefits — if that prevents insolvency. Under the law, known as the Kline-Miller Multiemployer Pension Reform Act of 2014, plans can't reduce benefits for retirees who are over 80 years old, and cuts for those who are 75 to 80 must be smaller than for those under 75.

The Western States OPEIU

Vigor shipyard workers vote to extend contract to Sept. 1

Shipyard workers at Vigor Industrial LLC subsidiaries in Oregon and Washington voted overwhelmingly Feb. 13 to extend their collective bargaining agreements to Sept. 1, 2017. In return, workers received a 90-cent-an-hour raise, retroactive to Dec. 5, 2016.

Metal trades craft unions represent approximately 700 workers at Vigor Marine Portland, Cascade General Portland, Washington Marine Repair Seattle, Vigor Marine Seattle, and Vigor Shipyard Seattle. Vigor Marine Portland and Vigor Marine Seattle operate as a single company. All are subsidiaries of Vigor Industrial LLC.

Union contracts at the Vigor properties are bargained by the Metal Trades Council of Portland and Vicinity, the Puget Sound Metal Trades Council, and Boilermakers Local 104. A master agreement that covers all locations is under the direction of the national Metal Trades Department, AFL-CIO.

Local area collective bargaining agreements at all of the properties expired Nov. 30, 2016. The master agreement at those properties was set to expire June 1, 2017, but it, too,

was extended to Sept. 1.

The extension agreement will give the sides more time to address ongoing problems with the funding status of some of the multi-employer pension plans that cover some Vigor employees, said Pat Christensen, president of the Portland Metal Trades Council.

Christensen, a union rep for Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, said a labor-management subcommittee has been created, and will meet with pension trusts from the Machinists, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Boilermakers to determine what solutions might be available. Those pension plans are currently underfunded and in a federally-mandated rehabilitation plan.

The sides also will continue to bargain contract language and economics, Christensen said.

Nearly a dozen craft unions are affiliated with the respective metal trades councils in Oregon and Washington. They include Plumbers and Fitters, Machinists, Electricians, Laborers, Painters, Operating Engineers, Teamsters, Sheet Metal Workers, Insulators, and Boilermakers.

Unions facing fierce attack in GOP-led state legislatures

Iowa strips public worker collective bargaining rights, but right-to-work fails in New Hampshire

By Don McIntosh

Is Iowa the next Wisconsin? Under Gov. Scott Walker, Wisconsin famously stripped public employees of all meaningful union rights in a draconian piece of 2010 legislation. Now Iowa has passed a very similar law. House File 291 ends for all intents and purposes, the collective bargaining rights of 184,000 public employees.

Under the new law, public employee unions will only be allowed to negotiate base wages, nothing else, and they can never bargain increases that are more than inflation. Health insurance, vacation time, evaluation procedures, seniority-related benefits ... none of those things can be part of union contracts going forward. And public-employee unions would be barred from automatically deducting union dues and political contributions from members'

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