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\$790 million Portland Public Schools bond could spell years of work for the trades

Portland Public Schools Board voted unanimously Feb. 28 to move forward with the largest construction bond request in Oregon history. If approved by voters May 16, the \$790 million measure would fund system-wide upgrades for Oregon's biggest school district — and years of work for hundreds of local building trades workers.

Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council is an early endorser of the bond measure, and other labor organizations are likely to follow. Because the work would pay prevailing wages and benefits, union-signatory contractors would be likely to outcompete nonunion contractors and secure much of the work. And the projects are broad in scope, says Building Trades Executive Secretary-Treasurer Willy Myers — touching nearly every craft.

The bond proposal includes the demolition and new construction of Lincoln High School and Kellogg Middle School, and



Portland's Franklin High School, pictured above as it looked in July 2016, is on track to reopen this September after a two-year, \$113 million remodel — funded by the first of three planned school modernization bonds.

comprehensive retrofits of Benson and Madison high schools. It also includes health and safety improvements at every school in the district, including repairing or replacing leaking or deteriorating school roofs; replacing old pipes and fixtures to reduce lead and improve water quality; removing or encapsulating ex-

posed lead paint and asbestos; improving building foundations and ventilation to decrease radon exposure; upgrading fire alarm and sprinkler systems; and improving accessibility for people with disabilities. Finally, the bond would pay to begin plan-

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PERS under threat ... again

By Don McIntosh

For the fifth time in 14 years, Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) is under attack in the Legislature. Business groups, arguing that PERS is too costly, are clamoring for lawmakers to slash benefits and make current employees pay to help make up for the system's investment losses.

Certainly the losses were massive. PERS was established in 1945 as a traditional "defined benefit" pension: Employers promise workers a cost-of-living-adjusted monthly check once they retire, and to meet that obligation, employers and employees contribute over the years. Those contributions are pooled and invested, and the returns help the system pay the promised benefits. But like so many other pension funds,



A DEAL IS A DEAL Everice Moro worked 30 years as an educational assistant at Estacada School District expecting to get a monthly pension with a cost-of-living increase (COLA). Then the Oregon Legislature reduced her COLA to save money. Moro became the lead plaintiff in a suit that went to the Oregon Supreme Court and overturned the cuts. Above, she holds up the framed letter she got announcing that PERS would be restoring the COLA.

PERS lost a big fraction of its investments' value in the 2008 fi-

ancial crash — 29 percent. That

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Abhe & Svoboda fires union 'salt' amid safety complaints

Nonunion paint contractor Abhe & Svoboda is under increasing scrutiny for its management of a \$22 million Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) painting project underneath the Ross Island Bridge, which spans the Willamette River between southwest and southeast Portland.

Oregon-OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) is still investigating a Feb. 8 accident in which a worker fell 40 feet and landed on another worker, sending both to the hospital after a Portland Fire Bureau ladder rescue.

Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries is investigating a pair of civil rights complaints filed Feb. 28 by an African-American Navy veteran who was fired Feb. 4. Among other

things, the worker says Abhe & Svoboda badly mishandled a complaint about sexual harassment, tolerated an atmosphere of racial hostility, and fired her in retaliation for making a safety complaint — after she was injured on the job.

Finally, the National Labor Relations Board is investigating charges that the company fired worker Omar Rubi Feb. 16 in retaliation for legally protected activity — including telling co-workers they have the right to voice safety concerns. Rubi, a union 'salt,' spoke with the Labor Press, and before the ink was dry on our Feb. 17 story, was fired in person by company president James Svoboda — right after a site visit from agents of ODOT and OSHA.

Malarkey Roofing withdraws from pension in new contract

Members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 330 voted 54-41 March 9 to accept a "last best and final" offer from Malarkey Roofing Products. Voting to reject the contract offer would have meant authorizing a strike by the 115 workers at the company's North Columbia Boulevard roof tile factory in Portland.

The vote came after the company backed off several "union-busting" proposals. Malarkey, represented by employer consultant Jim Frazer, had proposed to halt employer collection of union dues, end the requirement that represented employees become union members, and eliminate "just cause" discipline.

Under the new agreement, Malarkey will stop making pension contributions and pay \$6.5 million to withdraw from the union-sponsored multi-employer pension plan. The \$1.7 billion pension plan, known as PIUMPF (PACE Industry Union-Management Pension

Fund), has more than twice as many retirees as active members, and it's projected to become insolvent in less than 20 years. USW inherited the pension when it absorbed the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers (PACE) union in a 2005 merger.

Malarkey has been contributing \$1.38 an hour to the pension plus a rehabilitation surcharge.

In place of the defined benefit pension, Malarkey will enroll union members in the company-sponsored 401(k), matching employee contributions dollar for dollar for the first 2 percent of salary, and 50 cents on the dollar after that up to 10 percent.

The contract runs through April 2019. It provides annual wage increases of 1.5 percent, retroactive to the June 1, 2016, expiration of the previous union contract. Wages at the roof tile plant currently range from \$16.50 to \$25.96 an hour.