... PERS under threat . . . again

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vs. The State of Oregon, a 2015 case in which the Oregon Supreme Court ruled once again that public employers can't renege on their pension promises.

Why business wants pension cuts

Why *are* Oregon business leaders so interested in cutting pensions for teachers and firefighters? They've said it's because they're concerned the cost will be a drag on public services. But Professor Gordon Lafer of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon thinks there's something else going on. Lafer is about to publish a book based on five years of researching corporate legislative agendas in 50 state capitols. Lafer found that business lobbies have been going after public employee pensions all over the country, regardless of how well the pensions are funded. In fact, Lafer says, the corporate-funded legislative clearinghouse known as ALEC has standing cookie-cutter legislation to do away with defined benefit pension plans for public employees, a proposal they push in every state, regardless of its fiscal condition.

"Very often people who are against public employee pensions say, 'This isn't fair because these people have better pensions than the working people whose taxes pay their salary.' But instead of the answer being, 'Damn it, we need to provide all private sector employees a way to retire in dignity,' their answer is to pull down the standard," Lafer says. "I think they want to disappear the idea of a defined benefit pension so that nobody remembers that it's something we can aspire to. It's the idea that when you're old and tired, if you stop working, you can have security and not be afraid."

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— Professor Gordon Lafer, University of Oregon

PERS MYTH-BUSTING
For updates about the PERS fight, visit the union coalition web site at KeepOregonsPromise.org

NATIONAL

Union march at Nissan in Mississippi

On March 4 more than 5,000 auto workers marched with their families and supporters from local park to the gates of the Nissan assembly plant in Canton, Mississippi. Their demand: that the company respect its workers' right to vote for the United Auto Workers (UAW) free from fear and intimidation. Of 43 Nissan plants worldwide, the only nonunion plants are in Canton and at two locations in Tennessee.

Nissan is trying to keep it that way, waging an anti-union campaign and airing anti-union ads on local television. UAW says the company has violated federal labor law in its effort to keep the union out. In one complaint, UAW says the company told staff that if they unionize, the plant will move to Mexico — an illegal threat. Then, two days before the march, a company security guard stopped workers outside a gate of the Canton plant from handing out literature and asking fellow employees to sign cards authorizing a union vote.

Supporters at the march included Vermont U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, actor Danny Glover, and NAACP President Cornell William Brooks, as well as a dozen unionized Nissan workers from Brazil.

The Canton plant employs about 6,400 workers. Over 80 percent are black, and most make less than $15 an hour, with starting wages for some at $13.46 an hour.

Workers have been campaigning to join the United Auto Workers for 13 years, and have formed a community coalition with civil rights and community groups — the Mississippi Alliance for Fairness at Nissan.

Union electrical contractor stiffed at Trump Hotel

President Donald Trump is still stiffing contractors who work on his construction projects. At the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.'s Old Post Office Building, IBEW-signatory Freestate Electric has filed a lien for more than $2 million for nonpayment. Hundreds of union electricians worked on the project. Freestate is one of five contractors suing for nonpayment, totalling nearly $5 million.

"I want to make clear that this is not political," said company executive Tim Miller. "Whether it is Trump, or somebody you never heard of, we did a good job, at an agreed upon price and we want to be paid for it. "

The general contractor nominated Freestate for an award for the lighting they installed, and they won, so there's no question about the quality of the work they did, just whether they should be paid for it, Miller said.

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