

# ...Kaiser Permanente union coalition splits in two

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Oregon and Southwest Washington.

As a health maintenance organization (HMO), Kaiser Permanente combines features of an insurance company and a hospital system. It operates in eight states — California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Maryland, Virginia — and in Washington, DC. It's also the most heavily unionized large health care employer in the nation — and the site of a unique “partnership” agreement in which unions and employer commit to a collaborative relationship.

The unions that are leaving have good relationships with Kaiser, and say they want to preserve that partnership. They are affiliates of seven international unions — AFSCME, United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW), United Steel Workers, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Teamsters, Operating Engineers, and International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) — plus an independent union called Kaiser Permanente Nurse Anesthetists Association (KPNAA).

The unions that remain are affiliates of four international unions: SEIU, Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU), UNITE HERE, and International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE).

## Twenty years of labor unity come to a close

The split is the first major rift among participating unions since the CKPU union coalition formed in 1996. Back then, Kaiser was in deep financial trouble, and had a history of conflict with its unions. All that changed with the creation in 1997 of what all sides touted as a historic “Labor Management Partnership” between Kaiser

and the CKPU. Now in its 21st year, it's the largest, longest-running and most comprehensive labor-management partnership in the United States. The partnership gives front-line employees a say in decisions that affect them. Self-directed work teams come up with ways to improve performance and reduce waste. And under the rules of the partnership, bargaining is supposed to be “interest-based” and collaborative, not “position-based” and adversarial.

But the unity of the labor side of the partnership began to come undone in recent months.

At a meeting of CKPU unions in August 2017 in Portland, SEIU-UHW pushed for a change to the CKPU's bylaws to give more decision-making weight to unions based on their size. CKPU's decision-making process had always before been based on consensus among its constituent unions — even though they varied in size from dozens to tens of thousands of members. CKPU had negotiated five national collective bargaining agreements with Kaiser using that process.

Though the discussion reportedly devolved into a shouting match at times, participating unions agreed to a compromise that gave somewhat greater weight to larger unions.

Then, according to several sources, SEIU-UHW asked Kaiser to bargain with them as the sole representative of the Coalition. Kaiser refused.

In November, SEIU-UHW filed a prospective ballot initiative in California that would have prohibited Kaiser from raising its premiums until its capital reserves drop below a

certain level. The initiative made no distinction between Kaiser and insurance companies: It counted Kaiser's hospitals and medical offices as capital reserves.

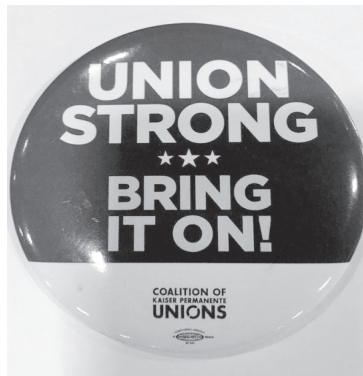
Kaiser management said for SEIU-UHW to promote such a measure violated the terms of its partnership deal, and announced that it would bar SEIU-UHW from taking part in the 2018 Coalition bargaining.

On Feb. 6, 2018, SEIU-UHW withdrew the initiative. It also signed an agreement with Kaiser and the unions agreeing not to file hostile legislation in the future. And it was on track to once again take part in bargaining once again.

From February 14 to early March 9, in advance of the scheduled beginning of CKPU's national contract bargaining, SEIU-UHW held a series of 32 protest demonstrations at Kaiser locations across California. The message: Kaiser is thriving financially, with net revenue of \$3.8 billion last year, yet still plans to outsource some jobs and cut wage rates for some new hires.

The final straw was a March 19 meeting of the coalition unions, at which SEIU UHW brought up the decision-making process again, threatening to block agreement if it wasn't revised further.

Enghouse, the OFNHP president, says it became apparent then that the unions were not going to be a cohesive team. The labor-management partnership is complicated even when it's functioning, Enghouse said; with unions at odds, it would make no sense to begin.



## Clergy call for new contract at Nabisco, and against outsourcing jobs to Mexico

By Mark Gruenberg  
Press Associates Inc.

Faith leaders from around the country are urging Dirk Van der Put, the new CEO of Mondelez International, Nabisco's parent firm, to negotiate in good faith and reach a new and fair contract with Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain

Millers union (BCTGM), which represents 2,000 unionized Nabisco workers at six plants in the U.S., including one in Portland, Oregon represented by Bakers Local 364. The union has waged a publicity campaign against Nabisco for shutting the Oreo cookie line at its South Side Chicago plant almost two years ago and moving 600 jobs to Mexico.

The clergy wrote a letter to the CEO after a Mondelez executive forecast even more production of their top snack and cookie lines will take place at their new plant a mile outside Monterrey, Mexico. There, workers toil behind a barbed wire fence. They are bused to and from a residential compound, and earn a dollar a day, according to a recent report by Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ).

Reacting to the announcement that the 22 local unions are leaving, SEIU Locals 49 in Portland and 105 in Colorado issued statements faulting the exiting unions for not giving members a chance to vote on that decision. Local 49 also expressed disappointment “in the lack of solidarity from the other union leaders in the Northwest.”

Though five SEIU locals remain in the partnership, the rancor felt by the departing unions toward SEIU-UHW doesn't appear to extend to other SEIU locals, such as Local 49 in Oregon and 1199 in Washington.

“Our members work side by side and care about each other,” Enghouse said. “We will always stand by SEIU Local 49 in their striving to get a good contract.”

Local 49 president Meg Niemi expressed similar sentiments in a statement emailed to the Labor Press: “We care about all the union members of Kaiser Permanente and we hope the unions that left will reunite with our coalition because we know we're stronger together. That said, we want SEIU 49 members to be clear that they voted to join the coalition 20 years ago, and the only way our union will leave the coalition is that if members vote to make that decision.”

One other major Kaiser union — California Nurses Association (CNA) — was never a part of the CKPU. CNA, now part of the National Nurses United union, just came to terms March 20 on a new five-year agreement with Kaiser that provides raises of 12 percent to 19,000 registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

CKPU's current national contract, negotiated in 2015, expires Sept. 30, 2018.

The new Alliance of Health Care Unions is drafting a constitution and expects to formalize its structure within a few weeks.

—Don McIntosh

## Unions leaving the Kaiser coalition:

22 locals  
37,102 members

AFSCME United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP)  
Hawaii Government Employees Association (AFSCME Local 152)  
Teamsters Local 166  
International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE): Local 501, Local 1  
United Steelworkers of America (USW) Local 7600  
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW): Local 770, Local 324, Local 135, Local 1428, Local 1442, Local 1167, Local 555, Local 21, Local 27, Local 1996, Local 7, and Local 400  
Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP), AFT Healthcare Local 5017  
International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 28  
Kaiser Permanente Nurse Anesthetists Association (KPNAA)

## Unions staying in the Kaiser coalition:

13 locals  
70,700 members

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 20  
Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU): Local 29, Local 30, Local 8, Local 2, and Local 50 (Hawaii Nurses Association)  
Service Employees International Union (SEIU): United Healthcare Workers West, Local 121RN, Local 49, Local 1199NW, and Local 105.  
UNITE HERE Local 5

security for the workers. Furthermore, jobs should not be outsourced to Mexico as a way to evade the promises made by your company to workers in the U.S.,” the letter concludes.

Ten faith leaders, including a rabbi, an imam, and two who are BCTGM members, including Pastor Lamar Kennedy, who is a member of Local 364 in Portland, signed the appeal to other clergy.

“Based on the social teachings of our faith groups, we believe Mondelez has a moral responsibility to treat its workers with dignity and respect,” the clergy said in their public letter, asking for further clerical support nationwide.

“We call on Mondelez to negotiate a new contract with BCTGM that maintains health care benefits and a pension plan that would maintain retirement