



Photo by Sam Porter, courtesy of OFNHP

...Tense bargaining with Kaiser Permanente ends with national deal and pledge to work on relationship

From Page 1

avored provider when unions provide health coverage in the regions where it operates.

But this year, despite a thriving financial bottom line, Kaiser's top brass demanded concessions from union workers. In negotiations with the newly formed Alliance of Health Care Unions (AHCU), Kaiser negotiators called for an end to defined benefit pension benefits for new hires, saying that workers of the millennial generation don't care about pensions. So-called "two tier" proposals like that create division and rancor among union members, because newer employees will forever remember that their coworkers sold them out before they arrived.

"I was so proud. Our members said, 'You're not doing that to the people that come after us,'" said Adrienne Enghouse, president of Oregon Federation of Nurses and Healthcare Professionals (OFNHP, AFT Local 5017). OFNHP represents 4,300 Kaiser RNs, dental hygienists, medical technicians and health care professionals in Oregon and Southwest Washington, and Enghouse serves on the board of the new alliance and the national bargaining team for the AHCU coalition.

Kaiser also wanted to end a no-cancellation clause (a guarantee that you work the hours you're scheduled to work, instead of being sent home early.)

Only when Kaiser dropped those demands at the final hour did the two sides reach agreement. As the Oct. 1 contract expiration loomed, a final deal was reached in a 52-hour marathon of continuous bargaining in which members of the bargaining team took turns

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leaving to take naps.

The three-year national collective bargaining agreement provides for wage increases each Oct. 1. The raises vary by region: Workers in California, Washington, and Oregon, will get raises of 3, 2.75, and 3 percent, plus a lump sum bonus of 0.25 percent on Oct. 1, 2019. Those in Hawaii, Georgia, and the Mid-Atlantic will get 2.25, 2, and 2.25 percent. And those in Colorado will get 2, 1, and 1 percent. The lower raises are in areas where Kaiser is less profitable because it doesn't own its own medical facilities and must contract with hospitals. Kaiser's Colorado operations in particular have struggled financially.

The contract also:

- Improves dental benefits, and increases contributions in year three to Health Reimbursement Accounts that pay for employee and retiree copays and deductibles.
- increases the number of "contract specialists". The current formula provides one for every 1,500 members and we agreed to increase it to one per every 1,200 members.
- introduces a new, modest retiree medical plan for Kaiser members in Washington that have not had one up to now.

The tentative agreement is going out to each local union for ratification. OFNHP held a mass meeting and voted to approve it Sept. 30 at the Red Lion Jantzen Beach.

The national agreement is supplemented by local agreements. OFNHP's local agreement also increased longevity steps and improved language on minimum staffing levels.

Kaiser still has to bargain with other local unions, including locals of SEIU and OPEIU, whose contracts expire next year.

The AHCU was formed in March by a group of unions that withdrew from the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions (CKPU) just a day before national contract bargaining was to begin. AHCU unions include locals of AFSCME, UFCW, USW, IBT, KPNA, IUOE, OFNHP (AFT), and ILWU. Reasons for the split were partly personal: union leaders had trouble working with the leader of the largest union, California-based SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West. But the split also reflected differences in approach: Leaving the CKPU, the unions that formed AHCU said it was because they valued the partnership. In other words, it was the "play nice" unions that left; SEIU, the biggest union that remained, had nearly been expelled from the partnership for un-partner-like behavior — it floated a California health insurance tax ballot measure that would have put Kaiser at a significant disadvantage competing with other insurers.

UNION ORGANIZING

Bus drivers unionize at Columbia County's CC Rider

A group of 22 bus drivers who transport passengers for Columbia County's "CC Rider" transit service is now union-represented.

In a Sept. 27 election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board, the drivers voted 13 to 7 to join Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757. The drivers are employees of MTR-Western, a Seattle-headquartered charter bus and shuttle transport company. Columbia County owns the vehicles and the transit center in St. Helens where trips originate, but since 2016 has paid

MTRWestern to hire and oversee drivers.

Low pay is the biggest issue for drivers, says Local 757 spokesperson Andrew Riley. Drivers can earn as little as \$13 an hour after more than a decade at CC Rider, Riley said.

CC Rider provides bus service between the communities of Clatskanie, Rainier, St. Helens, Scappoose, and Vernonia, as well as trips from Columbia County to downtown Portland, PCC Rock Creek, and Kelso/Longview, Washington.

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