

## Portland bricklayers union featured in the New York Times

Portland-based Bricklayers Local 1 got some well-deserved press last month. An article about the opioid addiction epidemic in the Sunday, Sept. 23, 2018 edition of the *New York Times* said many employers are looking the other way as worker spiral downward. But not Local 1 business manager Matt Eleazer. Eleazer has intervened to help several members struggling with addiction, including one featured in the story.

“We go through the process

together,” said Eleazer, who works closely with a union-sponsored membership assistance program. “They’ll call me every single day.... If somebody has a problem like that, it’s a family problem,” Eleazer told the Labor Press. “And we’re their family.”

### Workers Overdose, and Employers Struggle to Respond

Read the article online at <https://nyti.ms/20L9IKm>

## RETIREMENT

# Despite lopsided ‘no’ vote, Western States OPEIU cuts retiree benefits to halt slide to insolvency

As of Oct. 1, pension benefits will be cut as much as 30 percent for retired members of Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) who worked in the Western United States — even though the proposal to make the cuts was rejected by a majority of participants who voted on the question.

Cutting pension benefits for current and future retirees is a new option for trustees at union-sponsored multi-employer pensions that are severely underfunded and running out of money. Under the 2014 Multi-employer Pension Reform Act (MPRA), trustees can cut current and future benefits if the cuts can stop the slide to insolvency and still leave benefits at least 10 percent above what retirees would have gotten in case of default from the Pension Benefit Guaranty Fund, the federally-sponsored pension insurer. The benefits can’t be cut for those over 80, and are proportionally less for those 75 to 80.

Under MPRA, cuts proposals go before pension plan participants for a vote, but can only be stopped if a majority of the total participants vote to reject them — NOT just a majority of those voting.

### MORE INFO ABOUT THE CUTS

[wspensionrecovery.com](http://wspensionrecovery.com)

At the Western States OPEIU Pension Fund, ballots were mailed to all 7,232 participants on Aug. 20 and were due back Sept. 7. A total of 2,326 participants voted against the cuts, while 920 voted in favor of the cuts. That meant the cuts were opposed by 72 percent of those voting, but only 32 percent of the total participants. Because the 3,986 participants who didn’t return ballots were counted as de facto “yes” votes, the cuts were approved. Opponents would have needed another 1,300 “no” votes to reach a majority.

The Western States fund provides retirement benefits to current and former members of nine western union locals of Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)—mostly clerical staff at labor unions and defunct or no-longer-unionized trucking companies. Without the cuts, the fund was forecast to run out of money altogether in 2036.

Nationwide, five other pensions have held votes on benefit cuts under these rules so far, and

the cuts have gone through despite majority opposition of those voting in four of those five. So far, Alaska Ironworkers Pension Plan is the one exception: Its proposed benefit cut of 26.5 percent was supported by 55 percent of those casting ballots.

As many as 100 union-sponsored multi-employer pension plans are headed for insolvency, but only 23 have so applied for permission to save themselves by making cuts. Of those, seven cuts have been approved, 10 are under review, two were withdrawn, and four were rejected by the U.S. Treasury Department.

### PENSION CUT VOTES SO FAR

#### Ironworkers Local 16 Pension

Voting against: 352 | Voting for: 144  
Ballots not returned: 542

#### Alaska Ironworkers Pension Plan

Voting against: 142 | Voting for: 175  
Ballots not returned: 507

#### Machinists Motor City Pension

Voting against: 371 | Voting for: 126  
Ballots not returned: 714

#### NY Teamsters Conference Pension

Voting against: 9,788 | Voting for: 4,081  
Ballots not returned: 20,767

#### United Furniture Workers Pension

Voting against: 1,928 | Voting for: 1,041  
Ballots not returned: 6,304

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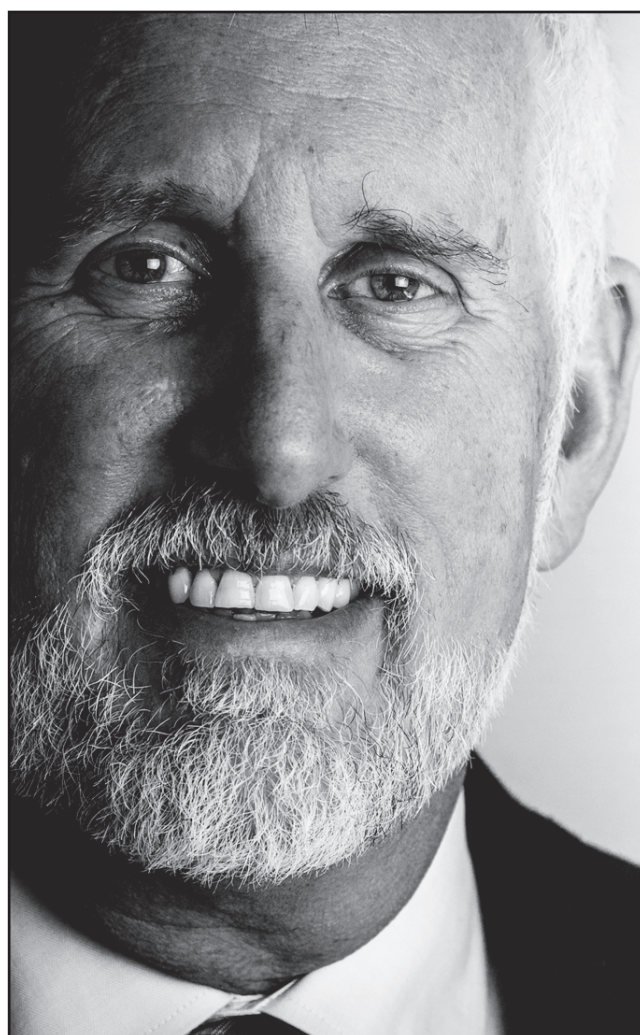
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Authorized and paid by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, Portland, Oregon



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He passed a \$15/hour minimum wage in Milwaukie.