

Union nemesis retires at TriMet

Could labor relations be on the mend at TriMet? For most of the last decade, TriMet and the union that represents its employees have had an icy and litigious relationship. While Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 has seldom backed away from a fight, arguably it was TriMet's labor relations director — Randy Stedman — who set the tone of acrimony. Hired in 2011 by then general manager Neil McFarlane, Stedman adopted a bellicose posture in contract bargaining, made frequent public criticisms of the union, and indulged in behind-the-scenes provocations of union officers.

In February, general manager McFarlane retired and was replaced by Doug Kelsey. In June, Stedman's deputy Britney Colton left for a position at the Stoel Rives law firm, and was replaced by Laird Cusack, a former HR manager at Portland Public Schools and

King County Metro Transit.

Now Stedman is retiring as of Nov. 14. Longtime TriMet attorney Kimberly Sewell is replacing him as new executive director of labor relations and human resources.

At the Oct. 24 meeting of TriMet's board, Block encountered Stedman for maybe the final time.

"I wished him well ... and told him to stay away from ATU," Block said with a chuckle.

Block said going forward TriMet and the union will no doubt continue to have disagreements, but she's cautiously optimistic they'll be easier to resolve with Sewell. Sewell scheduled an informal breakfast meeting with Block for Nov. 2, something Stedman never did in seven years.

TriMet and the union will be meeting next year to negotiate a new contract covering over 2,500 TriMet employees. The current agreement runs through Nov. 30, 2019.



A TOP NATIONAL UNION LEADER, ON THE STUMP FOR OREGON GOVERNOR KATE BROWN:

Randi Weingarten, international president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) was in Portland Oct. 23 to campaign for the re-election of Oregon Governor Kate Brown. First stop (above) was a press conference with Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center nurses who are represented by the AFT to discuss Brown's efforts to protect the Affordable Care Act for all Oregonians — including people covered by Oregon's Medicaid expansion and people with pre-existing conditions. "You have a governor in this state who is doing everything in her power to ensure that people have the health

care they need in Oregon," Weingarten said. Oregon has expanded its health care coverage to nearly 95 percent of adults and 100 percent of children. Later, Weingarten and Brown joined Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain at the Oregon Labor Center to phone bank union members, encouraging them to vote for candidates who support a pro-worker agenda. The visit ended with a student debt clinic hosted by AFT, where Weingarten and Brown discussed student loan forgiveness. Gov. Brown has received endorsements from most labor unions in the state, as well as the Oregon AFL-CIO.



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