

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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# GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

By Don McIntosh

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents at the Portland airport say they've been getting more thank-yous from the traveling public since they began working without pay Dec. 22. But sympathy won't pay the bills. On Jan. 11, with the partial government shutdown in its third week, they and the rest of the estimated 800,000 federal employees missed their first paycheck. About 380,000 of the affected federal workers have been furloughed, while 420,000 are working without pay — those whose jobs involve human safety, the protection of property, or other work designated as essential by their agencies.

If the shutdown is hitting TSA screeners the hardest, it's because they're some of the fed-

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"I can pay the minimum on my credit cards, and I can skip utility bills," says Trang Kim, a 16-year TSA employee. "I'm just worried about my mortgage." Kim, a lead worker and behavioral detection specialist at the Portland airport, is also regional vice president of AFGE Local 1127. She came to work on her day off Jan. 10 to take part in a union-sponsored airport protest against the government shutdown.

## Washington AFL-CIO will push the Democrats on pro-worker agenda

Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) will be going to the State Capitol in Olympia with a packed agenda this year. Last November's election resulted in stronger majorities of pro-labor Democrats in the 2019 legislative session that began Jan. 14. WSLC, which coordinates the legislative efforts of 600 AFL-CIO-affiliated unions, will push lawmakers to pass a "Shared Prosperity Agenda." Some highlights:

- **Secure schedules** Require retail and food employers to provide work schedules two weeks in advance and compensate workers if their schedules are changed.
- **Workers' rights** Make farm workers eligible for overtime pay. Bar employers from imposing "non-compete" agreements on workers (with just a few

reasonable exceptions). Guarantee that hospital nurses and medical technicians get uninterrupted meal and rest breaks.



- **Tax fairness** Levy a capital gains tax on profits of over \$25,000 on the sale of stocks and bonds.

- **Jobs and job training** Inventory public buildings and put them on a schedule to be retrofitted to improve energy use and environmental health. Restore funding for community and technical colleges that was cut during the recession.
- **Safety** End single-member crews for trains carrying hazardous materials.
- **A second look at privatization** Require contractors that perform services that used to be done by public employees to meet performance metrics and accountability measures.

SEE WSLC'S FULL AGENDA  
<https://bit.ly/2H9K0KJ>

## LA teachers strike for smaller classes

After 20 months of unsuccessful contract negotiations, 32,000 teachers in United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) said "enough is enough!" and went on strike Jan. 14. Every school site in the Los Angeles Unified School District—more than 900—participated in the strike. On Day 1 of the strike, a 50,000 teachers and supporters marched to the District's headquarters.

It's the city's first teachers' strike in 30 years, but it's also part of a wave of teacher strikes that got under way last year in West Virginia and spread to Oklahoma, Arizona, North Carolina, Colorado, Kentucky, and Washington.

In LA, teachers are striking for smaller class sizes, 6.5 percent raises, more counselors and nurses, and in opposition to the expansion of charter schools: LA's charter school industry has grown by 287 percent since 2008, draining nearly \$600 mil-



Striking LA teachers have been getting messages of support from across the nation, including officers and staff in Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, above.

lion a year from public schools.

When this issue went to press, administrators were trying to keep schools open for the district's 600,000 students, using

400 substitute teachers and over 2,000 reassigned administrators, but it's not clear any learning is going on, and many parents are keeping students home.

## Reversing course, OHSU agrees to recognize grad student union

Back in September, Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) argued that its 250 full-time graduate student researchers shouldn't be allowed to unionize — because they're not really public employees under the law. In December, university executives changed their mind, and OHSU dropped its legal objection rather than go to a January hearing before the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB).

"It is clear that our Ph.D. students desire a union to formalize a dialogue about their needs," said OHSU Provost Elena Andresen in a Dec. 28 joint statement.

"We are pleased that OHSU decided to withdraw their objections," responded Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Stacy Chamberlain. "OHSU graduate students are part of a growing movement of profes-

sional workers forming unions, and they are the last group of graduate students in Oregon to organize."

Union supporter Rich Posert, a graduate researcher in cryo-electron microscopy, called it a big win.

"We're all really excited to move forward and have good-faith bargaining," Posert said.

Posert thinks community support made a difference. The reversal came just days before a planned "social media day of action" by the union. It also didn't hurt that the legal decision OHSU was trying to interpret as anti-union was written by former ERB member Jason Weyand, who now works as Oregon AFSCME's attorney.

Students will now select members of a bargaining committee and vote on what their priorities will be. The two sides agreed to begin bargaining by March 15. —DM