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OREGON

Lawmakers vote to cut PERS

By Don McIntosh

It was a chaotic scene on the floor of the Oregon House May 30. A controversial public pension reform bill — proposed by Democratic Senate President Peter Courtney and Democratic House Speaker Tina Kotek, but opposed by public sector unions — had come up short. The vote was 29 for, 31 against. But instead of announcing that tally, Kotek directed the chamber to stand at ease while she summoned Rep. Andrea Salinas, (D-Lake Oswego), and Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland) to her office for a private meeting. Half an hour later, they emerged, Salinas in tears. Kotek returned to the dais and called for Greenlick and Salinas to announce their votes: The two “nay”s became “ayes,” and Senate Bill 1049 passed.

With the Senate having passed it 16-12 one week earlier, it’s set to become law as soon as the governor signs it.



LOOK US IN THE EYES Union firefighters watched from a Capitol balcony as Oregon lawmakers voted to cut public employee compensation up to 2 percent and divert those funds to refill public pension coffers that have lagged since the 2008 financial market collapse.

Union leaders denounced the vote. Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain called it “anti-worker.” Teachers union president John Larson called it “unconscionable.” Service Employees Local 503 Executive Director Melissa Unger called it “a step backwards.”

“Public sector workers across

Oregon deserved better,” said Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Stacy Chamberlain in a public statement. “The state should expect a lengthy legal battle in defense of our members.”

The politics of SB 1049 are complicated and counter-intu-

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Union report: men out-earn women at Fred Meyer

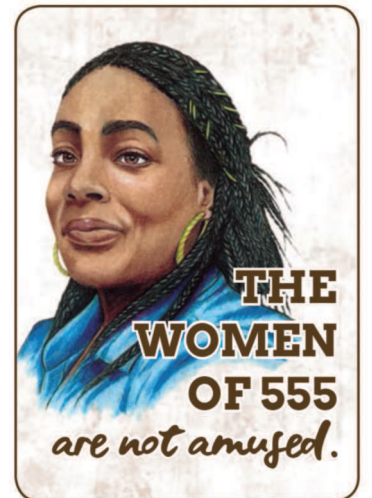
By Don McIntosh

“The women of UFCW Local 555 are not amused,” Oregon’s largest private sector union says in a campaign for pay equity launched last month.

Neither are the men, actually.

Last year, as a customary part of union contract bargaining, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 asked Fred Meyer for a list of employees that would include job classifications, wages, and seniority. The union merged that with its own data that included members’ gender, and then spent months analyzing the data. Union officers had a hunch that men were out-earning women. But they were surprised to find out how much: Among journeyman grocery workers at Fred Meyer, male workers are earning on average \$1.31 an hour more, Local 555 found.

It’s long been true that some



higher-paid classifications like meat-cutters attract mostly male applicants. So Local 555 focused only on data for grocery jobs, where it turns out men and women are hired in almost exactly equal numbers.

Why are male journey-level grocery workers out-earning female counterparts? It comes

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Portland City Council votes to close five community recreation centers

Up to 56 newly unionized workers will be laid off.

By Don McIntosh

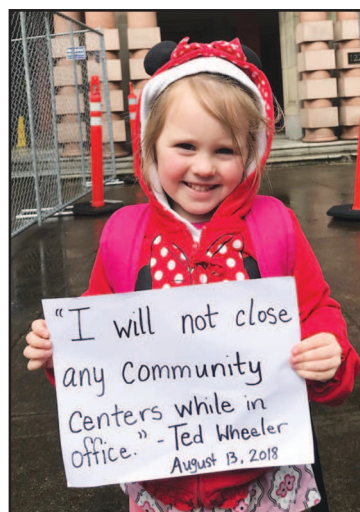
Only one member of Portland City Council tried to halt the lay-off of 56 recreation center workers and the closure or privatization of five community recreation centers: Jo Ann Hardesty. Allying with residents who use the rec centers, Laborers Local 483 had campaigned hard against its members’ layoffs through two months of packed and emotional budget hearings. But in the end, two amendments Hardesty proposed that would have lessened the cuts failed by 4 to 1 in a May 23 vote.

City bureau budgets can be complicated, but the underlying issue isn’t hard to understand. Two years ago — after a decade-long campaign by Local 483 — Portland City Council agreed to do right by its low-wage “permatemp” recreation center

workers. To settle a union grievance that it lost at arbitration, the City made those workers permanent, recognized their union, raised pay to \$15 an hour, and offered benefits for those working full time. The catch: City Council never gave the Parks Bureau a budget bump to be able to pay for those increased compensation costs, and instead funded them through one-time allocations.

This year, the price tag to continue current services at the new compensation levels was \$6.3 million more than what the mayor proposed for the bureau. The mayor sought no new general fund revenue, but instead proposed to balance the budget by laying off employees and closing rec centers.

Hardesty floated several ideas to stop some of the layoffs. One proposed amendment would have frozen cost-of-living raises for one year for 1,305 high-paid



non-union employees — those making over \$80,000 a year. That would have saved \$1.8 million — enough to halt about 35 parks layoffs. Another proposal would have freed up \$1.6 million for parks by eliminating funding for a new body camera pilot program at the Portland Police Bureau. Neither proposed amendment got any support.

At the final hearing, a crowd

of rec center workers and users filled council chambers, the second floor balcony and two overflow rooms.

Commissioner Nick Fish, who Mayor Wheeler put in charge of Parks and Recreation last September, wrung his hands as the city clerk called the roll. First he praised Hardesty and said workers are the cause of his life. Then he voted against the amendments that would have stopped the layoffs in his bureau. Fish said it would be inequitable to withhold cost-of-living increase from non-union employees. But he repeatedly pledged to help laid off employees find other jobs at the City.

Local 483 never made an issue of it during its campaign, but the rec center layoffs and closures come just after Fish increased the Parks Bureau director salary by \$29,000. Adena Long, who started in February, gets \$215,000 a year plus bene-

fits; her predecessor Mike Abbate was paid \$186,000 after seven years in the role.

Meanwhile, the mayor’s budget also found \$200,000 to help a private group pay for a study to see whether a water taxi service between Vancouver and downtown Portland is feasible.

The rec center layoffs will begin July 1. Sellwood Community Center, which provides preschool programs, will close in September, not July 1, because parents have already paid for summer programs there. Columbia Pool is slated to close July 2020. The City will also end staffing for programming at Laurelhurst Dance Studio, Hillside Community Center and Fulton Park Community Center. The bureau offered that they could later reopen if non-profits step up to manage those facilities and offer programs at no cost to the city.