

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

### Union to OHSU: Health workers need sick days

By Don McIntosh

As an early signal that they're unwilling to make concessions in their next union contract, over 1,000 AFSCME Local 328 members and supporters rallied June 13 outside the offices of executives at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). As a publicly owned hospital, university and research institution, OHSU is thriving, but in bargaining with AFSCME Local 328, management is proposing meager raises, takeaways on health insurance, and a new paid-time-off policy that would incentivize employees to work while sick.

Ultrasound technologist Kasey Zimmer-Stucky, a member of the AFSCME Local 328 bargaining team, said it's been "disheartening" to see OHSU seeking to shift costs onto employees.

Local 328 represents close to 7,000 workers at OHSU, in over 300 job classifications.

They want raises: In contract



"I chose to work at OHSU nine years ago because I believe in the mission to improve the health and wellbeing of Oregonians," said AFSCME Local 328 member Kasey Zimmer-Stucky at a June 13 union rally outside OHSU's Mackenzie Hall. "I love my job. I love my co-workers. I love my patients. I'm proud of the work that we do. The fair contract that we're asking for shows us that OHSU cares the same about building up its patients and employees as it does about building up their shiny city on Marquam Hill."

negotiations, Local 328 is calling for a two-year contract with raises of 5% and 4%.

Members also want to be treated with respect, something

they say HR director Hollie Hemenway failed to do at a recent bargaining forum. Just be-

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## RETIREMENT

### U.S. House committee passes bill to rescue failing union pension plans

The Butch-Lewis Act would lend money to pension plans to give them a chance to recover.

The U.S. House Education and Labor Committee approved a bill June 11 that would rescue failing multi-employer pension plans. H.R. 397, also known as the Butch Lewis Act, passed the committee by a 26-18 vote along party lines, with all Democrats voting in favor and all Republicans against.

If it ends up passing the full House and the Senate, the measure would help the 100 or so union-sponsored multi-employer plans that are headed for insolvency, by giving them 30-year low-interest federal loans to shore up their assets. H.R. 397 is backed by the AFL-CIO and numerous unions.

It's estimated that about 1 million union workers, retirees and their dependents are in

plans that are headed toward insolvency because of the financial crash of 2008. Congress bailed out the banks back then, but has up to now been reluctant to provide any help to the roughly one in 10 union pension funds that were sent into a tailspin by the crash.

"The hard-working and tax-paying American workers whose retirement income security is at risk have not forgotten the 2008 record-setting federal rescue that provided hundreds of billions of dollars to troubled financial firms," AFL-CIO legislative director Bill Samuel told the House committee. "These workers are no less worthy ... Indeed, unlike those entities, they played no part in creating the crisis at hand; throughout the years, they sacrificed wage increases in favor of contributions to their pension plan."

## Little Big Burger, hoping to squash Little Big Union, calls for election

By Don McIntosh

In its zeal to stomp out a union campaign among some of its workers, Portland-based fast food chain Little Big Burger got clever last month. Through an attorney at Bullard Law, Little Big Burger on May 24 asked the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to hold a union election at all 13 of its stores in Oregon.

It's very rare for U.S. employers to ask for union elections. That happened in only 50 cases last year, compared to 1,597 union elections that were petitioned for by private sector unions or workers. When an employer calls for a union election, it's almost always because they think an existing union has lost majority support. If the union election proves that, the employer isn't legally obligated to deal with the union any more.

In Little Big Burger's case, the call for union elections is a gam-



Ashley Reyes, center, spoke to the Labor Press at the March 16 launch of Little Big Union. On May 3, she and a coworker were fired for taking part in an impromptu walkout to protest unsafe work conditions.

ble that the union idea hasn't had time to gain support at many stores. Little Big Union only just announced its formation on March 16, and has been most active at the company's Northwest 23rd Avenue location in Portland.

Little Big Burger is owned by Chanticleer Holdings, a publicly traded restaurant giant that owns

Hooters and three other chains. Little Big Union is affiliated with the Portland chapter of Industrial Workers of the World, a grassroots independent union with no staff and few resources. So when workers learned their employer had requested a union election, they were unprepared and unfamiliar with the process. Noah

Warner of the McKanna Bishop Joffe labor law firm stepped up to represent them *pro bono*, and won terms favorable to the union.

Little Big Burger had proposed a near-immediate in-person election, to be held in person at three suburban stores, with workers at all 12 Portland-area locations plus a store in Eugene taking part. But NLRB regional director Ron Hooks agreed with the union that a mail ballot would be more appropriate: Some Little Big Burger stores are too small to have a private polling area, and to hold a vote at only some stores would place a significant burden on those not employed at those locations, Hooks ruled. And Eugene, 113 miles away, is out.

Ballots will be mailed July 1, and will be counted July 23.

Besides jumping the gun on a union election, Little Big Burger has also taken action against union supporters. On May 3, it

fired union supporters Ashley Reyes and Jules Jones and suspended Bradley Meyers, after the three took part in a brief strike to protest unsafe conditions. The workers walked out during a dinner rush after a chronically clogged drain turned the kitchen area into a slip hazard zone. Three workers had already slipped and been injured at the same location in previous months. The workers wrote down their demands for a safe work space and pledged to unconditionally return at closing time, but were dismissed when they returned.

Little Big Burger also fired Lily Aguilar, a union supporter at its Northeast Alberta location.

To protest the firings, Little Big Union picketed outside the stores, and filed charges with the NLRB. It also filed a safety complaint with the Oregon-Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

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