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## Workers strike at Burgerville

By Don McIntosh

Members of Burgerville Workers Union waged a four-day strike Oct. 23-27 at four Portland Burgerville restaurants to protest a company wage proposal they said would keep them in poverty. The two sides have been meeting since June 2018 to negotiate a first union contract for workers at locations that have voted to unionize. If they ever reach agreement, it would be the first union contract with an American fast food chain.

The strike was called after the company publicly announced that it will raise wages for all workers by \$1 an hour on Dec. 31 and set \$13.50 as the new base pay level at all stores, union or nonunion. That sounds



Union supporters marched Oct. 25 outside the 82nd & Glisan Burgerville.

more meaningful than it is: Washington's minimum wage will rise to \$13.50 on Jan. 1, and Oregon's Portland-area minimum wage will rise to \$13.25 on July 1.

Union bargaining team member Mark Medina, who works at the SE 92nd and Powell location, says the union

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## Labor in the thick of the debate over Medicare For All

By Don McIntosh

It was 74 years ago that President Harry Truman first proposed a program of government-sponsored universal health insurance. Twenty years later, a part-way version of the idea became law when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Medicare Act in 1965. Today, Medicare covers 60 million seniors and disabled Americans, and momentum has never been greater to expand it to all Americans as originally intended.

"We're calling this magic moment in the movement for Medicare for All," says Mark Dudzic, national coordinator for the group Labor Campaign for Single Payer. "We don't want to blow it."

Dudzic — who served 18 years as union president at a New Jersey metal refinery — has spent the last decade-plus advocating for universal health care. He and as many as 300 other activists from around the country held a strategy meeting in Portland Oct. 18-20. Dudzic says public opinion has shifted decisively since Bernie Sanders made Medicare For All a centerpiece of his 2016 presidential campaign. Polls have shown as many as 70% of Americans favor the idea. A Medicare For All bill sponsored by Seattle Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal has 118 co-sponsors and has had three committee hearings. A similar bill sponsored by



The union-backed coalition Health Care for All Oregon kicked off a national activist conference on Medicare for All with an Oct. 18 rally at Pioneer Square in Portland.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont) has 14 co-sponsors. And unions representing a majority of organized workers have endorsed national Medicare For All legislation, Dudzic says.

But prominent opponents have been pushing

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## GM strikers win big gains

After 40 days on the picket line, the longest nationwide strike against General Motors in nearly 50 years ended Oct. 25 when members of United Auto Workers (UAW) voted by 57% to ratify a new four-year contract. The new agreement means an \$11,000 ratification bonus for about 48,000 workers at 55 factories and parts centers.

It also phases out a two-tier system that UAW agreed to in 2007, in which new hires were paid lower wages and would never reach the same wage as more senior workers. About a third of the workforce is now in that lower-paid tier. By the end of the new contract, they'll reach a new top wage of \$32 an hour, the same as the more senior workers.

The contract also provides 4% lump-sum bonuses in the years 1 and 3, and 3% wage increases in years 2 and 4. It removes a \$12,000 cap on the profit-sharing formula, which gives \$1,000 to every worker for each \$1 billion GM earns in North American pretax profit. And it converts more than 900 temporary workers to regular employees in January.

The deal is not without union concessions. It allows GM to close three factories and one parts depot. But GM dropped a demand for concessions on health care: Workers will continue to pay 3% of the cost.

Workers were motivated to strike in part because GM was being tight-fisted with workers at a time of record profits.

### UNION ORGANIZING

## Physicians-in-training unionize at OHSU

By Don McIntosh

About 830 doctors are about to unionize at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).

On Oct. 15, Oregon AF-SCME turned in union authorization cards signed by a majority of the group. The union will become official after the Oregon Employment Relations Board checks the cards against a list provided by the university.

The new unit consists of medical interns, residents and fellows, known collectively as "house officers" within their profession. Having earned doctoral degrees, house officers treat patients under the supervision of "attending physicians." It's the final stage of their training before they become licensed to practice medicine as a physician. In their first year, house officers are known as interns, and in subsequent years they're known as residents. Fellows are those who've completed a residency and are continuing training in a subspecialty.

OHSU house officer Justine

Hum, for example, is near the end of a three-year fellowship in gastroenterology after a three-year residency in internal medicine. Hum, 32, says she feels lucky to be in the program and finds OHSU a fantastic place to work.

"But anything can be improved," Hum said. "Residents work really hard, and having more benefits and protections can only make us a stronger program."

House officers are typically the first doctors a patient sees. They examine a patient and make a recommendation about treatment to the attending physician.

But they work for salaries far below that of a licensed physician; \$60,000 a year is typical, and they may be carrying \$200,000 in medical school debt. House officers also work legendarily long hours: Up to 80 hours a week, with shifts that can last 24 hours.

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