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## Clark College goes on strike

VANCOUVER, Wash.—More than 400 faculty members went on strike Jan. 13 at Clark College in Vancouver for the first time ever. The strike comes after years of the college shifting course load to lower-paid part-timers and offering salary increases that failed to keep up with inflation. It also follows more than 15 months of bargaining, half a dozen union pickets and rallies, and a unanimous strike vote Dec. 7.

Clark instructors are represented by the Clark College As-

sociation of Higher Education (CCAHE), an affiliate of the Washington Education Association. In contract bargaining, they've asked for catch-up raises, and they want part-time faculty to be paid at the same rate as full time faculty so the college no longer has a financial incentive to limit instructors teaching time.

The strike began a week into the new academic term. Classes for Clark's nearly 13,000 students are expected to be canceled for the duration of the

strike. On the picket line Jan. 13, union members said they plan to stay out on strike until the college makes an acceptable offer.

"I see this as much bigger than just Clark College," CCAHE President Suzanne Southerland told the *Labor Press*. "If we can win this, it will influence other colleges, and ultimately the education that students are going to get."

—Don McIntosh

## Oregon AFL-CIO ramps up pressure on Rep. Schrader to get behind labor law reform

The Oregon AFL-CIO is asking union members, their families, and friends to call Oregon U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-5th District) and urge him to support legislation that will give workers additional protections to organize and have a voice on the job.

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 2474) would protect the right to strike, prevent misclassification of workers as independent contractors, increase penalties for retaliation, and more. Currently it has 219 bipartisan sponsors and co-sponsors in the U.S. House. It is supported by every

Democratic member of Congress from Oregon except five-term incumbent Schrader, who has indicated he does not plan to vote for the bill.

"Oregon's unions expect better from Rep. Schrader," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Graham Trainor. "Reforming labor law is a critical step in building an economy that works for everyone, not just the



Rep. Kurt Schrader

wealthy."

In December 2019, the Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board unanimously approved a resolution calling on Congress to pass the PRO Act, in addition to the Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act (H.R. 6238), and the Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act (H.R. 1154). Union officials say these bills will help modernize labor laws in the United States.

"Our outdated laws let bad bosses break the law without any detrimental consequences,

## WORKER SAFETY

# OR-OSHA signs off on reduced fine against bridge painting contractor

Non-union Abhe & Svoboda has continued to bid on ODOT work.

By Don McIntosh

Two years, 10 months, and eight days after a near-fatal workplace accident under the Ross Island Bridge, Oregon OSHA closed its case against bridge painting contractor Abhe & Svoboda. The case began when bridge painter Marco Dion Lilly fell 37 feet and landed on his adopted son Christopher Montiel, sending both to the hospital with severe injuries.

In June 2017 Oregon OSHA announced fines of \$189,000 against the company for knowingly and repeatedly exposing its workers to injury and death. But on Dec. 16, 2019, the agency quietly signed a final settlement of the case in which Abhe will pay just \$24,500.

For Painters District Council 5, that's an incredibly frustrating result. Leaders in the union did everything they could to draw attention to the non-union company's safety record, including sending in a worker undercover to document conditions, and complaining to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), which oversaw the project. After the accident, the union put up a web site, abhe-exposed.com detailing Abhe's record of safety and other violations around the country.

"We're disappointed with the time that it took to arrive at this decision, and the amount of the fine," said District Council 5 field representative Scott Oldham. "For such a serious incident to come down to such a small penalty, the system in place seems a bit broken."

Based on what OSHA investigators pieced together, Lilly was using a compressed air hose to blow down debris, and Mon-

tiel was working on a platform below scraping paint. When Lilly's hose got stuck on a bent piece of metal, he lost his balance and fell through a ladder opening. No guardrail had been installed around the opening, and though Lilly and his co-workers above had been wearing fall protection harnesses, there was nothing for them to attach to.

As reconstructed from worker interviews and OR-OSHA records, it was an accident waiting to happen. Workers felt unsafe on the project, and Abhe & Svoboda was warned repeatedly about the very hazards that contributed to the fall — and did nothing.

In fact, OSHA itself had been out to the bridge on June 13, 2016 — investigating a complaint that there were holes employees could fall through while sandblasting and painting the bridge — but found no violations and issued no citations.

Even Lilly himself had warned a foreman two days earlier about the loose piece of metal sticking up from the platform near an unsecured ladder hole, and had asked that the hole be covered, the hole he later fell through.

And that's not all. At least four workers have alleged they were gotten rid of after complaining about safety:

- Shane Duane Luey, hired through an ODOT employment program for tribal members, said he raised an issue at a safety meeting and was told by the company superintendent, in front of 30 co-workers, "Next time you have a problem with safety, talk to me. Then get in your car and hit the f\*\*\*ing road." Luey said he's the one that called OSHA in June 2016, and he thinks the company figured it out it was him. "They wrote me up the next day, twice," Luey said. "They were on me about

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