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# Oregon Democrats meet with public workers whose retirement contributions they voted to cut

In the basement at Oregon AFL-CIO headquarters, Oregon's House Speaker Tina Kotek and fellow Portland House Democrat Rob Nosse came face to face Jan. 10 with several dozen public workers whose retirement savings they voted to cut last year. It was a gloomy meeting that left no one satisfied.

Most in attendance were members of IBEW Local 48, which organized the event, but co-workers in AFSCME Local 189, Laborers Local 483, and Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 who work for the City of Portland and Portland Public Schools were also in attendance.

Graham Trainor, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, opened the meeting.

The public employee union members came to hear Kotek and Nosse explain Senate Bill 1049, which among other things reduced contributions by public employers to public workers' individual retirement

accounts — and "redirected" the savings to refill the underfunded Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System (PERS). Kotek, who had told the Oregon AFL-CIO she wouldn't cut public employee retirement benefits, had led passage of the legislation together with Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney. Nosse, a union rep for the Oregon Nurses Association, voted for it, even though it reduced the compensation of some of his union's own members.

Under SB 1049, the diversion of funds will go on for 10 to 15 years, until PERS is restored to 90% funding. More senior employees who are in the more generous PERS Tiers 1 and 2 are losing retirement savings account contributions equal to 2.5% of their salary. Less senior public employees who have the less generous defined benefit pension known as OPSRP (Oregon Public Service Retirement Plan),



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— IBEW Local 48 Union Rep  
Kevin Jesequel

will lose contributions equal 0.75%. Employees with annual salaries under \$30,000 are spared from the cuts.

Kotek and Nosse told union members SB 1049 was the least bad solution to restore stability to the retirement system, which took a big hit in the 2008 financial market crash. If Republicans had their way, they'd get rid of public employee pensions going forward, and offer just a 401(k) style retirement savings plan, Kotek and Nosse said.

Since 1996, Oregon lawmakers

have repeatedly reduced public employee retirement benefits. Some of the cuts and changes have been struck down in the courts.

The cuts are part of a decades-long nationwide trend in both the public and private sector toward less secure retirements for workers.

"They seem to think they have this solved," Local 48 rep Kevin Jesequel said of Kotek and Nosse after the meeting. "I don't think anybody left feeling all that reassured."

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