

IATSE 488 faces near total job loss

Several hundred Oregon members of IATSE Local 488 were already facing a scarcity of work: Grimm and several other locally-produced TV shows ended, and in general, the shift to streaming television has meant shorter shoots and seasons with fewer episodes. COVID-19 made matters worse, shutting down projects statewide by mid-March.

“Our entire membership is out of work,” said Local 488 Vice President C David Cottrill.

At a television studio space in Clackamas, about 120 members were expecting another six to nine weeks of work on a TBS series called “Chad,” while 80 to 90 more were gearing up to produce a pilot called “Crazy For You” for NBC. Now they’re out of work, along with smaller crews who were expecting to work on a Marvel Hulu series called “Omens” in Portland and a Netflix project with Sandra Bullock at a correctional facility in Madras.

Cottrill is meeting online weekly with a COVID task force with representatives of the Oregon Media Production Association and Oregon Film. Of their own accord, nearly all the

employers in the industry decided to keep those who were already employed on the payroll for two weeks. But they’ll need to go on unemployment after that, and there’s no telling when their projects will resume production. Some members, classified as independent contractors, haven’t been eligible for unemployment benefits, but Congress has temporarily expanded unemployment compensation to them as well.

The union is surveying members about the impact of the crisis, and on April 2, helped deliver food boxes to members who are most in need.

Meanwhile, the IATSE international put out a call for members who work in costume and wardrobe departments to volunteer to produce protective masks for health care workers and others who need them. It’s also launching a nationwide mutual aid initiative called CARES (Coronavirus Active Response and Engagement Service) in which younger members deliver groceries, prescriptions, and other necessary supplies to older and more vulnerable members and retirees who face greater risk going out.



NEW LOOK OF THE SEASON: Rebecca Lewis—Good & Welfare Committee chair at International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 28—wears a cat-patterned mask made by a volunteer committee of union workers who work in wardrobe departments. Several dozen IATSE Local 28 members who work in the wardrobe department are volunteering to make protective masks for health care workers—alongside members of IATSE Local 488 and SAG-AFTRA. From Southwest Washington to The Dalles, hospitals and home health care workers are facing a shortage of masks, and are calling for donations. Volunteers use close-weave cotton fabric to make the masks, based on a pattern and instructions put out by Deaconess Hospital in Indiana. The masks union volunteers are making aren’t medical grade and are not guaranteed to prevent any illness, but they can be used so that more medical grade masks are available to front line workers. On March 16, a batch was delivered to the Oregon Veterans Home in The Dalles. Others have gone to grocery workers, or to Portland Public Schools maintenance workers who are still on the job. “It’s great that we’re able to pitch in,” Lewis said, “and we’re glad to be able to do it, but it’s also really upsetting to a lot of us that in the richest country in the world, people are sewing protective equipment for medical professionals — in their homes.”

JOBS

FERC approves Jordan Cove project

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) voted 2-1 March 19 to approve the labor-backed Jordan Cove liquefied natural gas export terminal and Pacific Connector Gas Pipeline in Coos Bay on Oregon’s south coast.

The vote came less than two months after Pembina Corp. — the Canadian company behind the proposed \$10 billion project—withdraw an application for a key state permit over concerns that it would be rejected. Pembina wants to build a 229-mile-long pipeline to a new liquefied natural gas export terminal utilizing the National Construction Agreement of North America Building Trades Unions. The project, they say, will create thousands of family-wage union construction jobs, provide opportunities for apprentices in all trades, and contribute more than \$100 million in state and local taxes every year.

“We’re happy to see this project move forward. It has the potential to create much-needed family-wage jobs on the Southern Oregon coast,” said Robert Camarillo, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building Trades Council. “We’ll continue to support Jordan Cove to fruition any way that we can.”

Harry Andersen, Pembina’s senior vice president and chief legal officer, said FERC’s approval represents the most significant step forward for Jordan Cove since Pembina acquired the project in 2017.

“The FERC’s decision is due in no small part to our many supporters who have turned out time and time again to voice their support for Jordan Cove and to show that the project is in the public interest, including in Southern Oregon and the Rockies Basin,” Andersen said.

But even with FERC’s approval, the project currently doesn’t have a green light from Oregon state agencies: It was denied a clean water permit by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ); it withdrew its permit applications to the Department of State Lands; and it received an objection from the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLC) on the grounds that the project was inconsistent with the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Boost Southern Oregon, a coalition of community leaders,



small local businesses, organizations, labor, and elected officials, said Jordan Cove will continue to obtain all the necessary permits to move forward.

“This now means that all local and federal permits have been approved. There is still work to be done, but this is one step closer,” the group said.

Following FERC’s vote on March 19, Pembina filed a notice of appeal to the finding by DLC. *The Portland Business Journal* reported that to win on appeal, federal statute requires a determination by U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross that the project will bring more good than harm or is “necessary in the interest of national security.”

In the notice of appeal, Pembina argued both points: “The record contains sufficient information to permit the Secretary to balance the coastal effects against the strong national interest furthered by the project. When considered either separately or cumulatively, the project’s adverse coastal effects are outweighed by the strong national interest that the project furthers.”

The FERC vote didn’t sit well with Oregon Gov. Kate Brown or U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who for the first time announced opposition to the project.

In a press statement, Brown pointed to the timing of the vote in the midst of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

“Given a national and state emergency, in which the federal government and its agencies are unable to fulfill their basic responsibility to keep citizens safe, it is stunning that the FERC moved forward on this decision,” she said.

Brown said her position on

the project has always been to ensure the neutrality and fairness of state permitting processes as part of her commitment to uphold the requirements of Oregon law.

“I’ve received enormous criticism for this position, but I want to be clear: Defending these processes defends everyone’s right to be heard—from a tradesperson hoping to work on the project, to a landholder along the pipeline route, to citizens concerned about the ramifications of this project on our climate or in the event of an earthquake or tsunami on the coast.

“As the FERC chair stated earlier, it is now incumbent on the company to secure all state permits,” Brown said, adding that she has consulted with the state’s lawyers to consider all appropriate legal action to assure the Oregon permitting processes are followed.

“A stacked and incomplete FERC approved the controversial and complicated Jordan Cove project,” Wyden said. “There was no rush. A balanced and full FERC should have made the decision.”

The five-member Commission has been operating with two vacancies for more than year, which prompted Wyden to request that the agency wait until it had a full board of commissioners before voting on Jordan Cove. Commissioners voted 2-1, with Chair Neil Chatterjee and Bernard McNamee in favor and Richard Glick voting against.

On March 12, the U.S. Senate confirmed James Danly to the Commission, giving Republicans a 3-1 majority. Danly was confirmed on a mostly party line vote. He did not cast a vote on the Jordan Cove project.