

WORKER SAFETY

AFL-CIO’s OSHA suit dismissed

COVID-19 has killed more workers in a shorter time than any other health emergency in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) 50-year existence. But OSHA has refused to require employers to take any specific action to protect workers, saying that employers’ “general duty” to maintain a safe workplace under the law is enough.

On May 18, the national AFL-CIO asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia to order the agency to issue an emergency temporary rule.

On June 11, the court gave the federation its answer: No.

A three-judge panel found that the agency’s refusal was reasonable, “in light of the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the regulatory tools that the OSHA has at its disposal to ensure that employers are maintaining hazard-free work environments.”

Judges signing the two-page

ruling were appointees of presidents Trump, Obama, and Bush Sr.

“We are very disappointed that three judges did not deem the lives of America’s workers worthy of holding an argument or issuing a full opinion,” reacted AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka in a press statement. The AFL-CIO has appealed to the full Circuit Court to review the panel’s judgment.

It’s not just organized labor that thinks OSHA is AWOL. On June 21 the *New York Times* editorial board blasted OSHA for inaction, pointing out that the agency has issued only one COVID-related citation so far, after having received over 5,000 COVID-related safety complaints from workers.

And in its second-round stimulus package, the Democratic-led U.S. House included a requirement that OSHA adopt an emergency standard for COVID safety measures. The Republican-led U.S. Senate has refused to take it up.

WORKERS’ RIGHTS

Minimum wage going up and up

The minimum wage rose again in **Oregon** July 1. The hourly wage went from \$12.50 to \$13.25 within the Portland Metro urban growth boundary; from \$11.25 to \$12 in Northwest Oregon and Deschutes, Josephine, Jackson, Hood River and Wasco counties; and from \$11 to \$11.50 in rural Eastern

and Southwest Oregon counties. The increase is the latest under a 2016 union-backed law under which the minimum wage will reach \$14.75, 13.50, and \$12.50 in July 2022; after that, the wage will rise annually based on inflation. Approximately 146,303 workers are impacted.

In **Washington**, a 2016 ballot initiative has also been raising the minimum wage. Since Jan. 1 it’s been \$13.50 an hour statewide, and as high as \$16.39

in Seattle.

Congress hasn’t passed a federal minimum wage increase since 2007, and the federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 since 2009. That’s the longest minimum wage freeze since the minimum wage law first took effect in 1938. Twenty-nine states have passed higher minimum wages than the federal one, but the federal minimum is in effect in 21 other states, including **Idaho**.

Oregon Fair Work Week law goes into effect July 15

Large retail employers will have to offer predictable schedules and pay for last-minute changes.

The Oregon Legislature passed the nation’s first Fair Work Week bill in 2017. The law provides schedule predictability for employees in the food service, hospitality, and retail industries.

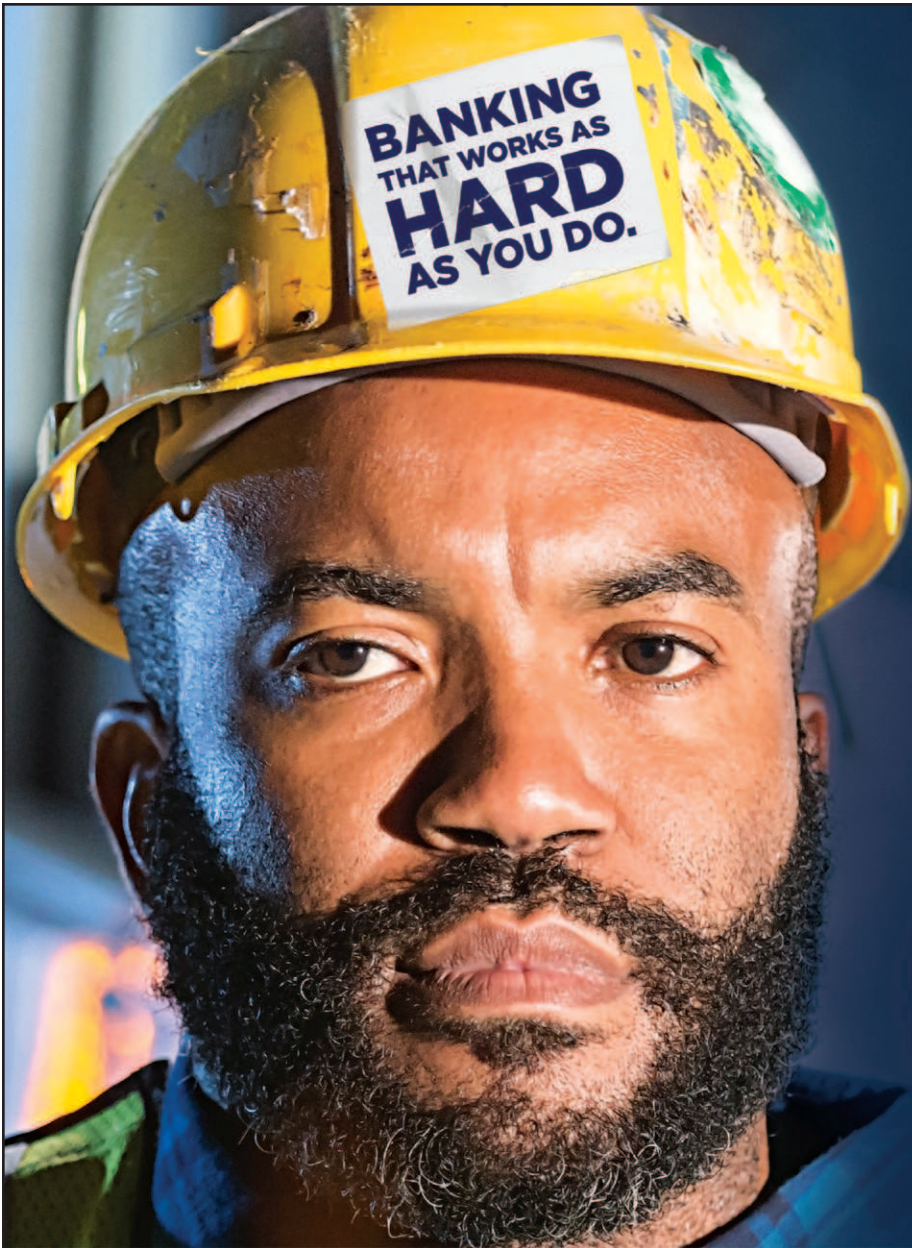
The law has been slowly phasing in since then. But on July 15, all of the law’s provi-

sions will be in effect. Starting that day, employers with at least 500 employees worldwide must give their Oregon employees written work schedules 14 days before the start of the work week. The law also requires employers to provide new hires with a written good faith estimate of their work schedule; schedule at least a 10-hour break between shifts; pay extra for unplanned schedule changes; and give workers the right to express scheduling

preference with no retribution.

The law affects not only union members, but hundreds of thousands of people across Oregon.

“It was a quality-of-life game-changer for so many who had been unable to reliably plan things like doctor’s appointments and family outings,” said Dan Clay, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, which help champion the bill.



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