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...New \$15 wage floor at Portland Airport

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cabin cleaners employed by G2 Secure Staff, janitors employed by disability nonprofit Relay Resources (formerly PHC), and wheelchair assistants working for G2, Huntleigh USA, and Bags Inc.

But Long said the new policy falls short, because about 60% of the service workers already make around \$15 an hour. That means they won't see a real wage bump until Jan. 1, 2022 under the policy.

"These wage increases need to be implemented much faster," Long said. "They should happen in July. Workers currently at \$15 can't wait a year for another wage increase."

Local 49 has been campaigning since at least 2014 to raise standards for Portland airport service workers, and lately has been pushing the Port to mandate increased sick days and affordable health care. An earlier airport policy raised wages to \$15 for wheelchair assistants.

"The Port has had to be pushed every step of the way to take leadership," Long told the *Labor Press*.

After Pippenger reported on the new policy, SEIU Local 49

Political Director Felisa Hagins and several Local 49 members addressed commissioners.

"I like this job, but the wages are a real problem," said union shop steward Donald Martin, a Huntleigh employee who helps mobility-impaired passengers get to and from their terminals. "We have lots of people working here who are just barely making it."

Hagins reminded Port commissioners that airline service workers used to be employed directly by airlines, but were contracted out to slash worker wages and benefits.

Airlines increased profits by creating a class of impoverished workers, and that may have lowered the quality of service.

SEIU conducted an analysis of badged workers in 2017, Hagins said, and found that annual service employee turnover ranged from 59% to 143%.

The new minimum wage policy came at the initiative of Port executives, and doesn't require the approval of the Port Commission.

Representatives from organized labor used to occupy two seats on the otherwise business-led nine-member commission, but Oregon Gov. Kate

Brown reduced that to one last year—SEIU Local 49 President Meg Niemi.

Niemi pointed out that the Port received a letter from the trade group Airlines for America opposing the new minimum wage. The industry is in a fragile and vulnerable financial position, wrote Airlines for America Vice President Sean Williams, and expects recovery to take at least three years.

"We respectfully write in opposition to the proposal to apply a separate minimum wage mandate to airline service providers," Williams wrote. "Doing so would make PDX less competitive."

"They say they're in a crisis because of the pandemic," Niemi told fellow commissioners. "Well, they were just as opposed to raising wages and benefits for Black, brown, and indigenous workers a few years ago at the height of their profits, when they were doing stock buybacks and paying shareholders huge dividends rather than saving for a rainy day."

Niemi said even with the new wage floor, workers at Portland International Airport will earn much less than workers under similar policies at other West Coast airports.

Our members have the power to make the season bright.

Enjoy Your Holiday Season from **IBEW Local 125**

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HOLIDAY GREETINGS TO ORGANIZED LABOR

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