

# NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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VOLUME 122, NUMBER 2

PORTLAND, OREGON

JANUARY 15, 2021

## UNION ORGANIZING

### OHSU Hillsboro hospital workers unionize

By Don McIntosh

A group of 448 workers at OHSU Hillsboro Medical Center voted more than two-to-one to unionize with Oregon AFSCME, in mail ballots counted on Jan. 7. The official tally was 164 to 61 in favor of the union.

"I'm feeling ecstatic," said emergency room receptionist Shellie Powers, the worker who first contacted the union back in April 2020. "It's so overwhelming."

Oregon AFSCME organizer Sarah Thompson said a management anti-union campaign advised by Bullard Law seemed to backfire and turn workers toward the union.

The hospital and its nearby facilities were known as Tuality Health Care until 2016, when Tuality became a clinical partner of Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) and adopted the OHSU name. AFSCME represents about 7,000 workers at OHSU's main campus, and in October 2020 the union presented signed union cards from a majority of workers, seeking union recognition under Oregon's public employee union law. But hospital management said Tuality, a private entity, was still the true employer, so AFSCME petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to conduct a union election.

Thompson said the next step is for workers to select bargaining committee members and decide what they want to push for in a first contract. Union proposals are likely to include better pay and benefits and greater control over work schedules.

In an emailed statement, OHSU Hillsboro said it will work collaboratively with the union. "The union election is now behind us, and we respect the outcome of the vote," said human resources vice president Kelley Frengle in the email.

"We're ready for change," Powers said. "We're ready to make it a better place to work for all of us."

## NATIONAL

### Biden names former union leader as nominee for labor secretary

President-elect Joe Biden announced Jan. 7 that he will nominate Marty Walsh—mayor of Boston and a member of the Laborers union—to be U.S. Secretary of Labor. Labor secretary is a cabinet-level post, in charge of wage and hour enforcement, worker safety, pension security, and apprenticeship training, among other responsibilities.



Marty Walsh

If confirmed as expected by the newly-elected Democratic majority in the Senate, Walsh would be the first union member to serve as labor secretary since 1977.

The son of Irish immigrants, Walsh joined Laborers Local 223 in 1988 at age 21, following in the footsteps of his fa-

ther, a lifelong member of the local. Walsh got active in the union, was elected Local 223 president, and eventually became secretary-treasurer of the Boston Metropolitan District Building Trades Council. In 1997, he was elected state representative, and later became co-chair of the Massachusetts Democratic Party Labor Caucus. He remained Local 223 president until he was elected mayor of Boston in 2013.

"Marty Walsh will be an exceptional labor secretary for the same reason he was an outstanding mayor—he carried the tools," said National AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka in a press statement praising the nomination. DM

## OREGON

### Oregon Justice Department says legislative workers can't unionize

Oregon law—passed by the Oregon Legislature—says state and local public employees have the right to unionize. On Dec. 8, the Legislature's own staff exercised that right, and filed cards seeking to join IBEW Local 89. It would be the first state legislative union in the nation. The roughly 110 employees in the proposed unit work directly for Oregon's 90 legislators.

Now the Oregon Attorney General's office says they don't have the right to unionize after all. On behalf of the Legislature, Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum submitted four separate legal objections in a Dec. 29 filing with the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB), the body that administers the state's public employee collective bargaining law.

Rosenblum argues that for an executive branch agency (ERB) to recognize a bargaining unit in the legislative branch of government would violate the Oregon constitution's separation of powers. A similar argument came up in 1983 when judicial branch employees sought to unionize; the Legislature passed a law making it clear they could unionize.

Rosenblum also points out that it's a highly fluctuating group, laid off not just when the Legislature is not in session but when their employers lose election. And each of the 90 legislators independently select and hire their personal staff, and some or all of them could be considered supervisors, managerial, or confidential workers who don't have the right to unionize.

### PGE's new windfarm: union-built

At finish, Wheatridge will be one of the nation's largest wind/solar/battery combos.

Unlike other recent Northeast Oregon renewable energy projects, which relied on nonunion out-of-state workers, the Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facility about 15 miles south of Boardman employed members of Iron Workers Local 29, Laborers Local 737 and Operating Engineers Local 701. Oregon State Building Trades Executive Secretary Robert Camarillo says contractor Blattner Energy signed agreements with those unions after labor leaders met with PGE. PGE is part owner of the project, along with Next Era Energy Resources.

The Wheatridge facility is one of the first large-scale energy facilities in the United States to combine wind, solar, and battery storage at a single location. PGE says up to 300 workers were employed to construct the 300 megawatt wind farm portion of the project, which went online Dec. 8. It consists of 120 massive



Photo courtesy of PGE

At the Wheatridge facility south of Boardman, a crane operated by a member of IUOE Local 701 lifts a rotor to be attached by members of Iron Workers and Laborers atop a 290-foot tower. At right in the distance is PGE's Boardman Coal Plant, which closed permanently in October.

wind turbines, 295 feet from ground to hub, made by GE Renewable Energy. Eastern Oregon Iron Workers representative Mike Alldritt says the project employed a mostly local workforce.

Next, up to 175 workers will complete an adjacent 50 megawatt solar array and 30 megawatt battery storage facility by the end of 2021. A new

transmission line connects Wheatridge with the Bonneville Power Administration's regional high-voltage grid.

The project received public subsidies, including a strategic investment program tax credit from Morrow County, a federal production tax credit for the wind portion, and a federal investment tax credit for the solar portion. DM