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Office location:
4275 NE Halsey St., Portland, Oregon

Mailing address:
P.O. Box 13150, Portland, OR 97213

Phone: (503) 288-3311

Web address:
<https://nwlaborpress.org>

Editor & Manager: Michael Gutwig
Senior staff reporter: Don McIntosh
Office manager: Jill Lukens

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LEGISLATURE IN SESSION

OREGON



Two union-backed bills have passed at least one Oregon legislative chamber.

A bill to give hiring hall workers the right to paid sick leave passed the Senate. Union construction workers were left out when Oregon passed paid sick leave in 2015. SB 588, to ensure they have the same rights, passed the Oregon Senate 22-4 on March 24 and is now in the House.

A bill to set the prevailing wage at the union rate has passed the Senate. In order to set the wage that must be paid on public construction projects, Oregon right now conducts time-consuming annual surveys, and union leaders say the results often don't reflect what's really paid. SB 493, a bill to base the prevailing wage on the collectively bargained rate, like Washington does, passed the Oregon Senate 16-11. Scappoose state Sen. Betsy Johnson was the only Democrat to oppose it in a March 31 vote that was otherwise along strict party lines. The bill is now in the House.

WASHINGTON



Several priorities of the Washington State Labor Council look likely to pass.

A bill to give farm workers the right to overtime pay is on track to pass. In a bipartisan 91-7 vote on April 9, the Washington House of Representatives passed a bill to make Washington the first state to give agricultural employees the right to a 40-hour work week and overtime pay. Because a technical amendment was adopted, SB 5172 now returns to the Washington Senate for concurrence. It earlier passed the Senate 37-12 and was expected to do so again. "SB 5172 will end a racist legacy and correct an injustice that has existed for too long," said Washington State Labor Council President Larry Brown.

COVID-19 workers' comp presumption bill is near the finish line. Frontline workers who are infected with COVID-19 will receive medical coverage and partial wage replacement for lost work hours under SB 5115, which passed the state Senate

48-1 on Feb. 23 and the state House 68-30 on April 5. The bill was amended in the House, so it must return to the Senate for concurrence. It will create a presumption that frontline employees infected by COVID-19 qualify for workers' compensation, unless it is proven they caught it outside work. It would also require businesses to be more transparent about cases and potential exposure during a pandemic. It would provide protections to virtually all workers who have significant interaction with the public, including first responders, health care workers, food service workers, teachers, grocery workers, and farm and food-processing workers. It had an emergency clause and would have taken effect as soon as it was signed, but the House removed it.

A top labor priority, the Worker Protection Act, has died in the state Senate. The Worker Protection Act (HB 1076), would have allowed workers to seek justice in court if their employer violates wage, work safety and discrimination laws. It passed the Washington House 53-44 on March 5 but died April 2 when it failed to advance from the Washington Senate Ways and Means Committee by a cutoff deadline. The bill was a top legislative priority for the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, which vowed to push the proposal again next year.

UNION ORGANIZING

Lifeworks NW workers file for union election

A majority of workers at a Hillsboro mental health and substance abuse crisis center are ready for a union. The unit consists of about 60 mental health therapists, substance use counselors and support staff at Hawthorn Walk-In Center, a facility funded by Washington County and run by the Portland-based nonprofit Lifeworks NW. It also includes a group of crisis clinicians that ride with the Washington County Sheriff's Office in response to behavioral health calls routed through 911.

They asked the National Labor Relations Board March 23 to schedule a union election. It's the latest in a series of campaigns by Oregon AFSCME to unionize and improve conditions at behavioral health providers. Oregon AFSCME asked for voluntary union recognition, but Lifeworks NW declined.

"Lifeworks has reached out to anti-union law firms in an attempt to neutralize this effort," said Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Stacy Chamberlain in a press statement. "Lifeworks should not be using their limited resources on anti-union activities to fight their own employees."

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CORRECTION

A story in our April 2 issue about a union agreement at the proposed renewable diesel refinery at Port Westward incorrectly said the 30-year lease on the property was signed with the Port of Clatskanie. There is no such entity, and the lease was signed with the Port of Columbia County.



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