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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Kaiser Permanente strike called off

Management drops anti-union two tier demand.

By Don McIntosh

An estimated 32,000 workers at Kaiser Permanente were set to strike Nov. 15 across five states. Instead, they and about 20,000 others will vote in the coming weeks on a new set of four-year union contracts. The deal was reached Nov. 13 after the massive health non-profit dropped its most outrageous demand: a "two-tier" arrangement in which new hires would be paid a third less than current employees doing the same work.

Kaiser also agreed to modest across-the-board raises: 3% in the first and second years, followed by 2% in the third and fourth years. The third and fourth year raises will also be accompanied by a 2% bonus that doesn't raise the pay rate. The 3% raise in year one is retroactive to Oct. 1, and matches the raise another set of Kaiser unions got for this year, but it also leaves workers falling behind inflation, which is currently above 5% for the first time in years.

The unions that were gearing up to strike negotiate together as a coalition called the Alliance of Health Care Unions (AHCU), made up of 21 locals and about 50,000 members in eight states plus Washington, D.C. AHCU was created in 2018 when a number of unions split from an older coalition called Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions (CKPU) after disagreements over how to make decisions as a group. In Oregon and Southwest Washington, it includes 3,400 members of Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP), while Service

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Union reaches agreement with Burgerville

By Don McIntosh

It took 51 bargaining sessions and more than three years, but roughly 100 employees at five Portland-area Burgerville locations are about to be the first fast food workers in America to have a union contract.

If members of the Burgerville Workers Union vote to ratify it in the coming weeks, the union contract will lock in current pay and working conditions and add notable improvements, including three-month set schedules, parental leave, and up to two weeks paid vacation a year depending on seniority.

The contract also gives union members the greater job security that comes with "just cause" protection. Just cause means an end to "at will" employment status in which workers can be terminated for just about any reason. Instead, managers will now have to document rule violations, use progressive discipline, and allow workers to bring a shop steward to defend them in investigatory and disciplinary meetings. Workers will also have a grievance procedure they can use to contest discipline they feel is unfair. All those are standard union rights, but unheard of outside union-represented workplaces.

"Now when it comes to a union shop, we will be able to say for the first time in the fast food industry, these workers are not going to be at will employees," says union bargaining team member Mark Medina.

Medina, who has been involved since the campaign began in 2016, also credits the union with improvements that Burgerville implemented across the board for both union and non-union employees, in-

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JOBS

Massive infrastructure and jobs bill becomes law

By Don McIntosh

It's the biggest investment in America's physical infrastructure since the 1950s: Signed into law by President Joe Biden Nov. 16, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act authorizes $1.2 trillion in federal spending over the next five years to upgrade bridges and highways, rail systems and transit, ports and airports, water systems, broadband infrastructure, and more. The $1.2 trillion figure combines $550 billion of new investment plus already expected spending from dedicated revenues like the federal gas tax.

For Oregon Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Eugene), it's a career-high moment. DeFazio is chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and played a big role in crafting the law. At a Nov. 12 press conference and later by phone with the *Labor Press*, DeFazio was candid about his frustration that it wasn't bigger still, but also celebrated the bill's passage as a hugely important win.

"I gotta say, to the unions: Warm up your apprenticeship programs. Get a bigger space and start looking to expand," DeFazio said. "In terms of infrastructure, union jobs, Davis-Bacon, these are going to be family wage, high-benefit jobs, career jobs.…This is the largest investment that America's ever made in its deteriorated infrastructure."

DeFazio is possibly the most committed advocate of infrastructure investment in Congress, and getting a major increase in infrastructure spending has been something of a decades-long personal saga, requiring battle with both Republicans and Democrats. At the height of the Great Recession, DeFazio fought unsuccessfully for ambitious investment in surface transportation to be part of the recovery bill.

He ended up being one of only a few Democrats to vote against Obama's American Recovery Act, and voted against it because only a small fraction of the act went to infrastructure. Instead, DeFazio says, tax cuts amounted to 10 times what was spent on infrastructure.

"Then comes Trump, the big builder, the compromiser," DeFazio said. "We sat with him at the White House. He bid us up to $2 trillion when we sat there. We came back two weeks later, he walked in, said 'If you're gonna investigate me, I won't work with you.' Slammed the door, walked out and had a press conference."

In the second half of Trump's term, DeFazio passed a bill out of the House called the Invest Act. It would have been larger than the just-passed bipartisan infrastructure bill, and more fo-

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