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SEIU 503, OPEU
PO Box 12159, Salem, OR 97309-0159

2,500 participated in the United For Oregon march on June 7, 2009.

The 503 VOICE

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DAS Ratification Vote Under Way

Ballots have been mailed to 18,500 state workers represented by SEIU Local 503 who will vote on whether to ratify a tentative agreement on a new two-year contract reached in July after eight months of negotiations. **Ballots are due at SEIU Headquarters by September 8 at 5pm.**

The DAS Bargaining Team called it "a victory for fairness" and a testament to what unity can accomplish even—maybe especially—in the face of potentially dire circumstances even while acknowledging that the agreement calls for shared sacrifice. Members across the state seemed to agree, pointing to a contract that continues fully paid medical coverage, retains the 10th step, keeps layoffs to a minimum and leaves all represented workers with a higher pay rate at the end of the 2009-11 biennium than they earn now.

"From the start of bargaining, we have sought to keep state workers on the job serving Oregonians and to ensure that we do not shoulder more than our fair share of the burden necessary to see the State through the worst economic crisis of our lifetime," DAS Bargaining Chair Kermit Meling of ODOT and team members said. "We feel that this agreement meets those goals."

The contract calls for 10 to 14 furlough days over two years, freezes steps for a year, and contains no cost-of-living increases. Those terms are a far cry from the State's initial insistence that all workers agree to 26 furlough days, give up all step increments, and give back the new 10th step. Specifics of the tentative agreement, which was considered by the union's elected bargaining delegates at a conference in Portland August 15, are highlighted on this page and laid out in complete detail with the ratification ballot mailed to all members following the conference.

Activity leading to the settlement involved lobbying, worksite demonstrations, large rallies on the Capitol mall and a huge march through the streets of downtown Portland, June 7, leading to a memorable gathering at Terry Schrunk Plaza with music, chants and calls for the fair settlement. That came after much more effort seven weeks later.

One key was a legislative budget that not only preserved jobs by using new revenue, federal stimulus funds and state savings to cut a $4.2 billion gap in half, but drew a virtual roadmap to a settlement by holding suggested savings from state employee compensation in the 2009-11 biennium to $65 million. But legislators acknowledged that they could only propose such a deal and not enforce it because state law invests the governor with the power to do all the actual bargaining and even dictate terms of a settlement if the sides fail to reach mutual agreement on a new contract.

And state negotiators tried to set the wheels in motion for such an imposed contract in June, declaring an "impasse" even though both sides were still coming to agreement on issues at the bargaining table. That's because such a declaration would start a sequence of events allowing the governor to act unilaterally less than six weeks later.

But after realizing that an unfair labor practice charge filed by SEIU 503 attorneys with the State Employee Relations Board might expose them to liabilities in the event of an imposed settlement, State negotiators withdrew the impasse declaration and more progress toward an agreement continued in the ensuing weeks. Meantime the four coalition bargaining groups completed their work on language specific to Human Services, Institutions, ODOT and Specials. These agreements, which are part of the proposed overall contract, are detailed on the State/University page at **www.seiu503.org**.

Having gained the best they could from legislators amid the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression—including the most significant tax reforms in memory and several legislative reprieves for positions in state agencies originally targeted for elimination—union members turned their spotlight directly on Governor Kulongoski.

More than 400 workers rallied outside his offices on the Capitol Mall and union members generated hundreds of phone calls to him and participated in massive informational picketing across Oregon, urging a fair settlement. Allies of the union also weighed in, and on July 27, with the ink barely dry on a new impasse declaration by the state that would allow an imposed settlement as soon as September 1, the SEIU bargainers were able to reach terms for a new contract they considered acceptable.

The bargaining team was comprised of Meling, Bill Kinyoun of ODFW, Karen Miller of DHS, Theresa Arndt of DOE, Dan Smith of OSH, Dan Ferguson of OYA, Rob Sisk of DAS, Trish Lutgen of ODE and Marc Nisenfeld and Nat Elder of OUS (for joint economic issues). Field Coordinator Donna Glathar and SEIU 503 Executive Director Leslie Frane led negotiations, and Linda Burgin participated in her role as statewide president.

All workers covered under the contract will have the opportunity to vote on the agreement, but you must be a union member to vote. If you need a membership application, please check with your union steward, call your local SEIU office, or download a membership application from the *Join SEIU 503* page at **www.seiu503.org.**

Health Coverage	We protected fully paid family medical coverage. Premiums are maintained for full-time workers and subsidies for participants in the part-time plan will be increased so that their costs do not increase. The State will pay for premium cost increases up to 5% in each year. Increases between 5% and 10% will be paid partly by the State and partly out of PEBB reserve funds.
Steps	There will be a one-year step freeze from 9/1/09 through 8/31/10. While this is a significant sacrifice, it is a huge improvement on the two-year step freeze the State had proposed. Employees who receive a step in July or August 2009 will have that step "rolled back" on 9/1/09 and then restored on 9/1/10. They will keep the money they got from the step in their July and August paychecks.
10th Step	We protected the new 10th step, although it will not take effect until after the one-year step freeze. This means that all bargaining unit members will get one step at some point during the life of the contract.
Furloughs	We will take 10, 12, or 14 furlough days over two years; 10 if you earn less than $2,450 a month, 12 if you earn $2,450 to $3,100 and 14 if you earn more than $3,100. Furlough time will count as time worked for the purposes of accruals and insurance benefits and will be pro-rated for part-time and seasonal workers. Most furlough days will be implemented through office closures. Those of us required to take furlough days when our offices are not closed or in facilities where closure is not feasible will schedule them on a quarterly basis. ***Further details will be posted at www.seiu503.org.***
Non-economic improvements	Includes a classification study covering support staff and health care job positions that must be finished in time to bargain salary rates in 2011 and an extra year of recall rights for laid-off workers. Many more agency specific improvements were won. ***Details are on the State/University page at www.seiu503.org.***

For late developments check www.seiu503.org