

## Oregon Workers' Union Reach Pact

A tentative deal offers state employees a 4 percent pay raise and may prevent a strike by Oregon's largest public union

By Steve Mayes

Oregon's largest public union and the state tentatively agreed to a new contract that gives union members more money and should avert a crippling strike.

The agreement, struck at 4:15 a.m. Wednesday, gives Oregon Public Employees Union members a 4 percent pay increase over two years. The union sought an 8 percent increase during the two-year contract period.

"We believe this is a very fair settlement. We believe it will be accepted" by union members, said Greg Ledbetter, who led the union bargaining team.

Union leaders will meet Saturday to recommend that members ratify a contract or vote to go on strike. The rank and file will vote on the contract in August. The new contract would expire June 30, 2001.

The deal with the union is important because it's the largest union the state negotiates with, and the agreement sets the standard for other contracts.

To meet the union's wage demands, the state will have to come up with around \$26 million, said Dan Kennedy, the state's top personnel officer. Half will come from money budgeted for pay raises and half from cuts made by individual agencies, which may leave some vacancies unfilled or cut services.

A key bargaining issue involved a monthly stipend paid to state employees who choose certain low-cost health insurance programs. Workers have come to rely on the payment and viewed it as part of their wages, union officials said.

The state wanted to use the money to cover its higher insurance premiums but dropped that demand. Instead, the incentive payment — \$38 a month — will be added to employees' paychecks.

That cleared the way for a deal, Ledbetter said.

Among the other key points in the proposed contract, which covers about 15,000 union members:

- Wages will increase 2 percent Oct. 1 and again Jan. 1, 2001. The union wanted 2 percent increases every six months.

- The state will pay the full cost of health care insurance for employees and their families, which will average \$470 a month per worker.

- The state will provide full dental coverage for employees and their families. Currently, employees are covered, and they must pay a monthly premium to cover family members.

- The union will not be authorized to add temporary employees to its bargaining unit. The state will continue informing the union whenever it contracts out services. The state wanted the union to loosen the reporting requirement.

Kennedy, the state's personnel director, said the pact is reasonable: "It keeps pace with the cost of living and the market, and we're able to do it in a very difficult fiscal environment."

Union officials, however, said that even with the raise, their members are still underpaid by as much as 15 percent. "To maintain the quality of public services, our wages must be made competitive with those in the private sector," Ledbetter said.

"We don't need to be defensive about this (contract)... Quality is entwined with pay," said Alice Dale, the union's executive director

Dale said that although Oregon's economy has been soaring for several years, state workers haven't benefited as much as their private-sector counterparts.

The union called a nine-day strike in 1995 to protest low wages and other issues. Two years ago, after a four-year pay freeze for some workers, the union won a 6 percent pay raise.

Last year, the state and the union studied public- and private-sector salaries in Oregon and four neighboring states. The study found that, on average, state workers were about 8 percent behind the market, and union employees at the top of the pay scale were roughly on par with government and private industry.

"Given the contentiousness we see between the Legislature and the governor, this was not an easy time to bargain," Ledbetter said.

Kennedy said: "We were unable to get all the money we'd like for raises. Agencies are going to have to absorb some of the costs."

The Department of Human Resources employs more union members than any other state agency and will have to wring money out of its budget to cover higher salaries. The department oversees programs serving children, the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill and the elderly.

"I don't know how much it will be. I'm not sure where we'll make the cuts," said Doug Wilson, the department's program and finance director. Some savings may come from falling welfare caseloads or a drop in demand for other services, Wilson said.

"If caseloads rise more than we expect, it will be difficult to backfill this hole. It's a little early to tell which ones will be ballooning up," Wilson said.

## Oregon Special Olympics Needs Volunteers in August

Donate Four Hours to Help 6,000 Oregon Athletes

Oregon Special Olympics critically needs 900 volunteers August 13, 14, 15 to staff the 1999 Bite. Bite volunteers receive t-shirts, vouchers for free food and their names are entered into a drawing for a mystery trip. Volunteers may choose single or multiple four-hour shifts beginning at 11 a.m., 2:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. Opportunities for individual volunteers include selling souvenirs, ice cream, refreshments and more.

Corporate and service groups are invited to be "Gate Sponsors." These organizations will receive special recognition for their support of the Oregon Special Olympics in all of the Bite's publications and promotional materials. Gate sponsors may also

post their corporate/club banner. Groups who register to sponsor a gate will commit to staffing one of the six entry gates into the park for at least one day. Gates require a minimum of six volunteers at times that are responsible for accepting donations and welcoming people to the festival.

Volunteer time and dedication during the Bite, the major fundraising event for Oregon Special Olympics, raises almost a quarter of a million dollars to support 6,000 Oregon athletes with disabilities. The statewide non-profit agency is dependent on the efforts of 10,000 volunteers annually to provide sports training and competitions at no cost to over 6,000 Oregon athletes with mental retardation.

Volunteers who also help at the Summer Sports Tournament in Salem during the week following the Bite, August 23 and 24 will receive an Oregon Special Olympics volunteer card good for fantastic and great dining experiences all over town, all year long. Over 500 athletes statewide who compete in softball and golf attend this event. Volunteer opportunities are flexible and range from one-time, one-hour commitments to long term volunteer positions.

To participate in the Bite fundraiser or to volunteer at the Summer Sports Tournament, call Oregon Special Olympics 24 hour, toll free volunteer hotline 800-993-7663.

## School Uniform Programs Gather Momentum

This fall more than 500,000 New York City K-8 students will be required to wear school uniforms. Schools in more than a dozen other major cities have recently adopted uniform programs. Representatives of French Toast Official School wear have worked with each of these school systems as they made the transition.

"We are constantly fielding calls and e-mails from concerned parents and educators seeking more information," says Beth Silver, brand manager of French Toast Official School Wear. "They're worried about the school environment, and many of them see a move to a uniform program as an important part of the larger effort to ensure a basic level of safety in schools. They want to be informed." Beth Silver may be scheduled for interviews by calling one of the contact numbers above.

French Toast, the country's largest independent manufacturer of school uniforms, recently launched French Toast as an online resource for parents

and administrators seeking information about school uniform programs. In addition to offering the full line of French Toast Official School Wear for sale online, FrenchToast.com provides background information on uniform issues, advice on how to handle the process, statistics, current articles and interactive features such as dress code

and retailer locators.

French Toast is a division of Lollytogs, Ltd. Based in New York, New York, Lollytogs Ltd. was founded in 1958. French Toast Wear offers more than 5000 different items in sizes 4 to Young Men's and Juniors, at children's wear and uniform retailers nationwide.

## Medicine For Less

Are you unable to pay for the medication you need? Many pharmaceutical companies offer free or discounted prescriptions, through rarely publicized programs, to patients who meet criteria for assistance. The programs vary in scope and eligibility requirements.

To make the information more widely known, the Cost Containment Research Institute in Washington DC, has published a 32-page booklet, "Free and Low Cost Prescription Drugs". The booklet lists

phone numbers and addresses of 85 pharmaceutical companies, and an easy to use index of the 1,500 drugs they make, as well as several discount mail-order services.

The information is available to download for free from The Institute's Internet Web site, [www.institute-dc.org](http://www.institute-dc.org) or for a paper copy send \$5 to cover the cost of printing, postage and handling to: Institute Fulfillment Center, Prescription Drug Booklet #: PD-370, P.O. Box 462, Elmira, NY 14902-0462.

## 122 Arrested In Civil Disobedience Protests

In coordinated actions on both coasts, 122 activists were arrested during non-violent civil disobedience protests demanding liberty, a new trial and urgent medical attention for award-winning African-American journalist and Pennsylvania death-row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal. At Philadelphia's Liberty Bell, amidst 100-degree heat, 95 protesters from all over the country disrupted business as usual and closed the building for the afternoon, during a weekend with the heaviest tourist presence of the year. In San Francisco, after a mass march to Union Square from the Federal Building, 27 activists blocked the street and were arrested. Taken together, the demonstrations amount to the largest civil disobedience action against the death penalty in U.S. history. The unprecedented actions, accompanied by support vigils of hundreds nearby, were sponsored by broad coalitions of progressive activists and marked 17 years to the day after Abu-Jamal's death sentence was imposed in a trial deemed grossly unfair by Amnesty International and many other observers worldwide.

Dennis Brutus, South Africa's poet laureate and anti-apartheid former political prisoner, explained the need for the dramatic demonstrations on behalf of Abu-Jamal. "In struggling for justice, we are discovering that our voices are not heard, our efforts are ignored, and in fact what is confronting us is injustice." Brutus attacked the Effective Death Penalty Act, a 1996 federal law sharply limiting the appeal grounds of death-row inmates, including the ability to introduce new exonerating evidence and testimony by defense witnesses.

The Philadelphia demonstration began when four people went inside the Liberty Bell Pavillion and unfurled a banner reading "Let Freedom Ring for Mumia" next to the historic icon. Within minutes, several activists chained themselves to the two entrance doors, and dozens from peace, lesbian/gay, AIDS, African-American, Latino and student movements rushed to sit down in front, while U.S. Park Police looked on helplessly. Two student activists clambered onto the building's awning and held a banner reading "Liberty for Mumia" for three hours, until they were removed by police using a forklift. Participants in the civil disobedience included Rev. Lucius Walker, Executive Director of IFCO (Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization) and Pastors for Peace, Zayid Muhammad, founder of Frontline Artists, and activists from such organizations as Student Libera-

tion Action Movement, Women for Justice and the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition. Two blind people and a woman in a wheelchair were among those arrested. It took police several hours to clear all 95 protesters, who were released within ten hours after being charged with failure to obey a lawful order. They are now facing fines of \$250 each, which will be contested.

Along with the Philadelphia and San Francisco protests, over 100 people attended a Providence, Rhode Island prayer vigil and rally against the death penalty and in support of Abu-Jamal, held in conjunction with the national

General Synod of the United Church of Christ. In a statement of solidarity read to the Philadelphia demonstration, UCC President Rev. Paul Sherry said, "We recognize the critical urgency of Mumia's case and his role as a figure of international importance." Also read at the Liberty Bell vigil was a support statement from Puerto Rican nationalist Rafael Cancel Miranda, who connected Abu-Jamal's case with that of the Puerto Rican political prisoners; another statement linked the plight of Abu-Jamal as a political prisoner with that of American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier, falsely imprisoned for life and in

severe ill health inadequately treated by prison authorities.

The three U.S. protests followed hard on the heels of two demonstrations in Paris demanding immediate medical care and a Justice Department investigation into violations of Abu-Jamal's civil rights during his original trial. On June 16, twenty-three American, French and African activists were arrested after storming the American Library in Paris during President Clinton's visit with President Jacques Chirac. Five days later, a demonstration for Abu-Jamal greeted Rev. Jesse Jackson, who was visiting. (Jackson was targeted for the

demonstration because of his role as spiritual advisor to President Clinton and his own history of civil disobedience.) Jackson later told former first lady of France Danielle Mitterand, who has visited Abu-Jamal, that he too will soon visit the death row inmate. Among the activists arrested June 16 was writer Julia Wright of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mrs. Wright, daughter of renowned author Richard Wright, said, "We wanted to show the officials who get elected on death-penalty platforms and go on diplomatic trips abroad outside the American ghetto that they won't

be able to travel without being confronted by the Mumia Abu-Jamal file wherever they go." She promised further protests.

Last October, Pennsylvania's Supreme Court denied Abu-Jamal's bid for a new trial, upholding the ruling of Judge Sabo, the original trial judge. Abu-Jamal, an author and activist, was convicted in 1982 of the shooting death of a Philadelphia police officer in a trial tainted by the flagrant bias of Judge Sabo, by the deliberate exclusion of 11 Black potential jurors and by a court-appointed lawyer who, by his own ad-

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