

REMEMBERING

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Hundreds of People gathered at the Alki Statue of Liberty in West Seattle on Sept. 11 to remember the thousands of innocent lives lost 10 years ago in New York City, the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania.



Tacoma Teachers Strike

Issues include pay, class size, teacher transfer policies

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — Teachers in Washington state's third-largest school district picketed in front of the city's major high schools Tuesday, hours after they overwhelmingly voted to walk away from the classroom.

The strike kept 28,000 students at home.

Union spokesman Rich Wood said teachers began arriving at Lincoln High School at 6 a.m. Tuesday. The plan was to have teachers at the city's four major high schools demonstrating all day.

Eighty-seven percent of the Tacoma Education Association's total membership voted Monday evening to walk out, after weekend contract negotiations failed to result in an agreement, Wood said.

Issues in dispute include pay, class size and the way the district's teachers are transferred and reassigned.

The Tacoma School District planned to seek an immediate court injunction Tuesday to terminate the strike, which school officials contend is illegal, district spokesman Dan Voelpel said.

Superintendent Art Jarvis will revisit the decision to keep schools closed in light of whatever happens in court, Voelpel said.

Both the Washington attorney general and state judges have ruled that state public employees do not have the right to strike.

Teachers applauded and waved signs before Monday's vote at Mount Tacoma High School.

District officials, meanwhile, sent automated calls to parents and staff explaining their response to the strike.

Tacoma teachers have been working without a contract since school started Sept. 1. The union and district negotiated Saturday but couldn't agree on a contract proposal.

A strike vote at the end of August failed by about 28 votes. Union bylaws require approval by 80 percent of the nearly 1,900 members to authorize a strike.

Since the last strike vote was so close, the union decided to allow members with schedule conflicts to vote early. About 200 union members with after-school responsibilities like coaching voted Friday or Saturday, Wood said. This time, 1,623 of the union's 1,869 members voted to walk out, he said.

A 2006 state attorney general's opinion said state and local public employees, including teachers, have no legally protected right to strike. That opinion also noted state law lacks specific penalties for striking public employees.

During several past teacher strikes, Washington school districts have gone to court and judges have ordered teachers back to work.

In Washington, only the Seattle and Spokane school districts are larger than Tacoma.

Tacoma teachers earned an average salary of \$63,793 during last school year, according to the district. They are the best-paid teachers in Pierce County and about the fifth-highest paid among the state's largest districts, behind teachers in Everett, Northshore, Seattle and Bellevue, according to state data.

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Paid Sick Leave for Private Sector

Seattle City Council votes in new requirements, sets precedent

By Gene Johnson
The Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Seattle is set to become the third U.S. city to require businesses to provide paid sick days for their workers, after a City Council vote Monday that supporters said could provide momentum for establishing similar laws across the country.

The council voted 8-1 to mandate that all but the smallest companies - those with fewer than five workers - give at least five paid days off a year to employees who are sick, need to care for a sick family member, or who are victims of domestic abuse and need to take time off to assist law enforcement or attend court hearings. Businesses with more than 250 workers would have to provide nine days.

Mayor Mike McGinn is expected to sign the measure, putting Seattle in a league with San Francisco; Washington, D.C.;

and Connecticut, where a state law takes effect in January. Residents of Denver will vote on a similar measure this fall, and proponents are pushing for a statewide paid sick days law in

Massachusetts and elsewhere. Milwaukee passed a sick-leave bill in 2008 that was later preempted by the state Legislature, and this year Philadelphia's city council passed one which was vetoed by its mayor.

Nationwide, 44 million workers do not have access to paid sick days, according to the advocacy group Family Values at Work. An estimated 145,000 to 190,000 of them are in Seattle.

"Seattle residents shouldn't have to choose between staying home sick and keeping their job," McGinn said in a written statement.

The proposal drew opposition from some in the business community who warned that it was bad policy even in the best of times

Dozens of supporters attended the hearing, carrying and waving paper-plate signs that read "I'm a fan of paid sick days," and met the vote with a standing ovation. Among them was gro-

cery store cashier Natasha West-Baker, who said that without paid time off she had to work an 8-hour shift last Saturday immediately after she underwent an MRI for severe back pain.

"It's not an OK way to live,"

Nationwide, 44 million workers do not have access to paid sick days

she said. "I'm the sole provider for a family of five. This is going to give me the time I need to be to be healthy and not worry about whether that day off is going to cost me the gas in my car or the food on my table."

The proposal drew opposition from some in the business community who warned that it was bad policy even in the best of times, and possibly disastrous during a recession. George Allen, of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce,

said that in San Francisco some businesses had to forego hiring additional workers or giving out bonuses because of that city's law, which took effect in 2007.

Rick Yoder, owner of the

upscale restaurant Wild Ginger, said that the measure was one more factor stacked against Seattle business owners, including the recently hiked downtown parking rates.

"The city needs to start embracing the idea of the entrepreneurial ideal and what that brings to our city," Yoder said. "Are we trying to send a message here that the

urban core is no longer important?"

Several people also criticized an exception in the law that allows the mandated sick time to be bargained away as part of collective bargaining agreements.

But a number of other business owners came out in favor of the measure, saying they wanted to care for their workers and that the law wouldn't cost them as much as anticipated. Restaurants and bars can meet the requirements by offering schedule swaps to accommodate the sick time.

The law wouldn't take effect for a year, and new businesses would not have to comply until they've been operating for two years.