

University workers reach deal to avoid strike

By Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

A looming strike by thousands of workers at Oregon's seven public universities has been avoided after the workers settled with management early Saturday morning.

The two-year contract was settled during talks at the Oregon Institute of Technology campus in Wilsonville.

Workers and the universities had reached an impasse after months of negotiations over cost of living increases, yearly pay bumps, benefits and the cost of meals for food service workers.

The workers, represented by Service Employees International

Union Local 503, were preparing to strike unless an agreement was reached by 7 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 30, the first day of classes for many of the universities.

The union reported that the final agreement they reached includes:

- The largest cost of living adjustment in over a decade
- No leaps in health care costs
- A 48-hour leave bank that employees can use in inclement weather

University workers had lamented that they were getting short shrift compared to other workers on the state's payroll — especially after lawmakers voted to boost the amount of money going to public universities by \$100 mil-

lion over the next two years.

The median classified university worker makes \$36,000 per year, according to SEIU Local 503. Classified staff work in jobs ranging from food service to information technology.

The union had railed against what it said were sky-high salaries for top administrators, bloated management and modest pay raises compared to other state workers. The universities had countered that they had made fair offers.

"Workers stuck together to demand a contract that respects the critical role they play in supporting our students and keeping our campuses running," said

Melissa Unger, executive director of SEIU Local 503, in a statement Saturday. "Together, we fought back take-aways proposed by management on wages, health care, steps and personal days, and won higher wages for all workers. This hard-fought victory is a testament to the strength and solidarity of Oregon's front-line university workers."

There will be a vote among workers in the next few weeks to ratify the contract, according to the union. But until then, they will show up for their jobs as usual.

"As we welcome students back in the new academic year, we are pleased that we have a tentative agreement in place with

our SEIU-represented classified workers, who play an important role in the education of more than 120,000 Oregon public university students," the university presidents said in a joint statement Saturday. "Our university classified employees are respected colleagues who are vital to the operation of our universities and the diverse student services each campus provides."

Oregon's public universities are Western Oregon University, the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Eastern Oregon University, Southern Oregon University, Portland State University and The Oregon Institute of Technology.

State health care sounds alarm: quit vaping

Brown asks DOJ for 'legal options' to stop sale of some vaping products

By Sam Stites
Oregon Capital Bureau

A second death related to vaping has prompted the Oregon Health Authority to advise Oregonians to stop vaping.

On Thursday, Gov. Kate Brown urged Oregonians to stop vaping.

"I have directed (the Oregon Health Authority) to provide recommendations for further steps to protect Oregonians and public health within 24 hours," Brown said. "I am also requesting that the Department of Justice advise my office on what legal options are available to the state, up to and including the temporary ban of all vaping products."

Brown's statement came after the Health Authority announced that another person had died of illness related to vaping.

"The safety of this product has been in question for a long time," Dr. Dean Sidelinger, state health officer, told reporters during a Sept. 26 press conference. "We know this product is not safe and have seen health effects from it with acute respiratory injuries and death. We do urge all individuals to stop vaping whether that's nicotine-based products, cannabis products or other. People who haven't vaped shouldn't start."

State health officials identified five cases of acute respiratory illness related to vaping both nicotine-based products and cannabis products. The state's first death related to vaping was announced on Sept. 3.

According to Sidelinger, the five patients who were hospitalized reported shortness of breath and trouble breathing, which progressed. More than 800 cases of vaping-related illness have been reported across the nation. There have been a dozen deaths reported in several states.

"The latest individual who died, like the other case was an adult, and did report using cannabis products," said Sidelinger, who could not provide more detailed information about the victim.

Sidelinger said that all five of the people being treated for vaping-related illnesses had used licensed cannabis products. The Health Authority expects more cases to be reported. The agency is working with the state and local officials to track the outbreak of vaping-related illnesses.

Multnomah County Deputy Health Office Doctor Jennifer Vines said the county sent a clinician report to several hundred Portland-area health care providers echoing Sidelinger's warning. The county also urged people to quit vaping and asked health care providers to watch for more cases.

The warning came days after Multnomah County commissioners said the county would work with state and federal officials to ban the sale of flavored nicotine products.

House Republican leader Christine Drazan also issued a Sept. 26 statement saying that safeguarding public health was the state's top priority.

"I urge all Oregonians to take this advisory seriously and stop using vape products immediately until the Oregon Health Authority can properly investigate the risks," Drazan said.

Wildfire council tells governor: update firefighting tools

Group compiles more than 50 recommendations that could include millions of dollars in new investments

By Sam Stites
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Governor's Council on Wildfire Response said Thursday that the state needs to update its firefighting priorities and techniques to deal with future conflagrations.

At its final meeting, the council outlined about nine months of work that produced more than 50 recommendations to improve the state's firefighting, preparedness and response. The recommendations will be given to Gov. Kate Brown in early November.

Council Chairman Matt Donegan said the group's proposals could require about \$4 billion in investments. Recommendations fall into three categories: creating wildfire-adapted communities; mitigating and developing resilient landscapes to prepare for fire; and supporting effective wildfire response.

"The basic element of this (January) executive order is, are we setup for success? Is what we have today sustainable given the increase in wildfires that we're seeing?" Donegan asked. "I think the general message back from our committees is no. Many of these systems were built for another era and need to be updated and modernized."

The primary charge of the 20-member group, Donegan said, was to find the right strategy that hit key areas of interest, such as saving human lives and protecting public health, protecting homes and buildings, removing excess fuel from forests, creating green jobs and revitalizing rural communities.

The council determined that the state needs to reorient

some older systems in its firefighting protocol that are outdated for the modern wildfire realities. That includes the way the state monitors public health related to wildfires and smoke, emergency response to the fires, disaster recovery measures, public education about wildfires and improved research efforts at Oregon State University.

Spending more resources

Proposed changes would include a multi-billion dollar, multi-decade fuel mitigation initiative to reduce the proliferation and severity of Oregon wildfires. An investment in fuel mitigation is expected to come from both state and federal dollars, as well as expanded private sector investment and public-private partnerships.

"The estimates that we hear, it's going to be \$4 billion in terms of total costs," Donegan said. "It's larger than any one entity. This is going to take the collective power of the public-private partnership."

Recommendations to expand fire suppression efforts could mean major changes to the state's wildfire response, specifically in areas that will help protect firefighters, safeguard buildings and structures, and help the state meet social, ecological and economic goals, Donegan said.

"In an era of climate change, fuel build up and population growth, we're going to have to spend more resources in suppressing fire," he said. "There is a hope that a correlation between fuel loads and suppression, overtime as we invest more in mitigation both with the wildland-urban interface and the landscape, that we can see our suppression cost decline."

Donegan said state land-use planning tools could be used to create cost savings by taking hard looks at defensible space fire control methods — creating landscaped

buffers around structures designed to reduce fire danger — as well as building and zoning codes to create statewide standards in community fire suppression planning.

After the council presents its recommendations in November, it will be up to the governor and the Legislature to develop options, set priorities for recommended actions and find a way to fund the estimated \$4 billion of investment in state's wildfire preparedness, response and suppression.

"I'm really pleased with the council's work," Brown told reporters after the council meeting. "This is a diverse group of Oregonians that came together to spend a lot of time and energy to address the changing needs of our communities across the state as it relates to wildfire. It is absolutely instrumental that the state play a role in bringing all the parts together to create healthier public lands, healthier forests and of course, healthier and safe communities for Oregonians."

Smoky summers for some

Improved fire response, more resilient landscapes and better fire/smoke adaptive communities to keep Oregonians health topped the governor's list of priorities after hearing Donegan's pitch.

As an example of fire and smoke adaptive communities, Brown pointed to the Rogue Valley, where, for the past several summers, residents have dealt with horrid air quality due to wildfires.

"The Oregon Shakespeare Festival typically does an outdoor production. They had to cancel about 24 or 25 of their outdoor productions in 2018," Brown said. "I want to make sure our communities like Ashland and Medford have places to go if there is that type of smoke so that vulnerable populations, whether its seniors, children or people with asthma, have places to go."

"We don't want the Rogue Valley smoked-in for six to eight weeks. It destroys their summer. It's not healthy, and it's not good for the economy."

Speaking with reporters after the council meeting, Brown didn't say where the state would find the \$4 billion it could need to make changes suggested by the council. She promised to find ways to provide Oregon's Department of Forestry — which faces a four-year, \$100 million backlog of debt for fighting fires on federal and private land — with the necessary resources it would need to continue fighting state wildfires.

"We're asking (the Department of Forestry) to work under a structure that was created in the 1900s to fight fire in what we're seeing is substantially changing conditions," Brown told reporters. "I'm relying on the work of the fire council to make recommendations to changes in structure, changes in finance and changes in tools (the agency) needs to do their jobs. This department is one of the finest in the country, and we want to make sure they have tools and resources they'll need in the future."

We Measure Success in Acres. Since 1945.

Meet our team of experienced Agricultural and Commercial lenders.

BOARDMAN, OR
Shane Lazinka
BURNS, OR
Laura Georges
CONDON, OR
Amber Schlaich
ENTERPRISE, OR
John Bailey
Bob Williams
HEPPNER, OR
Amber Schlaich

HERMISTON, OR
Lucas Wagner
Jared Lathrop
IONE, OR
Russell Seawald
IRRIGON, OR
Shane Lazinka
JOHN DAY, OR
Bob Quinton

LA GRANDE, OR
Kristy Nelson
Dave Stirewalt
Craig Nightingale
MADRAS, OR
Pete McCabe
MORO, OR
Amy McNamee
ONTARIO, OR
Jed Myers
James Gardner
Nial Bradshaw

PENDLETON, OR
Mike Short
Tracy Hamby
DAYTON, WA
Todd Wood
POMEROY, WA
Fred Zack
PASCO, WA
Russell Seewald
Daniel Rehm

Your Premier Ag Lender



NMLS# 414459



Bank of Eastern Oregon

We're Growing Generations Together

Gear Up

for hunting & fishing

Cleaning Kits

Packs

Camping Gear

Knives

RV Supplies

Game calls, lures & attractants

Blinds & stands

Binoculars & gun scopes

...and much more

BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A

True Value.

161 E. Main, John Day
541-575-0632