



A-HEM, Some Progress and on to Bigger Health Care Issues

Karen Williams

Love, hate, or be indifferent to the Health Engagement Model, but don't overlook that one change in the 2013 HEM comes, in part at least, from the persistence, solid research, and persuasiveness of the members of the joint AFSCME/SEIU/AEE (Engineers) Labor-Management health care team – the HEM committee, for short. Local First Vice President Dana Huddleston and our business agent, Issa Simpson, represented us well on this committee. Unions and the State began discussing HEM during 2011 bargaining, then called a Health Improvement Plan, as one long term strategy for reducing health care costs and increasing employee wellness. Union representatives and members expected such a program to proceed after a year of member education, and then with significant incentives to participate. We know, of course, HEM didn't play out that way. The Public Employee Benefit Board implemented HEM last fall with significant surcharges for those choosing not to participate. Issa Simpson delivered public testimony to PEBB in February this year (posted on our website) recommending eliminating the HEM surcharges; In May, PEBB, having more flexibility thanks to surplus 'reserves', voted to implement the committee's recommendation.

If you participate in HEM in 2013, you'll receive a taxable \$17.50 in your paycheck monthly, \$35 if both you and your spouse/domestic partner participate. If you choose not to participate in HEM, your deductible will be \$100 higher, \$300 for a family, but you will not pay a surcharge. Our PEBB board member, Diane Lovell, supported this change, because eliminating the surcharge was

important to our members and the higher deductible for non-participants is a smaller disincentive than the surcharge now in place. The incentive gives participating members \$210 to \$420 more in their pockets each year; Non-participants save \$120 - \$420, depending on the medical services they use.

Still, many members continue to be irked by what they view as employer intrusion into their health care decisions. If the Union and the State bargain only on employer financial contribution to our health insurance premium, then why is one's waist size or how many times a month one drinks the State's business? Of course, the State, our employer, does not have access to this information, but that does not diminish some AFSCME members' opposition on principle.

And, we mustn't dismiss the larger issues of access (or lack of) to providers outside of the Willamette Valley, reduced service for increasing cost, and PEBB's more powerful role since the State's move to self insurance. How can we respond effectively to these challenges? We can act in solidarity through our Union: Local leadership and Pendleton members recently discussed a petition to PEBB from Eastern Region workers, particular to their concerns. We can also act as individuals and comment directly to PEBB via pebb.connect@state.or.us. In August, PEBB began developing the request for proposal for 2014 administrators. Now is the ideal time to let PEBB know about any dissatisfaction with the current administrator (Providence) and what services you expect your premium payment to provide.

Layoffs: What we Learned. Are we prepared for more?

Karen Williams

Last year, DEQ experienced layoffs like never before. Once an agency of mainly wastewater engineers, and until the early 1970s, called the State Sanitary Authority, DEQ grew in the late 80s and 90s along with society's awareness of diffuse, lower level, and pervasive pollutant sources. With this expansion, some constituencies challenged the Agency's authority. This skepticism of regulation, coupled with decreasing revenues in the early 2000s fueled a political appetite for cost cutting. In negotiations we began settling for salary freezes, step freezes and eventually furloughs, in part, to minimize the loss of positions. Management held many positions vacant, with the authority, but no funding, to fill them. The 2008 recession and, in 2011, the Legislature's elimination of more than 100 mostly vacant positions cut too deep to accommodate without reducing labor. The Agency announced layoffs in August 2011.

Our Union and Management communicated well in the weeks leading up to the layoffs. For understandable reasons, some members view workforce adjustments suspiciously, but Union leadership felt that Management made sincere and relatively transparent efforts to place people in vacant positions without jeopardizing contractual rights of more senior members, also on the potential layoff list. The Union did disagree with how the Agency managed some limited duration positions and filed a grievance on that issue.

In 2009, we had negotiated contract language in Article 20 (Layoff) that allowed members faced with layoff to prioritize their options to displace, demote, or be laid off. This gave members more information about possible outcomes to help them make extremely difficult choices. Coupled with this untested contract language was the State's shift from the paper "PD 100" job application to an on-line "profile." The Agency held several workshops on the new on-line process, but several members also sought help from their Union steward and business agent. Stewards helped members evaluate their options, communicate their

qualifications, and understand the unemployment insurance process.

By contract, members had 7 days to prioritize their choices and update their resumes, all via the new on-line tool. The Agency then decided if members who had elected to displace were qualified to fill the essential duties of the least senior position "within two weeks," as specified in Article 20. On this point, in six cases, the Union disagreed with Management's decisions. Union stewards and staff acted quickly and decisively, sensitive to the emotions and the "ripple effect" of layoffs. In less than 72 hours, we researched, prepared and submitted a written challenge to the layoff process, and Management stopped the layoff clock for two weeks. During that period, stewards worked with affected members who could then submit information supplementing their on-line profiles. Stewards also advocated with members in meetings with Management when they presented evidence of their qualifications. Of six challenged decisions the Agency had made, all but one were decided in a manner satisfactory to our members and the Union. We filed three grievances, two were settled fairly quickly and one is going to arbitration. The issue in question for the arbitration is essentially what qualifications are required for an employee to displace into another position as a result of a layoff.

Layoffs are grim, and both the Union and the Agency are responsible for assuring that the process is fair, objective and follows contract language and intent. Layoff outcomes should never be a surprise to anyone. Our stewards are trained to be knowledgeable and reliable advocates for members and they provide crucial support to our business agent. Everyone hopes we are not faced with layoffs in 2013 on the scale of 2011, but revenue projections suggest that some layoffs are nearly certain. Union stewards will be there again to help members through this difficult process.

Oregon Delegation Makes Waves at AFSCME International Convention

Karen Williams



Photo by Mark Gipson

Three elected delegates from our Local (William Brown, Angela Delfin, Karen Williams) attended the week-long AFSCME International convention this June in Los Angeles. With dozens of AFSCME brothers and sisters from city, state, and county Locals across the state, we made up the Oregon delegation. We may have been in the back of the convention hall, but we got noticed. The retirement of Gerald McEntee brought us the first contested election for AFSCME President in 30 years. The two candidates were Lee Saunders, Secretary-Treasurer under Gerald McEntee, and Danny Donahue, President of the New York Civil Service Employees Association, an AFSCME affiliate with over 250,000 members.

Our Local delegates carried 577 votes

and cast them for Danny Donahue, believing he was the candidate, as a Local President himself, more inclined to help us strengthen our Union from the bottom up -- from an activated membership. The Oregon delegation campaigned hard for Danny -- persuading undecided delegates, distributing fliers, waving signs, and being very, very loud. We were not successful in electing Danny Donahue, but we should be proud of our efforts. We recognized the importance of building coalitions with other progressive AFSCME affiliates across the nation -- in Minnesota, New York and Washington. AFSCME's Next Wave, activists and leaders 35 and younger, started in Oregon and is now a national model: Everyone wanted to claim Next Wave, but only Danny Donahue said from the stage "no one does it better than they do in Oregon."

We reelected two strong, independent voices to the International Executive Board -- Ken Allen (Oregon AFSCME Council 75 Executive Director) and Greg Devereaux (Washington Council 28 Executive Director). And we should also be extremely proud of passing a Resolution supporting Marriage Equality, authored by our brothers and sisters at OHSU, Local 328, and a Resolution to lower the salaries of the International President and Secretary-Treasurer.

Politics: Local 3336 Wakes up for Primaries

Karen Williams

Local 3336 is not normally known for its political hutzpah. But, our Local was no small force in the May 2012 primary elections. We turned out about 20 volunteers that attended candidate interviews, and racked up 80 hours of canvassing and phone banking for worker- and environment-supporting candidates.

One race garnered a lot of our energy. Jeff Reardon ran against Mike Schauffler, incumbent in House District 48, in far southeast Portland and Clackamas County. On many labor issues, Mike Schauffler had supported workers, most notably in his staunch protection of PERS from further "reforms." But he started losing labor support when he voted against raising taxes from corporations and rich households, and he had always been luke warm to outright hostile on most environmental protection bills. In 2011, he voted against DEQ's already emaciated budget and not because it was too small. When the Working Families Party reached out to us for help with Jeff Reardon's campaign, we were ready to listen. Not only did we turn out volunteers, our Local membership voted to make a \$500 donation to the Reardon campaign. With the hard work of our Local, many volunteers in other unions, the Working Families Party, and environmental groups, Jeff Reardon won his primary election with 67% of the vote.

So, that was then. Now, the General Election is upon us and we have twice as much work to do. To accomplish anything meaningful regarding environmental protection or public agency funding, we must have a pro-worker majority in the State House and Senate. Labels, D or R, don't reveal legislators' pro- or anti-worker leanings; Their actions do. Any candidate or incumbent has to earn AFSCME's endorsement by convincing a panel of member interviewers they have and will continue to stand up for workers, public services, tax fairness, and a healthy environment. Several candidates have done just that and now they need our help to get them elected. What we sow in autumn, we reap in January, come legislative session and contract bargaining. Now is the time to show up.

**How You Can Build a Stronger Union
(as Jim Hightower would say: Do
Something!)**

Be an informed member: attend membership meetings, register on the website and review materials there, know where to find your contract and read it. If you are a fair-share payer, join the Union, and use your vote, instead of your silence, to make change.

Join the Member Action Team: We need 60 people across the agency who can talk with about 10 of their nearby co-workers about bargaining and other Union issues. Fun training provided to improve your verbal communication skills – always useful in your career and real life, too. Contact Mike Romero, MAT Captain, (503) 229 – 5563

Become a Union Steward: The steward is the most important position in our Union. Stewards are members' first contact for accurate Union information. Stewards are the primary watchdogs for contract violations. Stewards should be good communicators, respected by their co-workers and confident in their knowledge and authority. Two-day trainings offered throughout the year. Contact Rick Rother, Chief Steward, (503) 693-5751.

Contribute to the Union's political action committee: PEOPLE – public employees organized to promote legislative equality. These voluntary contributions help us elect pro-worker, pro-public services, and pro-environment candidates. We don't live to do politics, but we need to do politics to live. Sign the back of a yellow membership card and donate a few dollars each month. \$50 a year, or \$100 a year if you are married and file taxes jointly, is eligible for the Oregon Political Tax Credit. Only \$8.50/month makes you a PEOPLE MVP and earns you a cool-looking, union-made jacket.

Do I have to be in trouble to contact the Union?

Heck, no. Sure, your Union steward is the person to call for representation when you have a reasonable belief that the outcome of a meeting with Management may result in discipline. Rights to representation are called your **Weingarten Rights** and count them among the most fundamentally important and hard-won benefits of collective bargaining. But, disciplinary circumstances are relatively rare, and your Union stewards, officers, and staff can provide other useful services, even when things are going great. They can answer questions about your compensation, benefits, leaves, training, classification and as many other topics as there are articles in the contract. Stewards can provide guidance, advocacy, or even help facilitate a difficult conversation with your manager or another represented employee. So, call us if you find yourself in trouble. Or, better yet, call us before you get there.

Local 3336 Officers

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Register on our Website

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