

503 Retiree

The Newsletter of the SEIU Retirees Local 001

Letter from the President



Greg Ledbetter
President

My term of office is ending and this is my last 'Letter from the President.'

I have been a so called member-leader/activist in our Union since 1992. I have served in enough roles that I don't remember them all, but shop steward, local president, chair of the DAS bargaining team two times, and most recently as President of sub-local 001, the retirees of SEIU 503, OPEU come to mind. I have seen us grow from 20,000 State and Local Government workers to some 65,000+ members that now include 40,000 caregivers. I have seen many victories and a few losses as we have faced so many challenges. I met the woman who became my wife on the picket line in the 1995 strike.

But the most rewarding (aside from a happy 22 years and counting marriage) has been the role as a member of the Board of Directors of Local 503 these past four years. As part of that, when there was an unexpected resignation by then Director, Brian Rudiger I was honored to be elected to chair the ad hoc committee charged with searching for possible replacements to be ultimately voted on by the entire Board.

During that process we talked with existing staff, previous staff, and our two prior Executive Directors. We searched the entire country for qualified candidates to head our union as we enter as perilous a time as we have faced. We talked with our allies around the State. We interviewed half a dozen candidates from over 50 applicants. It was an exhaustive search. We found that there are not a lot of folks available with the experience to assume the reins of such a large and complex organization as ours.

In the end we selected a woman who has been with Local 503 for ten years, most recently as our political director, Melissa Unger. We are incredibly fortunate to have had her with us for so long and it says much about how our union hires and develops the best talent out there. Our union will be in good hands. But not only with Melissa. I feel remarkably positive about our future after spending many hours with the Board. Their commitment, their intelligence, their understanding has heartened me over these past difficult months. If they are any indication of our future, we are in good hands.

So I want to thank everyone for the opportunity I have had to work with so many great people. I will not try to name them all but I will give a shout out for all his hard work to Len Norwitz and to my special and lovely wife, Von Ledbetter. **Remember, the people, united, will never be defeated.**

SEIU 503 Retiree Local 001 Elections

SEIU 503 Retiree 001 elections are here! Ballots with candidates statements were mailed the week of March 30th and **must be in by April 20th.**

Nominations were closed March 9th at noon. John Hawkins is the Elections Chair.

The candidates are (in alphabetical order):

President:

- Barbara Casey

Vice President:

- Karla Marks
- Ann Montague

Secretary-Treasurer:

- Donna Bradley
- Rosalie Pedrosa

General Council

Delegates. 4 to be selected (you need not vote for four if you choose):

- Phyllis Boulton
- James Jacobson
- Ann Montague
- Rosalie Pedrosa
- Rosanne Richard
- Mary Ann Terpesta



Steve Demarest

Hello Retirees,

Some updates: One PERS bill passed in the February short session of the legislature. It could have an impact for those few retirees who have elected to leave money in their IAP account for scheduled disbursements. As of January 1, 2018, IAP accounts defaulted into investment funds based on birthdates, with the accounts of retirement-aged members in the most conservative funds. The Oregon Investment Council took this action. As a result of the passed bill, as of January 1, 2019, PERS members with IAP accounts will have the option, once per year, of choosing another investment fund instead of their default fund. That could be another IAP age-based fund or the general PERS fund.

A Board of Directors committee composed of members from the Board and from staff are examining the utility of our Salem headquarters and Portland office buildings. We own both. Preliminary feedback is that neither building is suitable for our current or future needs. The question of what to do is something that will be taken up over the course of the year. Look for a survey.

General Council planning is gearing up. It is likely that part of the program to decide where we go in the post-Janus and post-Harris v. Quinn world, we will look at where we've been. That includes our origins, the 1987 strike, and the 1995 strike. I'm sure we will be drawing upon your experiences. Look for more information.

Finally, Melissa Unger was installed as our new Executive Director at the March 10 Board of Directors meeting, after the Board selected her from two finalists on March 3. Melissa is an exciting leader, and I'm looking forward to working with her.

Thank you for choosing to be members of SEIU 503. I appreciate your dedication and contributions.

In unity,
Steve Demarest, Statewide President, SEIU Local 503

The Rolling Strike of '87 Celebration

By Barbara Casey

It was first suggested we have a little something to mark the anniversary of the 30 years ago strike. But a little something was not what this occasion called for. It had been a momentous strike and we wanted to do it up proud! With Ann Montague taking the lead and Greg Ledbetter pitching it to our Board of Directors, the November 18th party was on. Stressing lessons learned and lessons for today's work force; invited guests recapped their roles in 1987.



Over 80 participants greeted with warm applause, Alice Dale, ED 1985-2002, Ann Montague and Karla Marks, rank and file leaders, Margaret Hallock, former Director of Research for SEIU, Michael Alexander, retired organizer. All brought those shared experiences alive with their stories; many in the audience spoke too, inspiring and energizing all of us to remember what power workers have when we use it.

A party without good food and desserts is just a meeting...so we had great BBQ done up by John and Thea Leppink and family including delicious Flying Squadron cupcakes, served up by the Portland retirees.

It was a fantastic turnout for a Saturday night at the Portland SEIU meeting hall with old friends and memories mingling with the newer generations sharing our own labor history with new members and staff connecting with our union and what being union means. Let's do another party soon!

Primary Elections: Candidate Endorsements

The CAPE Council, comprised of 52 SEIU members elected by the membership to drive our union's voice in politics, has announced the following endorsements in the 2018 primary elections.

Please see complete list on the SEIU 503 website at <https://bit.ly/2JgGZW2>.

The primary election will be held on May 15. The voter registration deadline is April 23. In Oregon, you can register to vote online by visiting the Secretary of State's website.

Some of our own SEIU503 members are running! Take a look and vote!

Tiffany Mitchell, HD 32, Astoria: Tiffany is an SEIU member who works at the Department of Human Services in Clatsop County. She is a true progressive who shares our union's values. Tiffany is committed to protecting vulnerable children, advancing women's reproductive health, securing affordable housing on the coast, protecting the rights of the LGBT community, and winning fair wages for all working families.

Micki Varney, Ward 8, Salem City Council: Micki is a salmon biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, where she serves as SEIU chief steward. She has served on the CAPE Delegate Council for the previous 4 years, bringing experiences from her tenure as a city councilwoman in Dayton, WA. She will bring our union's values to the Salem City Council.

Special consideration to highlight this race—a union champion—**Shemia Fagan, (Democrat) Senate District 24, NE Portland/Parkrose:** Shemia Fagan grew up in Eastern Oregon and East Portland, where as a child she experienced housing insecurity. This informs her strong commitment to addressing our state's affordable housing

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Together, We Rise

By Melissa Unger, SEIU 503 Executive Director



Melissa Unger

As some of you know, I have been recently hired as our union's Executive Director.

I know that I follow a long line of amazing strong executive directors, whether it's Alice Dale who led our union through two strikes or Leslie Frane who worked

to double our union's size by giving caregivers a voice on the job, we have a long line of leaders that have worked with members to grow our union and build our power.

As our union faces many anti-union threats, especially the upcoming Supreme Court case, *Janus v. AFSCME*, I look forward to building on the work done by Alice and Leslie, and more recently Heather Conroy and Brian Rudiger, to continue to build power for working families. We know there will be changes, but we know that no court can stop workers from coming together to make a change in their lives. **Unions will continue to be strong because workers know that they have power by standing together.**

I look forward to continuing to work with our retirees to remember the past, think about how we have changed, and run strong campaigns that matter to our members. I have been inspired by the work you all have done to build on our past and help us build towards the future. For the retirees that I know, thanks for your partnership for many years as political director and for everyone else, I look forward to working with you in my new role as executive director.

Right To Work And The Future Of Unions

Our own Ann Montague was a guest speaker at the Lavender Caucus Conference held in Las Vegas in October. Here is her speech at the conference. Thank you Ann for your passion and commitment to strong unions.

Welcome to everyone and a special thanks to SEIU Las Vegas for hosting our conference. The states in our Western Region that are currently Right To Work [sic] states are here in Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Arizona. Of course those of us from Washington, Oregon and California are all anticipating the upcoming Janus Case to be heard before the U.S. Supreme Court this next year. Most of our union locals are just waiting and assuming that the decision will be that Right To Work for public sector unions will become the law of the land.

Our locals are viewing the decision (yet to be made) as a financial one. But we are making a big mistake if we think this will affect only our budgets. If the plans are only about tightening our belts and planning on talking to Fair Share payers about becoming members based on the financial needs of our union—we will be missing the mark.

Our enemies who are behind these attacks on our unions—corporations, bosses, management, billionaires—believe that depriving us of money will destroy the power of unions and the working class. Of course that is what they believe because that is how they think. But as a union there are also things we need to do besides just looking at the bottom line.

SEIU organizers who have worked with locals in Right To Work states over the past decades can help us with strategies that have been successful. So in preparation for this presentation I spoke with an organizer for our Arizona local and two organizers who worked for the International in the southwest and southern states to develop strategies for union organizing in the Right To Work states.

In Tucson, Sandy Ochoa showed me a recent contract settlement for Pima County workers. It was impressive. Her comments about empowering workers in a Right To Work state was basic common sense but something we have moved away from in many locals as we have gotten bigger and our structure more centralized. Her main words of advice: “You

have to have strong rank and file leadership in every worksite”

The former organizers from the International were in agreement but were more specific, when they emphasized that you cannot have a top down, corporate style governance. There must be a new empowered structure at each worksite. Members must be free to make decisions about what they want to change and organize their own worksite actions. And one response was very clear, “The Executive Board or Board of Directors are too remote from the worksite. The current structures will not work. With Right To Work there need to be new models. This includes taking power from the Board and giving it to the worksites.”

When one of the organizers first went to Tucson he was just working with workers by worksite to create unity between all workers, both members and non members. After a few joint activities he asked them what they wanted to change at their worksite. They were surprised at the question and told him that no one had ever asked them that before. It should be the short term goal of all locals to empower rank and file workers around what they want and not make those decisions in some highly centralized structure and then just “inform” workers of the next union campaign, etc.

There also needs to be a long term goal that can only be understood by looking at the history of union power. It is common for people today to say that union rights are being taken away by politicians. It is more accurate to say that what is happening now is that the ruling class or whatever term you want to use—billionaires, Freedom Foundation, Koch Brothers, corporations, bosses, managers, capitalist class.. What they are doing is dismantling the compact for “Labor Peace”.

You often hear people talk about how weak unions are today in contrast to the past when we were strong. Then they claim that was because President Franklin Roosevelt was a great friend of workers and signed the Wagner Act and legalized unions. Not really. Roosevelt had been watching the greatest strike wave in U.S. history. A time when millions of workers walked out - in over 40,000 strikes. These would be called wildcat strikes today. When they were bargaining with management and it was stalled they just walked out...no mediation, no cooling off period, no filing of a strike notice ahead of time

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to give management the opportunity to get scabs in place. In Minneapolis the Teamsters literally shut down the city, nothing moved without the permission of the union. Other major strikes were in Detroit, Toledo, Oakland and of course the IWW was in the Northwest.

No worker paid dues until they had a contract and the pay of union officials was never higher than the highest paid worker. Watching all this, Roosevelt signed the Wagner Act which did legalize some unions but also put controls on strikes. Why did he do it? For “Labor Peace” a common term that was often used. It was a new compact.

Then during the Second World War, Roosevelt the “friend of labor” tore up contracts, insisted on a No Strike Pledge. He stripped contracts of health and safety provisions and eliminated wage and overtime language. The “Labor Peace” compact was shredded. As a sop to the unions immediately after the war checkoff of union dues was granted. Why? To try to reestablish “Labor Peace”.

One of the best organizers our local ever had was Michael Krivosh who brought in the organizing model, with empowered rank and file control and developed the strategy of a rolling strike that shut down the state of Oregon. He always said, “The strike will end and we will win when the Democratic Governor and state managers just want everything to be normal again—when they want Labor Peace.”

But how can you force a new compact for Labor Peace when unions are already so peaceful? In the public sector the strike of the Chicago Teachers Union stands pretty much alone. There have been some strikes around the country by SEIU, communication workers, strikes of fast food workers, airport workers, janitors. But this is not a strike wave. You are not going to force the changes we want without a new militant union movement. That is the only way.

But what can the Lavender Caucus and other rank and file leaders do right now? Most of our workers have never even been on strike. A good start is to work on solidarity actions for any union or group of workers who are striking, picketing or fighting back. Make sure your local does not just pass a paper resolution and send a check for \$500 to another union’s strike fund. Get them to turn out our members. When President Obama planned to break the strike of ILWU workers at the

Port of Longview (Washington), he sent an armed Coast Guard cutter from Astoria to Longview. A broad coalition of workers in Portland organized solidarity actions and Greenpeace planned to use their boats to go out and stop the Coast Guard before they got to Longview. This resulted in the Coast Guard turning around and returning to Astoria. We need our members involved in these solidarity coalitions. They need to see victories as a result of the power of unions when they fight together around “An Injury To One Is An Injury to All”. In addition, If we move to an organizing model that empowers our rank and file workers in their own worksites, we will be on our way to rebuilding the power of the union movement.

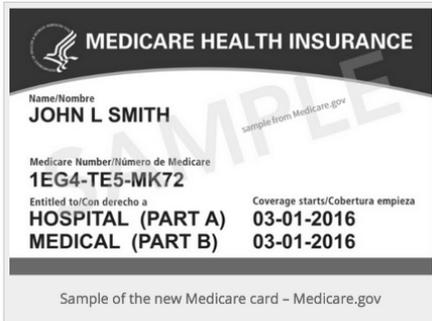
Wow! A great group of Eugene Retirees

By Barbara Casey

What an inspiring active fun group of retirees in Eugene, I travelled to Ye Olde Pancake house for breakfast in January with Ann Montague... gosh we love breakfast and these guys. They meet there monthly but are involved all year round. Highlighting a special tradition is Mary Lou Vignola, who hosts 22 guests for Thanksgiving. The 7 year tradition she follows is this- she places a \$20 bill on each plate, each guest can keep it or donate it to a charity of their choosing or one of Mary Lou’s. No one keeps it and this year among those who benefitted were Planned Parenthood, Womens’ Space, Eugene Food Bank and one child decided his would go to the Eugene Rescue Animal Shelter.

Weekly they help stock and man the “Occupy Eugene Medical Van” with cash donations and supplies. They also have a wool sock collection going to make sure homeless shelters and safe spaces have such a necessity during our cold and rainy months. They are also a main source of Meals on Wheels drivers for the Eugene-Springfield area. They have maintained their union activism along with their compassion for others and it was an honor to be among such cheerful givers. Drop by 4th Wednesday of each month.

For your information: The New Medicare Card



New Medicare cards will be mailed to all Medicare beneficiaries beginning April 2018 thru April 2019. Oregon beneficiaries will receive the new cards from April thru June of this

year. The new cards will not use a social security number for the identifier, will not have a person's gender, nor need a signature.

The new card will have a unique identifier that is computer generated. It will be eleven bytes long. Bytes 2, 5, 8, and 9 will always be a letter.

The new cards will be in a letter size envelope with a return address of Department of Health and Human Services

Baltimore, Maryland. On the other side will be "Official Information From Medicare." Again these will be appearing in your mailboxes sometime between April and June of this year. It is not junk mail.

Inside the envelope will be a letter telling about the new card, why you are receiving it, and what you need to do. PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY. You might want to save it at least for a while.

Also in the envelope will be the new card. It is paper (sorry, I know people were hoping for plastic). It is recommended that it be kept in a plastic sleeve, but it can be laminated. Take the new card to your medical providers on your next visits after receiving it. Destroy your old one. Remember if you have a Med Advantage Plan you will still use that card for services, and if you have a stand-alone prescription card you will still use it at the pharmacy. Put your new card in a safe place where you can find it when you need it.

Retirees in Action: Benicia Headquarters March

Workers and residents of Benicia, who have a chain of care facilities in Oregon needed our Retiree 001 support and a much needed "March on the Boss"!

John Leppink, Ann Montague, Rosanne Richard and Barbara Casey met up with others from Careworks Oregon in West Linn to deliver a message as people who care deeply about quality care and respect shown to Benicia residents and workers in our community and all communities were Benicia resides.

We were concerned about their willingness to address quality care and we also had grave concerns about the abuse and neglect that had been observed, experienced or heard about at Rivergrove(one of the facilities) and other non-union homes operated by Benicia.

As usual, the corporate heads were "not in". We know that because that is what they shouted to the hapless receptionist when we arrived. We made our case to her—in earshot of the bosses—to improve staffing levels and create a respectful environment to attract and retain good caregivers. We expected Benicia to provide high quality care in all their facilities and provide neutrality for their employees to form a union to provided better care for the residents. We rallied and marched in their hallowed halls and followed that up with an action after our retirees meeting with a raid on their contract bargaining meeting at SEIU headquarters, surprising management with signs and slogans from 20 retirees demanding fair and open negotiations.

Retirees—we get the job done!

Primary Elections: Candidate Endorsements (continued from previous page)

crisis. Fagan has served on the David Douglas School Board and served two terms in the Oregon House of Representatives.

Many of our retirees serve on CAPE and attend the multiple endorsement meetings held in December, January and February our thanks to them and to all CAPE contributors.

Members of SEIU Local 49 and 503 from across the state attended a large meeting in Portland with Governor Brown. Before her arrival members discussed the issues they were most concerned about and formulated specific questions they wanted answered.

Most retirees chose to join the discussion on PERS. We joined in solidarity with current workers concerns that

they not be held responsible for the current so-called “unfunded liability”.

A week prior to this meeting the news came out that last year Oregon’s pension system portfolio generated a 15.3% return, more than double what was expected. This reduced the liability by more than \$3 billion.

Governor Brown’s response to our questions was that she was looking for a solution that is “fair” and not “illegal”. She assured us that we “have a place at her table”. Undoubtedly union members are thinking more about organizing in preparation for their collective bargaining table however “The PERS issue” will continue to be in the forefront of any campaign or legislative proposal and our Retirees and BOD must keep vigilant.



ABOVE: Retirees (from left, seated): John Leppink, Karla Marks, Steve Barrett. From left (standing): Evie Pech, Von Ledbetter, Ann Montague and Greg Ledbetter take a break from the Governor’s Forum to smile for Rosanne Richard’s camera!

LEFT: Governor Brown responds to John Leppink’s questions on PERS.