



Update on Safe Staffing Bill

OFNHP/AFT Healthcare NW Local 5017 continued to activate members this spring in the ongoing effort to improve patient care and working conditions for nurses in Oregon hospitals.

The 2009 legislative campaign started last fall with an OFNHP/AFTNW-sponsored forum held on Nov. 17, 2008 at the Kennedy School in Portland. The room was packed and many RNs shared their concerns with State Reps. Brad Witt and Chip Shields. Rounding out the panel was Verna Porter, President of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans.

SB564 gets a hearing

In January, a Safe Staffing Bill (SB564) was reintroduced in the Senate Health Care and Veterans Committee chaired by Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson. After much anticipation, a 50-person delegation organized by OFNHP/AFTNW traveled to Salem for the committee hearing on March 26, 2009.



AFT-Oregon Director of Political and Legislative Affairs Rob Wagner, OFNHP/AFTNW Local 5017 President Kathy Geroux and Dr. Gordon Lafer, Associate Professor at Univ. of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center, present testimony in favor of SB 564 to Senate Health Care & Veterans Affairs Committee members on March 26.

Several RNs from our group testified, making the case that mandated RN-to-patient staffing ratios would lead to improvements in patient care and better working conditions for nurses.

Bruce Corkum, RN from Kaiser Sunnyside, and University of Oregon's Dr. Gordon Lafer both presented statistics showing that mandated minimum nurse-to-patient ratios would help alleviate the so-called nurse shortage by improving working conditions and thereby nurse retention rates. Senator Bill Morrisette was not surprised by the statistics, commenting that six nurse relatives of his had left the profession.

As experienced in other states, fighting for safe staffing ratio legislation can be a lengthy process. The efforts of our local union in this campaign date back to 2001, when OFNHP/AFTNW questioned the lack of enforcement for HB2800, the staffing committee bill that had just been passed in the Oregon State Legislature. OFNHP/AFTNW fought hard for

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National legislation introduced to set RN-to-patient ratios

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) introduced the **National Nursing Shortage Reform and Patient Advocacy Act** on May 13 to protect the rights of nurses to advocate on behalf of their patients, set minimum nurse-to-patient ratios in hospitals, and invest in training nurses to address the current nationwide nursing shortage.

Boxer followed the lead of Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) who reintroduced similar legislation, the **Nurse Staffing Standards for Patient Safety and Quality Care Act** (HR 2273), May 6 in the House.

Boxer's bill would:

- establish specific nurse-to-patient ratios;
- provide whistleblower protections to protect the rights of nurses to advocate for the safety of patients and report violations of minimum standards of care;
- create a standard for helping nurses to lift patients to prevent on-the-job injuries; and
- create a Registered Nurse Workforce Initiative within the Health Resources and Services Administration that invests in the education of nurses and nursing faculty.



All KP Bargaining Units

Conference focuses on need to transform Kaiser

The theme of the 2009 Coalition of KP Union Delegates Conference held April 17-19 in San Jose, Calif. was the crucial role of our union coalition in transforming Kaiser to be able to face the challenges of the 21st century. Key challenges include the effects of the worst economic crisis in 80 years, the possibility of national healthcare reform and the challenge of bargaining our contracts next year.

OFNHP was represented by 13 delegates who joined the 500+ who attended from across the country. With healthcare reform on everyone's mind and the increasing possibility of quick action by Congress, **Kaiser CEO George Halverson** focused his remarks on the possibility of Kaiser being seen as a model for how to care for patients in a truly American healthcare system. "We take care of our patients first," Halverson said. "Then we can go and show the world it can be done, and we can create expectations and standards and put pressure on everybody else to go where we go."

The possibility of OFNHP members being at the center of such important changes was felt by our local delegates throughout the conference. "Representing OFNHP at the Delegates Conference reinforced for me that now more than ever as healthcare professionals and leaders, we must believe in the value of our collective unity as power to produce change for ourselves and our patients," said **Stephanie Valle, RN**.

To read more about the 2009 Union Delegate Conference, including the complete presentations by our Coalition Exec. Director **John August**, log onto *Impartnership.org*. ❤️

Retirement benefits meetings prove popular

Marshall Woolner, RN and OFNHP staff have been presenting retirement workshops featuring an indepth review of the retirement benefits OFNHP has negotiated with Kaiser. The first seven Retirement Benefit Meetings filled to capacity rapidly and feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive. Watch for additional workshops to be scheduled soon. Future sessions will be announced through emails from the Contract Specialists for each bargaining unit and on the OFNHP website, *ofnhp.org*. ❤️

KP PRO Bargaining Unit

Long-time Pros retire

Tavo "Buz" Guthrie, President of the Pro Bargaining Unit, and Vice President and Contract Specialist **Signa Gibson** both retired this spring after long careers at Kaiser Permanente. Signa was a member of the team that negotiated the Pros' first contract and Buz became the first chief steward. They both contributed much time, energy and passion into developing the Professional Bargaining Unit and they will be missed.

Stepping up in time of need, **Jonathan May**, former contract specialist, was voted in to fill the vice president position that Signa vacated and will officiate at the BU meetings until a new president and vice president are elected this May.

Before retiring, Buz and Signa, along with ACs **Donna Albrecht** and **Dori MacDonald**, were part of the team bargaining the impact of the UCC closures that occurred in March. The team was successful in preventing any loss of wages or hours for Primary Care Affiliated Clinicians. ❤️

PMH Bargaining Unit

Providence nurses alerted to pension plan changes

Providence Milwaukie Hospital has announced plans to freeze employees' "Core Plan" pension and replace it with a "defined contribution" plan. According to the new plan, Providence will contribute an amount equal to 0%-6% of wages to employees' pension funds and then employees will be completely responsible for managing the investments that will provide their retirement income.

Obstetrics RN **Barb Cole**, President of PMH Nurses United, feels that with this new plan Providence is breaking promises made to employees long ago. Resource RN **Dawn Hersberger**, VP of PMH Nurses United, insists, "Providence must negotiate the proposed retirement changes with us. Our contract provides for retirement guarantees that must be respected."

OFNHP representatives will meet with Providence in the near future to clarify their proposal. In the meantime, Hersberger encourages nurses to attend any educational forums put on by the hospital, ask questions and take notes, so they may collectively determine an appropriate course of action. ❤️



Oregon Working Families Party focused on issues important to workers and their families

OFNHP/AFT Healthcare NW Local 5017 has been a member organization of the Oregon Working Families Party (OWFP) since 2005. A new political party focused on economic issues important to working people, the OWFP is known as “the minor party with major ambitions.”

Rather than running “spoiler” candidates with no chance of winning, the Oregon Working Families Party aims to win... by staying focused on issues.

Made up of people from all walks of life and all areas of the state, OWFP is determined to get our government focused again on the things that can make our jobs better, our families more secure, and our communities more prosperous. That means:

- making health care affordable and available to all;
- improving our public schools, from pre-school through high school, and opening doors to higher education and job training for more working people;
- increasing access to affordable housing;
- defending domestic jobs against outsourcing, pay cuts and Enron-style corporate raiders;
- protecting the promise of a decent retirement after a lifetime of work;
- promoting smart job-creation strategies such as development of Oregon’s sustainable energy sources.

Rather than running “spoiler” candidates with no chance of winning, OWFP aims to win for working families by staying focused on issues, by organizing in our communities, and by restoring a system of *fusion voting* in Oregon that rewards major party candidates who commit to support key issues.

At OFNHP’s March 7, 2009 Executive Board meeting, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

“The Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals [AFTNW Local 5017] reaffirms our commitment to the Oregon Working Families Party and its agenda, including fusion voting, single-payer healthcare [HR 676], and SB 628, and to promote it locally and nationally through our leaders.”*

For more information, visit www.oregonwfp.org. ❤️

*the pre-foreclosure mediation bill

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stronger patient care language and better enforcement during the implementation phase after revisions to HB2800 were passed in 2005.

Two years ago, during Oregon’s 2007 legislative session, OFNHP/AFTNW cosponsored Safe Staffing Bill HB3416, which would have mandated minimum RN-to-patient ratios for all of Oregon’s acute care hospitals. Unfortunately, that bill never made it out of committee.

Fast-forward to 2009. The Senate Health Care and Veterans’ Affairs Committee had until April 24 to recommend SB564 to the floor for a vote by the whole Senate, and despite our local’s lobbying and education efforts, failed to do so. According to legislative staffers, the primary reason was financial, given that drastic cuts are being made to the Department of Health Services’ budget at this time.

Disappointed but not defeated, AFT Healthcare NW will continue to build support for mandated RN-to-patient staffing ratios both inside and outside the state legislature and expects to again sponsor a safe staffing bill in the next legislative session. Stay tuned! ❤️

Mandated Pass-Through

As per Article IV, Section 6 of the AFT Constitution adopted by the National Convention in 2008, a small increase will be implemented on July 1, 2009. A complete explanation of this pass-through, which will amount to \$1 per pay period, will be sent to members in June. The constitution reads as follows:

Each affiliated local shall increase the local dues to equal any increase in per capita payments that are required to be made to the American Federation of Teachers and any increase to either the state federation or the regional council with which the local is affiliated.



A Union of Professionals

AFT Healthcare Northwest

Local 5017



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WHO IS AFT HEALTHCARE? AFT Healthcare is a national union, one of five divisions of the 1.4 million member American Federation of Teachers. We represent over 70,000 healthcare professionals across the country. Among our members are registered nurses, radiology techs, respiratory therapists, social workers, researchers, dental hygienists, LPNs and psychologists. We work in hospitals, nursing homes, visiting nurse services, universities, blood banks and schools. We are committed to building a strong voice for health professionals, to improving our members' lives through collective bargaining and legislative advocacy, and to making the American healthcare system the safest and best in the world.

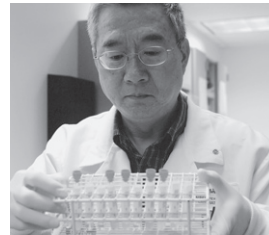
“If there is no struggle there is no progress—power concedes nothing without a demand. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted.”

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS



The Employee Free Choice Act Better Jobs and a Strong Economy

Gives the choice to workers for a secret-ballot election or majority sign-up to form a union.



“The Lab Professional Bargaining Unit at Kaiser Permanente was the first group organized under the Labor Management Partnership where management remained neutral while the employees decided if they wanted to join a union to represent their collective interests. The Employee Free Choice Act would make that available to all workers in this democratic country of ours where for most workers’ democracy ends at the workplace.” —Bing Wong, VP of Legislation, OFNHP

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Write your senators at www.aft.org/efcaletter