

# insight

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS & FRIENDS

OF PROTEC17

Spring  
2022  
Vol 27  
No. 2



## The Hybrid Office



**PLUS, Project and  
Program Managers  
win their first  
PROTEC17 contract!**



### On the Cover:

PROTEC17 members, like Deja Irving at the City of Tacoma, are navigating the new world of work. After two years of working remotely during the pandemic, many members are returning to the office - at least part of the time, with some time spent teleworking from home. Read more on pages 6-7. Also, DCHS Project and Program managers at King County win their first contract! Read more on pages 3 and 4. ■

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Karen Estevenin  
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## Transitions



his time of year, a wondrous transformation takes place all around us. The air changes, flowers bloom, and the sun shines again. With the shift from winter to spring comes transitions, new energy, and new beginnings, much like our Union is experiencing at this very moment.

This edition of *Insight* highlights some of these dynamic, exciting changes. The inset cover photo displays the joy, respect, and accomplishment of the over 100 King County Project and Program Managers who won hard-fought recognition for their union, finally finishing the negotiations for their first union contract. Winning this contract is a pivotal step towards asserting their right to have a say in how their work is done, and begins their journey of building a strong union culture in their workplace.

Another significant change for many of us right now is the transition back to into the workplace (cover story, see pages 6-7). This spring, many PROTEC17 workplaces began returning to offices after two years of remote work. We have insisted that these transition processes be transparent, inclusive, and fair, and result in safe working environments – and we will continue to advocate for these things.

We are also ratcheting-up our communications capabilities, including launching a newly revamped members-only web portal (p.8). Via the portal, members can get more detailed information about what's happening in their Chapters, access leadership development materials, and engage in an interactive discussion board to share events and opportunities. It's still in the beginning phases, but we will be building it out in the coming months to include more information and resources. Give it a try!

I would be remiss if I didn't mention one of the most significant transitions that we've been celebrating recently at PROTEC17 – the historic confirmation of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court. Now, the highest court in the land better reflects the people it serves, with the first Black female to take a seat. This Court makes important decisions that impacts workers across the country and everywhere. The 2018 Janus case allowing public sector members to abandon their union was pushed by anti-union political groups and ultimately codified by anti-union Justices who overturned long-standing precedent for the opportunity to harm unions. That case showed that who sits on this bench makes a difference for working people. Justice Jackson will bring a voice to this platform that is long overdue. She will bring her personal and tremendous professional experience, including an understanding of our governing system's faults, to her decision-making. In doing so, she will be paving the way forward for many others, hopefully for a good, long time. This is a transition worth taking a moment to celebrate, among this blustery, busy springtime.

In compassion and solidarity,



## KC Proj/Prog Managers negotiate first contract!



**C**ongratulations to some of our newest members – King County Project and Program Managers in the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) – for successfully negotiating their first contract! These workers joined our union at the end of 2020 and have been working hard to secure a fair and comprehensive agreement, containing important language and protections that will help better their working lives. Pictured are members of the bargaining team: Adam Schmid, Jennell Hicks, Sung Cho, and Eritrea Habtemariam. (Not pictured: Jessica Cafferty and Rebecca Roy). ■

## PROTEC17 supports farm workers in Skagit valley

**P**ROTEC17 members lent their support and solidarity to farm workers who harvest flowers in the Skagit Valley fields after their call for better pay and working conditions ahead of the spring tulip festival. And on Wed., March 30, just two days before the opening of the 2022 Tulip Festival, workers reached an agreement with the Washington Bulb Company. PROTEC17 celebrates these workers for standing up for what's right, and congratulate them on their new union! Read more at: [protec17.org/news](https://protec17.org/news). ■

## PROTEC17 welcomes two new Union Representatives for King County, Seattle



**A** very warm welcome to two new PROTEC17 staff who joined our team in March to help build member power: Regan McBride and Mark Watson.

McBride will join Union Representatives Alex Il and Youssef El Hamawi to help King County members during contract negotiations and beyond.

With years of experience in the labor movement, McBride most recently represented and negotiated for public and private sector healthcare workers at United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW21). Prior to that, she was tasked with causing trouble for the notoriously anti-union political group, the Freedom Foundation, while working at Accountable Northwest (formerly the NW Accountability Project).

"I am excited to be a resource and advocate for our King County members as they push towards the finish line in contract negotiations, and to help members continue to build power in their workplace well after the ink has dried," she said.

In her free time, McBride is an avid crafter and involved dog mom. Please feel free to reach out to her and say hi at [regan@protec17.org](mailto:regan@protec17.org) or 206-328-7321 x107.

Mark Watson will join the City of Seattle team with fellow Union Representatives: Alisha Gregory-Davis, Kaite Mark, and Steven Pray.



Watson brings with him extensive experience supporting workers as an organizer and union representative. He obtained a Bachelor's degree from the Rutgers University Labor Studies program and has worked in the labor movement representing both private and public sector union members ever since. In New Jersey, as a representative for Communications Workers of America (CWA), he led a coalition to secure the first family leave policy in the state and served as a city councilperson.

Before coming to PROTEC17, Watson was the Union Representative for the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 2 in Seattle. While at Council 2, he served as co-chair, lead negotiator, and active member of the Coalition of City Unions, where he worked closely with PROTEC17 to secure historically strong contracts for city workers and to navigate the challenges of the pandemic.

"Working closely with PROTEC17 as a coalition partner made clear to me what a strong organization we are and what a strong vision we have for the future," said Watson.

"I'm excited to join what is already a great City team and help further that vision," he continued.

You can reach him at [mark@protec17.org](mailto:mark@protec17.org), or 206-328-7321 x 133. ■

**Find more news on our website: [www.protec17.org/news](https://www.protec17.org/news)**

# Regional Executive Committee holds bi-annual meeting, adopts 2022 budget

**P**ROTEC17's policy-making body – the Regional Executive Committee (REC) – met virtually on February 26 for their twice-yearly gathering to discuss the business of our union.

With the theme 'Proud to Be PROTEC17', delegates reflected on the many accomplishments made in 2021 despite continued challenges, and celebrated our many wins and forward momentum. Nearly 80 participants joined the Zoom meeting, and delegates made several important decisions, including adopting the 2022 budget.

Delegates were welcomed to the meeting by PROTEC17 President Rachael Brooks, who acknowledged the Native land on which we all reside. Board member Jennell Hicks introduced the community agreements, and participants broke into small groups to introduce themselves to their fellow members. Then, Executive Board members and new REC delegates were sworn in, and the minutes from the October REC meeting were approved.

PROTEC17 Executive Director Karen Estevenin highlighted some of our many wins in 2021 – from membership growth and training many new member leaders, to securing strong agreements with our employers and taking action on the issues in our communities that reflect our shared values.

Jessica Garcia, PROTEC17 Secretary/Treasurer, then presented the 2022 budget, highlighting several line items and the rationale for their change from the previous year. Because of the continued pandemic last year and its impact on other industries, many expenses were under budget in 2021. For example, virtual meeting costs are far lower than the in-person meetings we anticipated we'd be able to do early last year; while delays in supplies needed for our swag webstore pushed orders into early 2022. This year's budget was adjusted to take these things into consideration, and to project a slow return to "normal". After questions and discussion, REC delegates unanimously approved the budget as proposed.

Next, REC delegates had the opportunity to hear about specific wins from their fellow members in Portland, Clark County, Kitsap Health, Washington State Department of Transportation, Seattle, and King County. The wins ranged from strong contract agreements, wage increases, and improved health and safety protections, to organizing wins that helped new members and brand new classifications become a part of PROTEC17.

Political staff Brandon Hersey and Elliot Levin also talked about victories in the legislative session, and highlighted the many members that participated in the 2021 election cycle and provided virtual testimony and support during the short 2022 session. Staffer Paul Marvy then recapped the two and a half year PROTEC17 constitution committee process, and thanked members for their continued hard work to update this important guiding document.

The meeting ended with 'Good of the Order' where delegates had the opportunity to ask questions and present ideas. ■



# Returning to the office:

## After two years of working from home, telecommuting PROTEC17 members adjust to a new normal



While many members worked on-site throughout the coronavirus pandemic as essential workers in public

health, transit, and more, a large percentage of PROTEC17 members have been working from home since the pandemic began in March 2020. After two years of adjusting to a new world filled with Slack conversations and Zoom meetings, while taking care of children and household duties, these telecommuting members are again adjusting to a “new normal” as they head back into the office.

Employers across our union began to call back telecommuting employees – in many cases in a hybrid capacity – starting in late 2021, with some of our largest employers (City of Seattle and King County) setting return dates in spring of 2022.

While some members are eager to return to the office for a variety of reasons, others grew to enjoy and prefer working from home, or simply feel safer doing so given that COVID-19 variants are still circulating. Plus there are many logistical issues to figure out – childcare being one at the top of many workers’ lists.

In the current job-seekers economy, with many open positions and options, employers are seeing that working people want flexibility, not rigidity, and are hoping to offer more of that now and into the future. And for union members, telecommuting – and the impacts of returning to the office – has become a priority issue at the bargaining table.

### Tacoma and Pierce County

For members at the City of Tacoma, the return to office is happening in phases,



with staggered in-office days to keep employees safe as the pandemic continues. Any impacts, such as health and safety issues, are being bargained through Tacoma Joint Labor.

At Pierce County, PROTEC17 members and other employees are returning to the office based upon decisions within their individual work groups. We will be negotiating any impacts here as they arise. So far, issues include: staggering office days so that members aren’t all in the office on the same day, and having the flexibility to work part of the day at home and part at the office to accommodate getting school-aged children to and from school.

Tacoma and Pierce members are encouraged to reach out to Union Representative Brent Wagar ([brent@protec17.org](mailto:brent@protec17.org)) to let him know if and when there’s been a change in your working conditions.

### State of Washington

Most PROTEC17 Licensing Services Representative (LSR) members at the Department of Licensing (DOL) have returned to work at Licensing offices around the state, with the exception of a few that remain on a temporary telework

basis through mid-June. In the office, LSRs are still required to wear masks, and offices will keep the plexiglass shields that were installed during the pandemic to keep employees safe. As essential workers, members at the Washington State Patrol continued to work in-office throughout the pandemic.

At the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), most PROTEC17 members have been telecommuting since March 2020, but late last fall, employees began to trickle back. Since then, teleworking schedules are being evaluated on a case-by-case, office-by-office basis. While the official return to office day was on March 15, 2022, WSDOT management are calling the process “a dial, not a switch,” meaning that they know the situation is nuanced and they don’t expect to go back to the way things once were.

Even prior to the pandemic, State Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar had announced that he wanted WSDOT to be a leader in teleworking, which is also in alignment with Governor Inslee’s climate goals to reduce carbon emissions from daily driving. The post-pandemic goal is to have 30 to 40 percent of all employees teleworking on any given day.

As with pretty much every employer, feelings on returning to the office are mixed, but in general, PROTEC17 members seem pleased with WSDOT’s commitment to a flexible model.

### City of Seattle

For PROTEC17 members at the City of Seattle, the return to office poses greater questions about equity and safety, and members are using their collective voice

**Have a question or concern about your work situation?  
Contact your Union Representative!**





to work towards positive and sustainable changes.

In April, Chapter leaders helped create a survey for Seattle members to collect their input about COVID, workplace, and transit safety as employees began the return to City offices. The data collected in this survey will help gauge the biggest concerns and will inform what steps to take during any impact bargaining as well as during their upcoming contract negotiations.

At the Department level, many Seattle members are working together to ensure that safety, flexibility, and equity issues are addressed by management.

Department of Neighborhoods (DON) members Yun Pitre and Lisa Uemoto have both been active in collecting feedback from their colleagues around the return to office, sharing concerns with management, and working together to brainstorm ideas. Some of the issues they are hearing from members include: how staff with less resources are being disproportionately impacted by the return to office; safety concerns within and around downtown workplaces; and there not being

a clear business need for coming into the office.

While Pitre and Uemoto have found some of the City's rollout unclear and confusing, they are seeing progress in the City addressing some of their colleagues' concerns - particularly the downtown safety issues that were elevated to the Mayor's office by their DON Director.

### Public Health Districts

Even employers whose workforce has largely been working in person - public health districts, for example - have seen the need to offer flexibility with telework when that's a possibility. Both Kitsap Health and Chelan-Douglas Health District are working to offer members flexible options which is helping to retain seasoned employees that perform essential roles.

No matter the employer, the return to an office-based or hybrid workplace will likely raise new issues for working people. If you have a question or concern about your work situation, please reach out to your PROTEC17 Union Representative. ■

*Above: Tacoma member Deja Irving, a Code Inspector Supervisor, working at her City office.*

**“If we’ve learned anything from this pandemic, it’s that these sorts of transitions are impactful and massive. And while we all transitioned very, very quickly, when the pandemic hit, that doesn’t mean that we need to reciprocate that speed easing back into it.”**

Karen Estevenin  
PROTEC17 Executive Director  
*Quoted in The Seattle Times, March 14, 2022*

## Our new and improved Member Portal has launched! Connect with your fellow PROTEC17 members online

**J**ust before the start of the pandemic in 2020, PROTEC17 launched the first iteration of our member portal – an online platform designed to increase member engagement. The original version allowed members to register for events, access QR codes to scan into meetings, quickly sign up new hires in-person, and more, with each activity earning members points for participation and union involvement.

As the pandemic continued, forever changing the landscape of how we interact, it became clear that we needed to expand the idea of the portal beyond its original intended use. We continued working with our web developers, Watson Creative, to reimagine the portal as an online community of union members who could share thoughts, ideas, and events with each other.

After many months of design and testing, we're happy to announce that the portal is now up and running! The new

and improved portal now contains many of the features and resources of the former version – a calendar of events, Chapter meeting notes, news articles, and quizzes – but now contains an interactive news feed, Chapter discussion boards, forums on topics such as Racial Justice, Political Action, and more. In a way, the site operates as PROTEC17's own social media platform – a members-only site for peer-to-peer conversations.

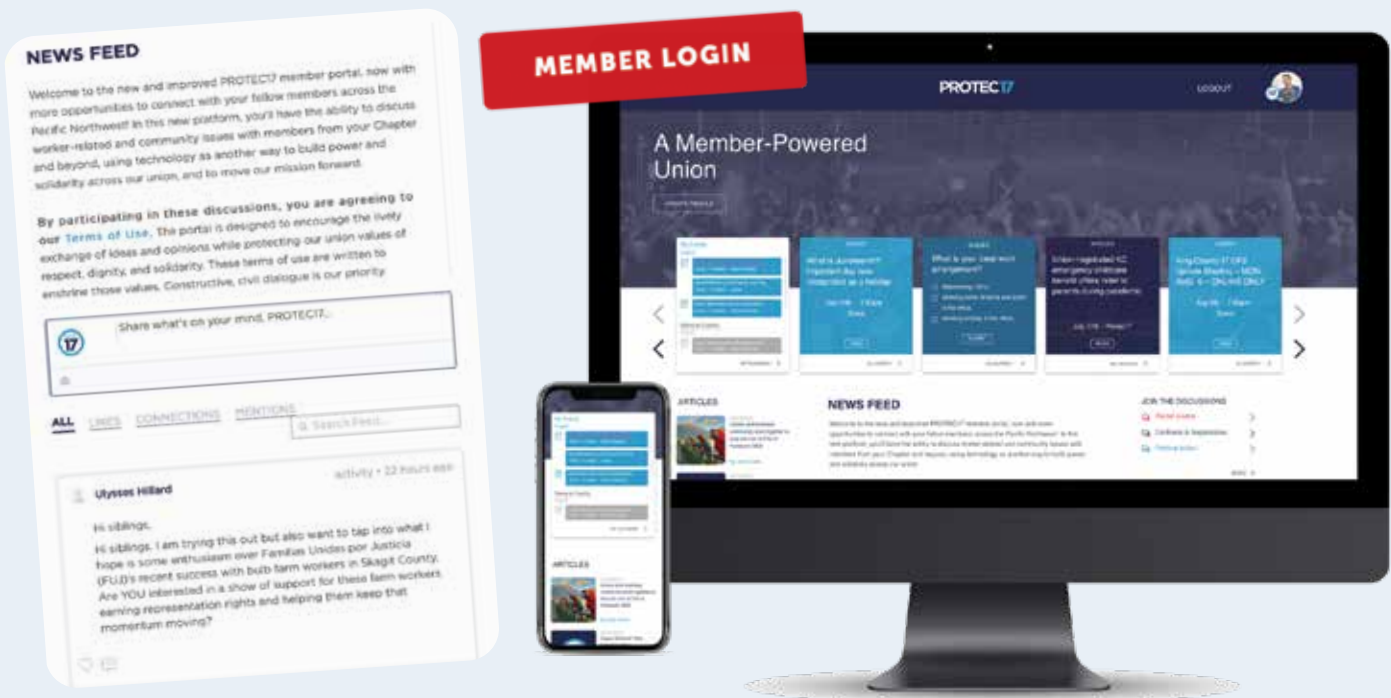
Governed by a code of conduct that each member agrees to when they register, all interactions are meant to build power and solidarity, and to move our union's mission forward. While some union staff are registered users of the portal, this platform is a space for members to share ideas with each other – not the place to ask staff questions about a grievance or individual issue. Staff will continue to be available by phone and email.

Over 60 members helped test the portal during its beta phase in March and April, including City of Seattle member

and Steward Ulysses Hillard who posted our first member comment in the News Feed (see below)! New additions and improvements will continue to be added over this first year and beyond as we assess how members are using the new tool.

To login to the new portal, click the red login button on [protec17.org](https://protec17.org) or visit: <https://members.protec17.org>. If you did not have an account on our previous site, click the 'Register' button and follow the prompts to create a username and password. If you had an account on the previous site, you will need to reset your password. To do this, click on 'Forgot Your Password?' and enter your email. You will then receive an email prompting you to reset your password. If you have any trouble, or would like to submit some feedback about the portal, please reach out to Deidre Girard, PROTEC17's Communication Director at [deidre@protec17.org](mailto:deidre@protec17.org).

We are excited to expand our online technologies to help you connect with your fellow members in new ways! ■



<https://members.protec17.org>



## Portland members work to remedy inequities by pushing for wage adjustments and removal of merit pay

**A**t the City of Portland, two recent wins have made big progress towards more fair and equitable wages for PROTEC17 members, today and into the future.

Last year, when Capital Project Manager (CPM) II's were organizing into our union, one of their main concerns was that there was no incentive for promotion from the PROTEC17-represented CPM I position. That's because the wage scale was such that the CPM IIs at the bottom step actually made less than CPM Is. CPM IIs wanted their CPM I colleagues to retain their fair market value salaries, but wanted their own wage scale to reflect the additional responsibilities, while encouraging advancement in their field.

In negotiating their accretion agreement with PROTEC17, the entry wage for CPM IIs went from \$32.15 per hour to \$42.79 per hour – a 28% increase! This alignment united the two classifications, and meets both CPM I and II's interests around career growth and promotional pathways.

Bringing the CPM II's into the bargaining unit and aligning their wages with the CPM I's will now make this a more attractive classification for promotion. Previously there was little incentive to advance in the series because of the wage range. By joining PROTEC17, CPM IIs now have a guaranteed progression through a fair, market-rate wage scale, plus all of the protections found in a union contract.

### In her own words

For Emily Tabachnick, an Information Systems Technical Analyst IV, her 14-year career at the City of Portland has been clouded by pay inequity.

In Portland, nearly all unionized positions across the Bureaus use step increases to determine employee wages. However, the Tech Bureau has been using merit increases for many years, citing it's usefulness as a



**“No more will implicit or unconscious biases impact the pay of the women and people of color in tech here at the City of Portland.”**

Emily Tabachnick  
PROTEC17 Executive Board and  
City of Portland member

motivational tool, while in reality, the system has created deep inequities – especially for women and people of color.

Tabachnick, who also serves on the PROTEC17 Executive Board, wanted things to change. She is currently serving on the negotiations team for the next Portland contract, where, by sharing her story, she's helping her current colleagues and future generations get the pay they deserve. Here is her story in her own words:

*“I've been working as a woman in tech for the City of Portland for the past 14 years. One thing that's been consistent, working in this male-dominated field, has been inequity. Every other bureau in the City has step increases for the first several years of their*

*job classifications. But the tech bureau has been using merit increases instead. They've claimed it is a motivational tool for employees, but the reality is that the vast majority of people who get a full merit increase have all been white men. Merit increases have only been given in partial increments, on management's whim, for women and people of color here in the tech bureau. We ran the numbers, the impact of bias is obvious and the truth is on our side. The City claims to want to advance in areas of equity, but they pushed back hard on this issue.*

*During this year's contract negotiations, we were finally able to make an important change. I volunteered to join our negotiating team and then had the opportunity to share my story at the negotiating table. I've been in the same job classification for ten years and am only now reaching the top of the classification's pay scale. For the majority of my white male counterparts, top of scale is reached in five years. They reach the top in half the time it takes for some of their coworkers, even when the work is done well by all and evaluations are overwhelmingly positive.*

*Because of my story being shared during negotiations, and the numbers being on our side, demonstrating how consistent these inequities have been, we've been able to reach a tentative agreement with the City to change the tech bureau over to use fair step increases instead of any merit-based wage scales. No more will implicit or unconscious biases impact the pay of the women and people of color in tech here at the City of Portland. I know now moving forward, if my niece or any other little girls grow up and go to work for the City, as I did, they will finally be paid fairly.”*

Thanks to the work being done by PROTEC17 members in Portland and beyond who are breaking down barriers, new hires today and into the future will not face the same inequities that once existed. ■

## Steward Spotlight: Belinda Chin, *City of Seattle*

**A**t the City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, Belinda Chin helps coordinate programs and services in the vast parks system that help residents across Seattle access and benefit from the City's many outdoor and recreational resources. But her commitment to community goes far and above the day-to-day work she does for her job. In addition to serving on her division's Safety Team and co-leading the Race and Social Justice Change Team, Chin helps her fellow union members with workplace issues as a PROTEC17 Steward.

Chin got interested in being more active in her union because over the course of her career she realized that she could not rely on her employer to look after her workplace interests and needs, and that she and her colleagues needed to get organized in order to advocate for themselves.

"Being in PROTEC 17 offers a place at the table to negotiate through our collective voice," said Chin.

"With PROTEC17, you're not alone! You're part of a community that sees and hears you."

This visibility, respect, and solidarity is important as Chin works with fellow members to challenge and change systemic disparities and inequities that have long been engrained in our institutions.

"With PROTEC17, I feel I'm part of a team that helps each other succeed while working together to gain fair wages, improve work conditions, and benefits that take care of us and our families."

Chin really values being a Steward. One of the things she enjoys most about her role is welcoming new hires and answering any questions they have about joining our union. When she speaks to new employees, she lets them know how hard members fought for the benefits that we all currently enjoy and how to continue to make positive changes, everyone needs to be on board.

"It's important to let new hires know they've got a community of support that

will back them up from the get-go," said Chin.

With the City of Seattle contract set to expire at the end of 2022, and a potential tough negotiations ahead, Chin knows that it's more important than ever that both new and long-time members are ready to stand together and take action.

"Our union's effectiveness and cohesive action depends on our relationships and our personal investment in our union," said Chin.

During last year's negotiations, Chin served on the bargaining team, and she credits the successful negotiations to members being involved throughout the whole process.

Seattle members will need to come together again to ensure another strong contract is won for 2023. Preparations are already underway for negotiations. Seattle members should expect to see more information in their mailboxes soon about upcoming info sessions, surveys, and ways to get involved. ■

**"Our union's effectiveness and cohesive action depends on our relationships and our personal investment in our union... With PROTEC17, you are not alone! You're part of a community that sees and hears you."**

Belinda Chin  
PROTEC17 Member and Steward  
*City of Seattle Parks and Recreation*



## Take our 2022 PROTEC17 political survey!



With this year's legislative session behind us, PROTEC17 is hard at work preparing for the 2022 election cycle!

This year's primary and general election will be held on August 2nd and November 8th respectively. We have developed a survey to assess what issues are most important to PROTEC17 members. The results of this survey will be used to develop the candidate questionnaire and interview materials for our 2022 endorsement process.

You can find the survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5F5YGXM>. It's open now, and should only take a few moments to complete.



PROTEC17 is committed to centering racial equity and social justice in all that we do. We believe strongly that by electing more women and people of color to public office we can create more just and inclusive systems for all. However, we cannot achieve this goal without the perspectives and participation of our members.

Our Political Director Brandon Hersey will soon convene the first meeting of the PROTEC17 Political Committee. The Committee will be tasked with supporting the development of the questionnaire, conducting endorsement interviews, and organizing political actions for our union. If you are interested and would like to get involved, please contact Brandon at [brandon@protec17.org](mailto:brandon@protec17.org). ■

## 2022 Oregon session wrap-up & May 17th primary



The Oregon Legislature completed its short session in early March, and there were several important labor victories that PROTEC17 supported including: overtime protections for farm workers (HB 4002); strengthening the language in the Workplace Fairness Act that protects against harassment and discrimination in the workplace (SB1586); and ending forced, unscheduled overtime for bakery union members (SB1513).

Additionally, following a long rule making process, Oregon OSHA has published final versions of new rules designed to protect workers from exposure to dangerous levels of heat and wildfire smoke. PROTEC17 has been involved as a stakeholder throughout this process, and has now provided testimony supporting the new rules and urging Oregon OSHA to adopt them before the 2022 heat and smoke season.

"We want to prioritize the safety of the workers, who understand that working in tough weather events goes with the job, but that doesn't mean they should be working in dangerous weather conditions," said Portland Chapter Vice President Rachel Burlington in her testimony to the OSHA advisory panel on this issue.

In addition to advocating for the adoption of these rules, PROTEC17 is having discussions with the City of Portland regarding the City's implementation of new protections.

### May Primary Endorsements for City of Portland Races

This spring, PROTEC17 members interviewed candidates for Portland City Council and Auditor. These interviews were conducted in two rounds — one, as part of the Unions United table which consists of other public employee unions, and the other as a separate panel of PROTEC17

members. After both rounds of interviews, the PROTEC17 interview panel has decided not to issue a formal endorsement in either of the Commissioner races for Seats 2 and 3 (currently occupied by incumbents Jo Ann Hardesty and Dan Ryan).

For Portland City Auditor, the PROTEC17 panel has chosen to endorse Simone Rede.

"Simone showed an impressive knowledge of issues and vision for the office of Auditor that aligns with PROTEC17's core values, and her experience and background gives us confidence that she will be an excellent choice," said Ian Hackett, Portland Chapter Treasurer and GIS Technician III with the Bureau of Environmental Services, who sat on the interview panel.

*Don't forget to vote!* Ballots for the Oregon 2022 primary election must be returned by Tues., May 17. ■

**To learn more about PROTEC17's political program, visit:**  
**[www.protec17.org/political-action](http://www.protec17.org/political-action)**



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