

Westlund to speak at solidarity rally for BAT union

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

State Senator Ben Westlund, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, Bend City Councilor Linda Johnson, and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 President Jon Hunt will join ATU members, union allies, bus riders, and community supporters from across Oregon in a Solidarity Rally for Bend Area Transit (BAT) union rights 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, May 12, at Bend's Juniper Park.

The rally will include messages addressing the issues of labor law reform, workplace rights and the right to organize from Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden, Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, Human Dignity Coalition Executive Director Jenni Peskin, Central Oregon Labor Council President Fernando Gapsin, former Bend City Councilor John Hummel, U.S. Senate candidate Steve Novick, and representatives from several Central Oregon unions. ATU members from Portland and other Oregon communities will come to the rally to deliver solidarity messages.

The May 12 rally promises to be a lively event with drums by Ubuntu, a Bend drum group. Strictly Organic and the 541 Lounge will provide coffee and water to rally participants. Children's activities will be available.

Rally participants are encouraged to take BAT to the Hawthorne Street bus terminal and walk two blocks east to Juniper Park. The rally site is on the Fifth Street side of the park at Hawthorne Street. Shuttle service will be available from the bus terminal to the park and back.

The rally will urge Paratransit Services, the out-of-state contractor hired to run Bend's bus system, to drop its objections to a federally-supervised election that saw a majority of BAT workers vote to join Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 three months ago.

"Paratransit should stop fighting its employees, recognize the union, and bargain in good faith so that BAT workers have the same union representation afforded other Bend city employees, police, and firefighters," said Michael Funke, organizer for Central Oregon Jobs with Justice. "Paratransit should also reinstate BAT driver and union steward Russ Evans, who was fired in retaliation after he spoke at the Bend City Council and at state legislative hearings in Salem."

The Bremerton, Washington company has refused to recognize the election and is appealing a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing officer's certification of the union. Paratransit fired bus driver Evans just nine days after he asked the Bend City Council to urge Paratransit to recognize the union.

A majority of Bend City Councilors approved a letter to Paratransit at the April 4 Council meeting, encouraging the contractor to "drop its efforts to appeal the decision of the NLRB regarding the establishment of a union among Paratransit workers in Bend."

Paratransit Services receives between \$95,000 and \$101,000 a month from the city to run BAT, according to the city Finance Department. The company has spent an estimated \$25,000 resisting the majority union vote of its employees.

For more information about the Solidarity Rally, call email Central Oregon Jobs with Justice or call 541-617-3879.

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