

State Representatives Show Solidarity With Albany Steelworkers

October 6, 2015

Salem – In a showing of solidarity, eight State Representatives including the Speaker of the House held a dinner on Monday for the 180 steelworkers who have been locked-out of their jobs at the Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) Albany plant since August.

“We wanted to show our support for the locked-out workers, many of whom have worked at this plant for more than 30 years. These hard-working Oregonians deserve a fair conversation with their employer about how best to provide for their families. I was proud to stand in solidarity with them during this difficult time,” said House Speaker Tina Kotek (D - North/NE Portland).

At the event, State Representative Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis) announced that his office is pursuing a bill for the upcoming February legislative session that will extend unemployment benefits for locked out workers. The steelworkers at ATI will lose their unemployment benefits after six months if the lockout continues.

“Employers should not wastefully abuse unemployment benefits to gain a tactical negotiating advantage. Negotiations should continue in good faith with all parties on equal ground” said Rayfield.

The lockout at the Albany plant is part of a nationwide lockout effecting 2,200 union members at 12 ATI plants in five other states – Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The lockout started on August 15th, after ATI issued an ultimatum that either the workers accept ATI’s offer or be locked out of a job.

ATI’s offer proposed to significantly cut health insurance benefits, end retiree health and life insurance benefits for new hires, replace the pension with a 401(k) for new hires, and give the company greater latitude to contract out work done by union members. The proposed health insurance cuts alone would cost workers the equivalent of \$5 an hour. In addition, ATI proposed a three-year contract for Albany, but four-year contracts at other locations, which some saw as an effort to divide the Albany plant from the other locations.

In addition to Speaker Kotek and Rep. Rayfield, yesterday’s dinner was attended by Rep. Lew Frederick, Rep. David Gomberg, Rep. Chris Gorsek, Rep. Val Hoyle, Rep. Rob Nosse, and Rep. Barbara Smith Warner. Several other state legislators who couldn’t make it to the event also expressed their support.

“It’s great to see our State Representatives showing solidarity with us – it’s definitely been a difficult time for our workers and their families,” said USW Local 7150 representative, Josh Hall. “We just want to get back to work with a fair contract that allows us to support and provide for our families.”

###