

As US experiences 10th COVID-19 wave, Portland, Oregon nurses poised to launch largest strike in state history

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Healthcare workers: Tell us what your conditions are like and what you are demanding! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Just under 5,000 nurses, certified nurse midwives, nurse practitioners, clinical staff, physician associates and physicians in Oregon are set to begin a strike Friday morning against the Providence hospital network.

The affected hospitals and clinics include: Providence Portland, Seaside, St. Vincent, Providence Women's Clinic, Milwaukie, Willamette Falls, Medford, Newberg and Hood River. The strike is slated to be the largest healthcare strike in the state's history.

The workers' primary demands include safer staffing levels—a legal requirement according to state law that has yet to be complied with—livable wages, tangible improvements in conditions, and reliable, affordable healthcare. They are also demanding retroactive pay for the new contract, especially for those who have been working without a contract since December 31, 2023, such as the nurses at Providence Portland Medical Center,

Workers are also demanding that their pay at least match what other healthcare workers in the region make. According to job searching website Glassdoor, the median pay for a registered nurse at Providence is \$54 per hour, while median pay Kaiser Permanente is \$63 per hour.

All of these demands have been refused by Providence, a “not-for-profit” which had earnings of \$165 million in the third quarter of 2024 and \$7.8 billion in the hospital network's unrestricted cash and investments. Ex-CEO Rod Hochman, who recently retired, made \$11 million in 2024.

Providence has announced that it has already hired scabs in anticipation of the strike.

The demand for safe and adequate staffing is crucial, as the abandonment of all public health measures has led to the 10th wave of COVID-19, which Oregon officially stopped tracking in November 2022.

The world also confronts the danger of the uncontrolled spread of the H5N1 “bird flu,” which has already claimed the life of a patient in Louisiana. Genetic sequencing of H5N1 has shown that the virus had developed adaptations that allowed it to infect the patient's respiratory system. Such adaptations are increasingly likely as the virus is allowed free rein to spread and evolve.

The seasonal flu is also surging across the US, risking a dire “recombination” event, where simultaneous infections of two different strains of flu virus, through genetic re-assortment, result in a new strain.

The adaptability of both bird flu and coronavirus demand a scientific approach to mitigating and containing them, which includes proper hospital staffing and protective equipment for all workers and patients.

The lethal consequences for-profit health has been demonstrated not only in the adoption of “forever COVID” policies which have killed or crippled tens of millions around the globe, but also in the resurgence of a myriad of other diseases. The constant state of infections, deteriorating living conditions, and limited access to healthcare have left the public even more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.

RSV, the second leading cause of death in children under the age of five, has swept across the states; Norovirus—also known as “winter vomiting

disease”—has reached record highs; Whooping cough has reach a decade high; All of which have been left unchecked, and the entirety of the burden of this public health crisis is foisted upon the shoulders of front-line healthcare workers.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, healthcare workers have been lauded as “heroes,” while being left to fend for themselves, to struggle and crumple. Corporations making millions, or even billions, in profit refused to spare even the bare minimum to ensure workers had access to safe and effective PPE.

These and other draconian attacks on public health, will only intensify under the incoming Trump administration, which is set to assume power a mere 10 days from onset of the strike.

With such figures as anti-vaxxer Robert F. Kennedy Jr. leading the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the health crisis will intensify.

Previous triumphs in the suppression of pathogens are already at risk, as seen in the surge in whooping cough; How long until the horrors of measles and polio return?

Similar assaults on public health, the healthcare workers that struggle to maintain it, and workers of all industries around the globe are taking place. Healthcare workers must turn to the ongoing struggles among East Coast dockworkers and UPS logistics workers for a unified front to fight for their common interests of inflation-busting wage increases and safe working conditions.

The strike at Providence thus faces not only the greed and contempt of corporate executives, but the entirety of the attacks on public health. These attacks aren't limited to one reactionary department head, one administration, or even one nation – it is the inevitable result of the underlying economic system, capitalism, that subjugates all aspects of human life to the profit motive.



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