OREGON NURSES ASSOCIATION PURSUES AFFILIATION WITH THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

TUALATIN, OR—Following a vote last week by the national leaders of the National Federation of Nurses (NFN) to affiliate with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), elected leaders of the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) are preparing to take their own vote in mid-March to ratify the agreement. The NFN is a national labor organization representing more than 34,000 registered nurses in Oregon, Washington, Montana and Ohio. AFT is the largest union of professionals in the AFL-CIO with 1.5 million members nationwide, including 48,000 nurses. ONA represents more than 12,500 nurses throughout Oregon.

The affiliation agreement approved by the NFN includes iron-clad protections for the organization’s autonomy and structure, and provides substantial resources for growth and development of the NFN’s membership. NFN’s constituents will continue membership in their state and national organizations, as well as in the American Nurses Association.

“The NFN decision is a vote of confidence in the AFT as a voice for professionals,” said Randi Weingarten, President of the AFT. “The NFN is the largest independent union of nurses, and we are delighted they have chosen to become part of our family of shared interests and professional values. Over the last few years, our union has been through the crucible of recession-squeezed budgets and political attacks. But we have emerged stronger, and this partnership only adds to our capacity to work with the communities we serve.”

The agreement—which was approved by the board of the NFN, still requires a state-by-state ratification by the NFN’s state organizations—also means affiliation within the AFL-CIO and represents a major development for labor relations in the healthcare professions at a time when the healthcare industry is rapidly changing and when nurses need a voice in implementing the Affordable Care Act effectively.
Susan King, ONA’s Executive Director, said, “This affiliation has the potential to expand opportunities for ONA to bring new members into the organization and to give us new resources to expand our advocacy for nurses and patients in Oregon and nationally.

Steve Rooney, President of ONA’s Board of Directors and a member of the NFN’s national board, said, “Oregon, and the entire country, faces enormous challenges in health care. Reform is complex, and it is crucial that nurses play a key role in maintaining quality patient care in that changing health system. We believe affiliating with AFT, joining our voices and our strengths, will help ensure that nurses remain at the heart of health care reform efforts.”

The affiliation agreement between NFN and AFT was approved on February 7th, 2013 in separate and unanimous votes by the NFN national executive board and by the AFT executive council. Over the next four to five weeks, each of the NFN state labor organizations will conduct its own formal ratification process. ONA will hold a special House of Delegates event in mid-March where hundreds of democratically elected nurse delegates will gather to consider, and ultimately vote, on the affiliation.

“We are 100% committed to transparency and engagement with our members,” said King. “ONA’s affiliation with AFT is not a foregone conclusion and requires a thorough vetting process by ONA leadership, board, staff and all of our members. When all is said and done, though, we believe affiliation with AFT is not only a good idea, it is the right idea for our members, for nurses and for our patients.”

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The Oregon Nurses Association is the voice for nursing in Oregon. With more than 12,500 members, it is the state's largest professional association and union for registered nurses. It supports nurses and nursing practice through education, research, legislative advocacy, and collective bargaining. More information online at OregonRN.org.