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EDITORIALS

A union flap ensnares state

The president of a union local in Oregon has filed legal complaints because his union won't pay him overtime. If that sounds weird, it is.

This is how Local 503 of the Service Employees International Union explains it:

The union represents state workers. The local's president took office in November 2004. In March 2007 he told the local's board he had worked 2,596 hours of overtime, which would amount to more than \$113,000 at straight time or \$179,000 at time and half, which overtime normally is.

Forget it, the union board told him, or words to that effect. And henceforth, don't work more than 40 hours a week. The man responded by filing a complaint against the union and the Department of Revenue, where he works, charging discrimination, among other things.

As the union explained it, it has an agreement with the state whereby the local's president keeps getting paid by the state even while he's working for the union. The union then reimburses the state for his state pay. Local 503 says it paid the state nearly \$220,000 through last April.

It's hard to see why a state agency would ever make an agreement like that. It means that now that there's a dispute between the local and its president, the state has to defend itself against legal action.

There's a good deal of irony in all this. Traditionally, unions fight to make sure their members get overtime pay when they work overtime. Here we have the union contending, with seemingly good reason, that being president of a local is a management job exempt from the overtime law.

What is even weirder is the pay arrangement between the local and the Department of Revenue, where Joe DiNicola, the local chief, works as a corporate tax auditor.

If state employees want to hold paid jobs in their union, let the union pay them directly. Why go through this reimbursement scheme?

Some members of the local now are trying to recall their elected president. That's a matter for the local. But the other thing, the pay arrangement, is something the union and the Department of Revenue should fix by calling it off. (hh)