

From union organizer to U.S. Senator: Butler succeeds Feinstein



By Combined Sources

For the first time in memory, a (former) union organizer is a U.S. Senator, as California Gov. Gavin Newsom named Laphonza Butler to succeed the late Dianne Feinstein. Many in labor and progressive circles are hailing Newsom's choice, but questions are also emerging about the nature of Butler's past work in the world of corporate consulting on behalf of big business.

Butler is now president of EMILY's List, a Democratic campaign committee devoted to electing more women, especially pro-choice women, to Congress. Newsom promised that if he had to select a senator, he would select a Black woman, but not one who is campaigning for the next general election in 2024 when the seat will be up.

That ruled out Rep. Barbara Lee of Oakland, the favorite of the Congressional Black Caucus, and the only lawmaker to vote against the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Newsom also passed over former CBC Chair Karen Bass, mayor of Los Angeles.

Butler started with SEIU organizing nurses in Baltimore and Milwaukee, janitors in Philadelphia, and hospital workers in New Haven, Conn., before moving to California and starting union work.

She later served as an advisor to Vice President Kamala Harris, including on Harris's short campaign for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

Newsom noted Butler served for a decade as

president of SEIU Local 2015, which represents more than 325,000 nursing home and home-care workers throughout the state, rising later to become president of SEIU California.

Before that, Butler was president of SEIU United Long Term Care Workers and its Property Services Division Director, directing the organizing of more than 250,000 janitors, security officers, window cleaners, and food service workers nationally.

Local 2015's current president, Arnulfo de la Cruz,

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was pleased to see his predecessor become a senator.

"Today is a proud day for SEIU 2015 and hundreds of thousands of caregivers across California as our dynamic and inspiring former president of over a decade, Laphonza Butler, was appointed by Governor Newsom to fill the seat of the late Sen.

Though she's being lauded by union leaders, some question Butler's role as a consultant for Uber on labor issues.

Dianne Feinstein,” de la Cruz said in a statement.

Butler “will bring a fresh perspective to the Senate from her decades of experience in the labor movement fighting for racial and economic justice, as well as her experience being a mother and serving as an inspiration for young women of color.”

Butler is a lesbian and an activist on pro-LGBTQ causes. She and her spouse Nyneki, have a daughter.

De la Cruz credited Butler with leading the union to “inspirational and impactful historic victories” statewide, including passage of the nation’s first \$15 statewide minimum wage.

While Butler is being widely lauded by progressives and organized labor, some are raising questions about her work in the world of corporate consulting after her departure from the union scene. Upon leaving SEIU, Butler became a partner at SCRB Strategies, a political and business consulting group now called Bearstar Strategies.

Though Harris, Newsom, and other Democrats were among the company’s clients during her time

there, so were corporate giants like Uber.

According to a report from Bloomberg in 2019, Butler “advised and represented Uber in its dealings with organized labor on employment issues.”

Uber was part of a coalition of businesses and conservative groups that spent more than \$200 million on a successful California ballot initiative to let gig economy companies call their workers “independent contractors” rather than employees.

That designation allows companies to dodge responsibility for paying minimum wage and providing many health and other benefits. It also prevents workers from joining a union. While Butler worked for SCRB, Uber paid the firm over \$185,000 to navigate the fight on the ballot initiative.

It’s her time at Uber during its major clash with labor, though, which is raising the most concerns.

The exact nature of Butler’s involvement as an Uber advisor and representative during its struggle against its workers has not yet been reported in detail.

Tucson’s Salt of the Earth Labor College celebrates its 30th Anniversary

By Joe Bernick

Tucson’s Salt of the Earth Labor College is celebrating its 30th anniversary amid growing working class militancy both nationally and locally. The school held its first class in September 1993 in a house left by Felix Padilla and Arvilla Jackson who wanted their home turned into a workers’ school.

The first meetings were held in one small room, but within a few years walls were removed, creating space with seating for about sixty people. The main advocates for the school were Lorenzo Torrez who was Arizona CPUSA Organizer, and his wife and comrade Anita. –

For 30 years Salt of the Earth Labor College has offered lectures, seminars, films, and cultural events. At the height of the pandemic classes switched to zoom, and are now hybrids. The school is also a venue for community and neighborhood events.

School programs usually try to connect to ongoing working-class struggles. For example, a talk by longtime Chicago activist Bea Lumpkin on the importance of the Coalition of Labor Union Women led to formation of a local chapter.

The seeds for several local union drives were planted at school discussions. This Fall’s schedule

will kick off on September 9 with a forum on the upcoming campaign for an amendment to the Arizona constitution to guarantee abortion and reproductive rights through a voter’s initiative.

Supporters will need to collect about 500,000 signatures to get it on the 2024 ballot and then campaign for votes. Polls indicate that Arizona voter support women’s rights and will vote to amend.

Supporters hope that putting the issue front and center will also help flip the legislature where ultra-right Republicans hold one seat majorities in both houses. It can also help defeat Trump.

In October Salt of the Earth Labor College President and Arizona Jobs with Justice leader, Steven Valencia will discuss the upsurge in organizing and rising militancy of organized workers. That will be followed by a class on why peace activists need to support workers’ struggles in defense industries.

Salt of the Earth Labor College is urging all its Arizona supporters on Saturday, September 2 at 6:00 pm to celebrate the anniversary. The party, at the school, will begin at 6 p.m. with food and drinks followed by a discussion of accomplishments over three decades. Local musicians Rebeca Cartes and James Jordan will perform.

Seeds for several important organizing drives planted at the labor school.

Illinois Nurses Association and other unions lobby for state safe staffing law



By Press Associates

Nurses brought their state-by-state drive for safe staffing ratios at the bedside to Illinois on October 3, with the Illinois Nurses Association/National Nurses United leading the way.

In a state legislative hearing in Chicago, the 6,000-member union joined the state AFL-CIO, Teamsters Local 743, the Chicago Black Nurses Association, and SEIU Health Care in pushing state lawmakers to craft and enact such legislation.

Safe staffing has been a top NNU cause, along with Medicare for All, for NNU and its state affiliates for decades. It's succeeded in its home state, California, as well as in New York and several other states, but has been stymied on Capitol Hill. There were hearings on it, but no more, in the prior Democratic-run House. And nothing since the GOP takeover, though Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., keeps pushing it.

In D.C., corporate special interests, their clout and campaign contributions have stymied safe staffing laws. The extremely rich and heavyweight health insurers lead, as well as the Chambers of Commerce.

The insurers make money through high premiums, co-pays, and deductibles, sucking consumers dry while paying only the minimum for care. But they also rake in cash by forcing hospitals to cut costs—and that means cutting care, including nurses.

So the union has simultaneously turned to the states—and run into similar flak.

“Our hospitals are refusing to hire the appropriate

number of nurses required to safely care for our patients,” Brenda Langford, RN, at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, while arguing for the proposed Illinois Safe Patients Limits Act (SB2314, HB3338) crafted with NNU by State Sen. Teresa Villanueva and State Rep. Teresa Mah, both D-Chicago.

The proposed Illinois law does not set specific limits or nurse-patient ratios, leaving that decision up to state regulators, an NNU fact sheet on the legislation shows. In California, however, the NNU-passed safe staffing law set a 1:2 nurse-patient ratio in intensive care units, with slightly higher ratios for other types of hospital wards.

Though the Illinois nurses did not mention it, the New York safe staffing law became a key pro-worker element in settling the recent New York State Nurses Association strike at New York City hospitals. Pay was one top issue, but safe staffing topped even that.

There, the hospitals refused to bargain with NYSNA—until Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) threatened to send in state health inspectors to see if the hospitals met the Empire State's new ratios law. They settled.

Without a similar Illinois law, “qualified, licensed nurses leave their jobs at the bedside because their licenses and their patients are being put at risk by these staffing practices,” Langford told lawmakers.

“We need the Safe Patient Limits Act to keep more nurses at the bedside. The law mandating nurse-to-patient ratios has worked in California for years, and it will work here in Illinois. Our patients deserve nothing less.”

Unions launch a major push to get the state legislature to act.

Peru CP calls for ouster of illegitimate government, constituent assembly

By CPUSA International Department

The Peruvian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Peruano) denounces the illegal ouster of the country's president, Pedro Castillo, and the violent repression of resulting protest by the government of Castillo's successor, Dina Boluarte, which has caused the deaths of at least 70 people, mostly poor and indigenous.

The Communists are calling for a united front of working-class and people's organizations to achieve the resignation of Boluarte from the presidency, the dissolution of the present right-wing-dominated Congress, general elections, and a constituent assembly to organize a referendum on a new constitution.

Derecho al aborto en Cuba bajo ataque de los contrarrevolucionarios

By Jose Manzaneda

En 1961, tras el triunfo de la revolución, Cuba se convirtió en el primer país de América Latina y el Caribe en despenalizar el aborto. Pero el derecho al aborto, como victoria histórica de las mujeres cubanas, está siendo atacado por la contrarrevolución y sus medios de comunicación, utilizando las mentiras más escandalosas.

En la década de 1950, la práctica del aborto en Cuba era similar a la de muchos países de esa región hoy: mientras que para las mujeres de la alta sociedad se practicaba de forma segura y confidencial, las mujeres pobres morían. El número de muertes maternas por abortos inseguros fue de más de 60 por cada 100.000 nacimientos, algo que, a los pocos años de la revolución, se redujo a casi cero.

Hoy el aborto se practica bajo tres principios: la decisión es exclusiva de la mujer, se realiza en hospitales públicos por personal especializado y es absolutamente gratuito. Sólo se convierte en delito cuando se realiza con ánimo de lucro, sin el consentimiento de la mujer, o en condiciones que puedan amenazar su salud o su vida.

“El aborto en Cuba es tan fácil como ‘sacarse los dientes’”, fue el impactante titular de un reportaje en el periódico español ABC, escrito por Camila Acosta, una periodista mercenaria cubana. Acosta recibe parte de sus aportes, que ofrece al diario Cubanet, de fondos federales estadounidenses.

Cita como fuente a conocidos “disidentes” que hoy viven fuera de la isla. Por ejemplo, Óscar Elías Biscet, expreso cubano y médico antiaborto, a quien ABC presenta como un “cristiano devoto” y “activista de derechos humanos”. Biscet afirma que para mantener baja la tasa de mortalidad infantil se presiona a “las mujeres con embarazos supuestamente problemáticos para que los interrumpan, a menudo justo antes del parto”.

Más escandalosamente aún, otra fuente, María Werlau, hija de uno de los invasores asesinados en Bahía de Cochinos y hoy directora del Archivo Cuba en Miami, afirma que las mujeres “con embarazos de alto riesgo son presionadas sistemáticamente (...) a abortar”. “ para que “sus fetos puedan ser utilizados en experimentos y trasplantes”, ocultando una red de tráfico internacional de órganos y tejidos humanos.

La contrarrevolución, junto a ciertos grupos religiosos de la isla, intentan poner fin a los derechos sexuales y reproductivos conquistados por las mujeres cubanas, como lo intentaron en 2021 con el nuevo Código de Familia, que protege la diversidad familiar, el matrimonio igualitario, y muchos otros derechos.

Para ello utilizan las mentiras más aberrantes y monstruosas, difundidas por los sinvergüenzas de los medios de comunicación internacionales.