

# ...Incumbent Kulongoski

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that it violated a union contract the state had bargained with its employees. The stock market has also partially recovered, which has reduced the system's unfunded liability.

Kulongoski defends his shift on PERS as a tough decision he had to make if he was to protect government services from cuts and protect public employees from plans by some Republican leaders to terminate their defined benefit pension and turn it into a 401(k).

Talk to labor folks and you'll hear other complaints: He had a no-show reputation in the Legislature, undertook few initiatives and dodged controversy.

There are exceptions to this chorus. Most building trades union leaders are highly enthusiastic about Kulongoski, who they say did everything they asked him to. In particular, Kulongoski came through on a series of massive public-works projects that will put building trades union members at work for years to come: One bill introduced by Kulongoski put the state to work fixing bridges using \$2 billion in bonds that will be repaid with an increase in the drivers' license fee. Another dedicated \$100 million in lottery-backed bonds for improvements to railroads, airports and other non-highway projects. A higher education construction bill put \$400 million of money into expansion at university campuses. All those amounts will be spent over a period of years.

Kulongoski also stuck by building trades unions in behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Warm Springs Tribe

over a proposed casino in Cascade Locks: The governor's influence helped get the tribe to commit to build and operate the casino with union labor if it wins federal approval for an off-reservation casino.

Kulongoski was the clear labor favorite four years ago, and for the same reason some loyalists are sticking by him now: Of the contestants, he has by far the longest, most solid relationship with organized labor, going back more than three decades.

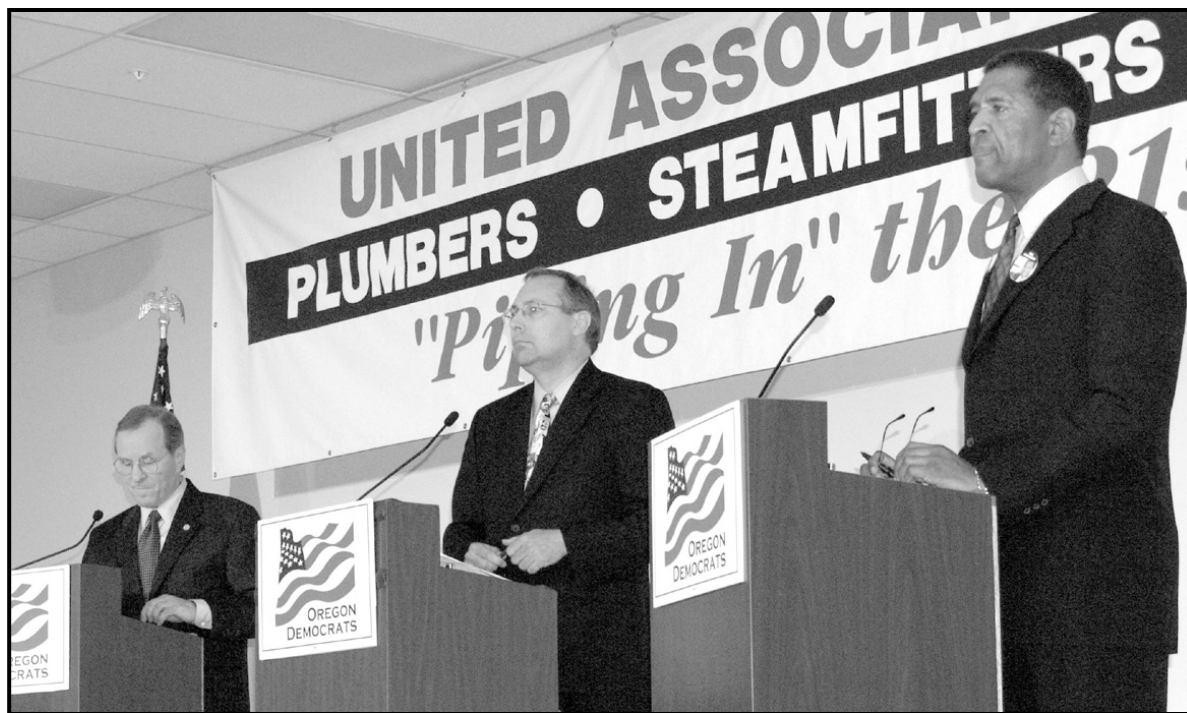
"I am and always will be a labor Democrat," Kulongoski told a gathering of labor leaders at a December breakfast.

At one time he was a member of the Teamsters in St. Louis, Missouri.

It was Kulongoski who wrote the 1973 law that allowed public employees to unionize: As a Eugene labor lawyer, he was asked to write the Oregon Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act, which passed a Democratic Legislature and was signed by Republican Governor Tom McCall.

From 1975 through 1981, Kulongoski served four terms in the Oregon Legislature, and his votes were in accord with the Oregon AFL-CIO 96 percent of the time.

In the late 1980s and early '90s, Kulongoski was the state insurance commissioner, and worked with then-Governor Neil Goldschmidt on a series of controversial changes in the state's workers' compensation system. The changes made it harder for workers to prove that their medical conditions were work-related, and limited the fees workers' compensation attorneys could re-



Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski (left) squares off against Democratic primary challengers Peter Sorenson (center) and Jim Hill during a debate last month at the Plumbers and Fitters Hall in Tualatin.

ceive. With those changes, the amounts employers pay for workers' compensation insurance have decreased, even though medical costs have gone up.

As governor, he made it easier for state workers to unionize in some instances. At the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Housing and Community Services, a governor's executive order permitted workers to unionize on the basis of signed union authorization cards rather than through a union election. At the Oregon Lottery, however, a late decision that the agency had to follow similar rules unraveled on a technicality. The Service Employees International Union opted to go the route of a union election, which is scheduled

this month.

After some prodding from the Oregon AFL-CIO, he pledged to veto a bill that would have undermined Oregon's minimum wage for tipped employees.

His record of supporting other union struggles was spotty, however. The governor was not seen on any union picket lines. After much pleading by the union, Kulongoski intervened in an SEIU dispute at the Parry Center for Children, using the threat of lost state contract to pressure management to sign a deal acceptable to the union. But he was criticized for it by opponents of labor. Later, when his appointees at the Lane Transit District provoked a strike in Eugene and Springfield, the governor refused ap-

peals for help from Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757. And when a teacher strike in Sandy, Ore., threatened to drag on, he proposed a settlement that was rejected by both sides. The teachers union later settled on more favorable terms than the governor had proposed.

The centerpiece of Kulongoski's campaign for re-election is his jobs record.

"Every night I go to bed I'm always thinking, 'How can I create more jobs for the people of this state?'" Kulongoski told delegates at the September 2005 convention of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Kulongoski says he inherited a severe recession and 7 percent unemployment, and worked to turn around Oregon's economy by creating jobs. Asked to elaborate, he acknowledges that his method of creating jobs was primarily wooing out-of-state corporations to locate in Oregon, using various incentives.

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