

Let me say this about that

...Brumm dies at 61

(From Page 2)

west states the AFL-CIO state labor federations launched campaigns to gather the necessary signatures to refer minimum-wage-raise ballot measures to the voters and then campaigned for passage of those measures.

Efforts to raise minimum wage rates are under way in a number of states. Nevada voters will have an opportunity in November of this year to increase their state's minimum wage.

The highest non-federal minimum wage rates have been set in two cities — Santa Fe, New Mexico, and San Francisco, California. In Santa Fe, the minimum wage is \$9.50 an hour and scheduled to go to \$10.50 an hour in 2008. In San Francisco, the minimum wage is \$8.50 an hour.

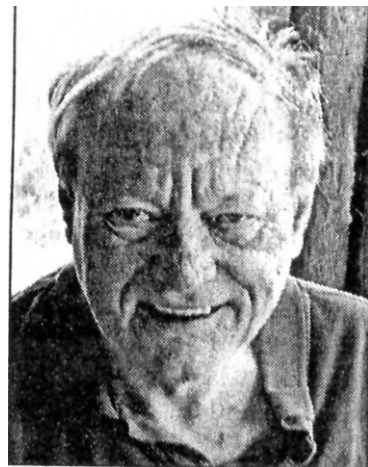
USA TODAY SAID that Santa Fe, New Mexico's capital, is a "city of 68,000 built largely on state government and tourism. Popular with celebrities and well-heeled art lovers, Santa Fe is an expensive place to live."

San Francisco, the fabled city by the Golden Gate Bridge, has a higher minimum wage than does the State of California — \$8.50 for the city vs. \$6.75 for the not-so Golden State.

★★★

THOMAS ALLEN BRUMM of Portland, who had worked for labor unions, U.S. Senator Wayne Morse, Gov. Neil Goldschmidt and the Clinton White House, died at age 61 on June 17. His death was from medical complications following a stroke.

An obituary published by his family said that he died "in the loving presence of family and friends."



TOM BRUMM

TOM BRUMM was born in Portland on July 11, 1944. He graduated from Kennedy Grade School, Grant High School and Portland State University. His family said his first job after graduating from PSU was with Portland's Model Cities program. While still at PSU, he worked as a student intern for the legendary labor lobbyist George Brown, who was the elected director of politics and legislation for the Oregon AFL-CIO.

In his career in the labor movement, Brumm was an organizer and assistant business agent for Laundry, Dry Cleaning and Dye House Workers Local 107 when Jerry Haggin was secretary-treasurer of the non-affiliated union. He worked for the Communications Workers of America when Del Ricks ran a statewide organizing local for the union. He also was an organizer for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees under John Paul Jones.

BRUMM SERVED on the campaign staff of Democratic U.S. Senator Wayne Morse in 1968 when Morse lost to Republican Bob Packwood, and Tom also worked for Morse when he tried for a comeback a few years later.

Tom campaigned for Democrat Neil Goldschmidt in 1970 when the Legal Aid attorney won election as a Portland city commissioner. In 1986, Tom worked on Goldschmidt's successful campaign for governor and subsequently was hired for an economic development post. Brumm's family said that in his economic development work his focus was on "the improvement of conditions for rural Oregon citizens and communities who had been financially displaced by globalization and the diminution of the Oregon salmon and timber industries."

BRUMM'S EXPERIENCE with and his empathy for the economic plight of rural and small-town citizens brought him to the attention of Democratic President Bill Clinton's Administration in the 1990s and he was called to Washington, D.C., for a temporary assignment in his area of expertise. He later returned to Oregon and worked on various projects for state government.

Tom's survivors include his wife, Betsy; two sons, Bill and David; daughters-in-law, Lisa and Jackie; four grandchildren, Max, Pearl, Josh and Alexa; plus a stepfather, known as Bill; and Doug and Kenny, described by the family as "like sons" to Tom.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS staged a wake for Tom on June 21 at former Mayor "Bud" Clark's Goose Hollow Inn, which was attended by an estimated 400 people. Tom and Betsy had met at the Goose.

Labor Commissioner Gardner rebuts foes of prevailing wage

By **DAN GARDNER**
Oregon Labor Commissioner

In its July 2 editorial, the Oregonian displayed a disturbing lack of understanding of the state's prevailing wage laws as well as cold contempt for the fortunes of Oregon's construction workers and their families.

As the commissioner of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), I am charged with applying the state's prevailing wage law (PWR) in a fair and legal manner. I take that duty very seriously, as I do my legal responsibility to protect the rights of Oregon's workers.

The state's prevailing wage rates for construction workers toiling on public works projects are not designed to supply "padded paychecks" to those workers. It reflects the amount of wages and benefits already paid to construction workers in a particular geographic labor market. In other words, it is the community standard package of wages and benefits paid to both union and nonunion construction workers.

Thirty-two states and the federal government set wages for construction workers on public works projects through such PWR laws. Oregon's law has been in place since 1959. In 1994, the state's voters were asked to repeal the law. They emphatically said "no." In fact, a majority of voters in each of Oregon's 36 counties rejected such an appeal. In the Portland metro area, the level of support for the PWR law was above 60 percent. The Oregonian was wrong in 1994 to advocate repeal of the state's PWR law and in 2006 they still seem to think they know better than Oregon's voters.

The state's prevailing wage rates are established by an annual, independent survey conducted by the Oregon Employment Department. More than 5,000 union and nonunion contractors are surveyed in 14 different regions throughout the state as to what they are paying their workers. By questioning the validity of the survey's rates, the Oregonian seems to be questioning the integrity of the contractors filling out the surveys. Do they believe the contractors are lying to the Employment Department?

The Oregonian accuses me of "expanding" the reach of PWR to cover public-private partnerships. The charge is false. The first public-private partnership to be "covered" under the PWR law was the so-called "Salem Carousel" project in 2001. The labor commissioner who made that decision was Republican Jack Roberts.

The Oregonian argues that the PWR law is a "bad deal for taxpayers." I'd respond by asking: Is it bad for our community, or for our state, that construction workers on public works projects earn enough to support their families while receiving health insurance coverage and retirement benefits? That is what prevailing wages supply.

Prevailing wage rates appear higher than other wages because they represent a package of both wages and the value of fringe benefits, including health and retirement. For example, in the recent Tin Roof case where the Portland Development Commission sued BOLI to avoid paying the prevailing wage rate, 53 percent of the additional cost (about 6 percent of a \$3.4 million project) associated with PWR came from the benefits portion paid to the workers. Would our community be better off if contractors imported low-wage workers from other states or countries to build public projects and paid them no benefits? Who in our community would benefit from such a situation?

Another question the Oregonian fails to ask concerns how the PDC chooses to spend its taxpayer dollars — and let's remember they receive 19 cents of every dollar paid in property taxes in the city of Portland. Is it better for PDC to build in large, double-digit profits for developers of their projects rather than spend several hundred thousand dollars more to pay higher wages and benefits to local construction workers? It seems odd that the question is never framed in that manner. Instead, the Oregonian and others question the need for highly-skilled and trained construction workers to receive family wages and health insurance benefits while never daring to wonder whether the built-in profit margins for PDC's development partners deserve scrutiny or are "a good deal" for Portland taxpayers.

The Oregonian also calls upon the governor to appoint a second task force to recommend changes to the state's PWR law. Such a task force is unnecessary without a new found willingness on the part of certain key participants — namely PDC — to compromise and solve problems. I named a PWR task force in September 2005. It was an august group with a broad representation including PDC, contractors, developers, bankers, the building trades unions, affordable housing advocates and local municipal officials. The group was jointly chaired by Jessica Harris-Adams of the Associated General Contractors and Bob Shiprack of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council.

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The group worked hard for eight months to reach consensus recommendations on how best to apply the state's PWR law to public-private partnership projects. Unfortunately, it failed to do so. That failure can be laid at the feet of one participant — the PDC. Apparently, it was PDC's belief that they would have a better chance of changing the law in the courts or in the state Legislature, so they balked at attempts by all parties to reach a compromise. Even the Oregonian agrees that such a strategy is ill-conceived given that it will take years for either the courts or legislators to make constructive changes to the law.

We should remember that these are local men and women who work in the cold, the heat, the rain and in the mud. They attend apprenticeship and training schools that offer state-of-the-art math and science classes. They earn the equivalent of an associate degree or higher during their four to five years of attending school and working at the construction site.

They do not get an hour of vacation, sick time or holiday pay. Simply put, if you don't work, you don't get paid. They rarely work on average more than nine months out of each year and often have to travel hundreds of miles to a job site. They work in the third-most dangerous profession in the nation and, sadly, many construction workers are injured or killed on the job each year.

These workers are your friends, your neighbors and your loved ones. They provide for our community. While it is not my intent to expand the reach of the PWR law, I will strongly defend its importance to maintaining community standards for all of us.

(Editor's Note: Dan Gardner is a third-generation electrician and member of IBEW Local 48. He was re-elected to a second four-year term in the May primary.)

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