

Unions working cooperatively on most Oregon legislative races

While structurally more divided than in previous election years, Oregon unions are still working cooperatively on most state electoral contests.

In the last few years, seven unions — Carpenters, Service Employees, Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers, Laborers, UNITE HERE and the United Farm Workers — have left the national AFL-CIO and joined in a new federation, Change to Win. Just two Change to Win unions remain affiliated with the Oregon AFL-CIO under temporary “solidarity charters” — UNITE HERE and several Laborers locals.

Still, the Oregon AFL-CIO continues to serve as coordinating body for its affiliates’ political efforts. Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain said that after getting off to a slow start, a campaign of mailings, phone banks and work site leaflet distribution is under way, supporting labor-endorsed candidates and ballot measures.

As for the state Change To Win federation, it has issued no endorsements in Oregon races, but is coordinating joint political efforts like joint canvasses, for candidates all affiliates agree on. SEIU Local 503 official Rich Peppers said the endorsements overlap 95 percent.

Each of the two state federations represents about 90,000 members in affiliated unions.

While virtually every union sees politics as a legitimate part of representing members’ interests, some unions are more focused on politics than others. The largest unions maintain full-time lobbyists and political directors and devote substantial resources to politics.

Chamberlain can quickly cite the Oregon labor organizations with the biggest political efforts: the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council (OSBCTC), Fire Fighters, the Oregon Education Association, the Oregon Nurses Association and SEIU. In other words, the largest public employee unions, the biggest nurses union, and the influential bloc of unions in the construction industry.

All the state’s unions favor incumbent Governor Ted Kulongoski over Republican challenger Ron Saxton. Saxton didn’t seek union endorsements, and is expected to be actively hostile to unions if elected.

In state legislative races, however, there are some differences among unions.

The Oregon AFL-CIO keeps the most detailed tracking of votes, and tends to evaluate politicians on issues of broad importance to working people. It uses those records, known as

COPE ratings (Committee on Political Education), as part of its decision-making on who to endorse. It also uses a candidate questionnaire, though not all endorsed candidates filled one out; Chamberlain said those who didn’t fill it out at least gave oral commitments to supporting expanded rights to organize. Endorsement decisions are made by COPE. The COPE board is comprised of members of the General Board. The General Board consists of AFL-CIO Executive Board members, delegates from the 12 regional central labor councils, and one representative of each affiliated international union (including Change to Win locals with Solidarity Charters) which does not have a representative on the Executive Board. COPE actions require a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

The Oregon AFL-CIO made endorsements in 13 of 15 Senate races and 37 of 60 house races. See www.oraflcio.org for the complete list.

Basically, the state labor federation endorsed all incumbent Democrats in the House and Senate, plus a handful of Democratic candidates running for open seats or against Republican incumbents, plus four incumbent Republicans: Albany Senator Frank

Morse, and in the House, Vicki Berger of Monmouth, Scott Bruun of West Linn, and Bob Jenson of Pendleton. While the Republicans all had much lower COPE ratings than any Democrat, Chamberlain said they were candidates with whom affiliates such as OSBCTC, AFSCME, or ONA had developed a working relationship with, potentially valuable connections given past Republican majorities in the Oregon House.

And while most of the AFL-CIO efforts are focused on the governor’s race and ballot measure campaigns, in legislative races it has paid closest attention to three Democrats in close races. They include Larry Galizio for House District 3 in Tigard; Chuck Riley for House District 29 in Forest Grove; and David Edwards for House District 30 in Hillsboro.

Within the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, ONA, and the Building Trades (OSBCTC) maintain independent approaches to politics.

Oregon AFSCME invites members to take part in candidate interviews and then make recommendations to its Political Action Committee, members of which are appointed by AFSCME’s elected president. The PAC in turn, makes recommendations to the Ore-



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Local Motion

September 2006

Union election activity in Oregon and SW Washington, according to the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Elections held

Company	Date	Union	Location	Results:		
				Union	No Union	
South Coast Hospice (decertification)						
	8/30	ILWU Local 5	Coos Bay	12	14	
Pacific Specialty & Rehabilitation Center						
	9/19	SEIU Local 775	Vancouver	33	9	

Elections requested

Company	Union	Location	# of employees
Pacific Specialty & Rehabilitation Center		Vancouver	
Service Employees International Union Local 775			62
Canteen Vending		Portland	
Teamsters Local 223			59
Kaiser Permanente (billing)		Portland	
Service Employees International Union Local 49			65
Glacier Northwest (decertification)		Oregon City	
International Association of Machinists District Lodge 24			13



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