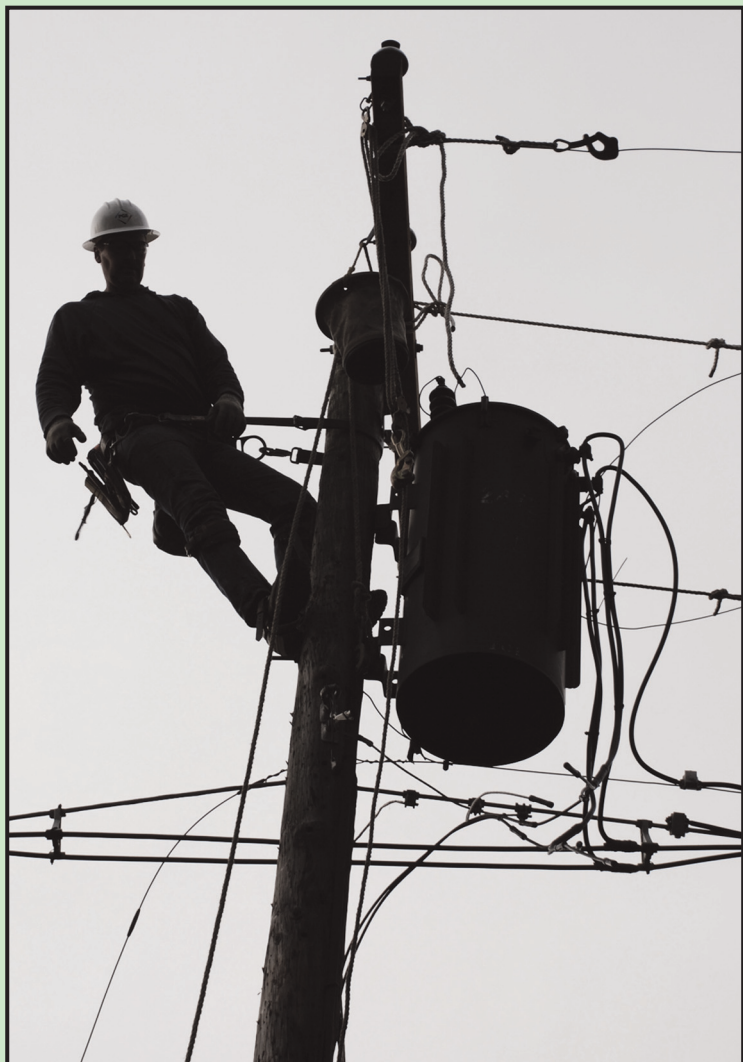




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Portland, Oregon*PGE finishes big storm's repairs*

An unidentified PGE employee — a member of Electrical Workers Local 125 — works to restore power to Cedar Hills customers following a wind storm last month that resulted in the loss of power to nearly 250,000 PGE customers in the Portland metropolitan area. As the storm hit (carrying wind gusts of 60 to 80 miles per hour), many PGE repair personnel worked 36 hours straight; then 16-hour shifts became the norm for the next five-and-a-half days. During the duration of the storm, line crews responded to more than 1,700 reports of downed lines. The storm was the biggest to hit the area in more than 11 years. “The restoration process was a huge team effort, involving employees from all parts of the company who pulled together for a common cause,” said PGE senior vice president Steve Hawke. “This once again exemplified the very best of who we are and what we stand for.”

(Photo by Richard Myhre, PGE)

## Sen. Wyden touts universal health coverage plan at business summit

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

At a Jan. 4 summit of Oregon business leaders, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) presented his proposal for universal health coverage, which would relieve businesses of the burden of finding and providing coverage to workers — and eliminate union health trusts.

“You can no longer keep plopping one Band-Aid after another on this system,” Wyden said. “Health costs are hitting our country like a wrecking ball.”

Under the Wyden plan, which he plans to introduce in Congress this month, most individuals would be re-

quired to buy insurance, though employers would also contribute part of the cost — and would be required to turn whatever they are now paying for insurance into a raise to employees. Premiums for full-family coverage average \$956 a month, so many workers would get a sizable raise if the Wyden proposal passes. But most of that would then go to pay for their insurance premiums.

Households earning as much as four times the poverty level would get some assistance in paying premiums, in the form of a tax deduction or out-right grant.

Health plans would have to be equivalent in benefits to those now of-

fered to federal employees, and would cover an annual physical examination.

Some individuals would be exempt from the requirement to buy health insurance, including those who are covered by Medicare, the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, or the Indian Health Service. Individuals who oppose medicine for religious reasons also would be exempt.

The Wyden bill would most likely do away with joint labor-management health trusts. Single and multi-employer health plans to which employers are now contributing under current union contracts would remain in existence until the contracts expire (or up

(Turn to Page 4)

## PDC adopts wage policy for private construction projects

The Portland Development Commission (PDC) Board on Jan. 10 passed a policy that sets parameters for when prevailing wage laws will apply on private construction projects that it helps finance. PDC is the quasi-independent urban renewal development arm of the City of Portland.

“Ending the uncertainty around prevailing wage and establishing a floor on wages and benefits are in the long term best interests of the community,” said PDC Board Chair Mark Rosenbaum.

To help end that uncertainty, all private construction projects receiving \$1 million or more in PDC resources will be subject to the new wage policy, which will require wages, fringe benefits, overtime pay and apprentice pay to mirror that of state prevailing wage rates for commercial construction, or federal Davis-Bacon Housing of Urban Development rates for residential construction. PDC defines “resources” as donated land, grants and below-market-rate loans. New Markets Tax Credits and other federal and state tax credits will not be counted as a PDC resource.

Additionally, low-income residential housing projects will be exempt, or at least be consistent with the recent agreement between the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council and the affordable housing community.

Prevailing wage laws are designed to level the playing field for construction companies on public projects by setting wage standards for workers on a craft-by-craft basis. Annual wage surveys are conducted by the Oregon Employment Division, and the law is enforced by the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries.

“We made some significant compromises,” said Bob Shiprack, executive secretary-treasurer of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council. “But something had to be done. Doing nothing was not an option.”

Shiprack said the new wage policy will make a big difference on larger projects downtown. “It will apply to roughly 80 to 85 percent of the construction dollars spent by PDC,” he said.

From July 1, 2004 to July 1, 2006, PDC has invested nearly \$200 million in private and public construction development projects.

The new wage policy will not apply retroactively to projects already under construction unless developers sign a memorandum of understanding. All projects now in the pipeline or under consideration will have to abide by the new construction wage policy. Projects subject to the wage policy also will have to negotiate specific hiring goals for minorities and women. Those goals will be determined on a project-by-project basis.

At the Jan. 10 meeting, Commissioner Charles Wilhoite questioned why the construction wage policy didn't contain language for some type of economic sanction against developers that don't meet the established hiring goals. Wilhoite will ask the Board to amend the policy to include such language at the next PDC meeting scheduled for Jan. 24.

Also at that Jan. 24 meeting PDC staff will present a Minority Contracting Initiative to the Board for consideration. This initiative will address issues including prompt payment, insurance and bonding barriers, expanded use of the city's Sheltered Market Program, and other ways to increase the use of minority and women-owned businesses on PDC projects.

John Jackley, manager of the PDC's operations division, told the NW Labor Press that when the Board amends the wage policy regarding economic sanctions, it also will clarify other terms in the policy. For instance, one condition of the construction wage policy states that “the Oregon Building and Construction Trades Council will submit an annual affirmative action report from each member union. On projects where the wage policy applies, the report will include usage rates and goals for apprentice and journey workers. Participating unions shall allow direct entry into the apprenticeship pool from qualified pre-apprenticeship

(Turn to Page 12)