

AFL-CIO backs Kitzhaber plan

The Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board has endorsed former Gov. John Kitzhaber's Oregon Better Health Act, a plan to overhaul the health care system in Oregon.

The proposed legislation seeks authority from Congress to allow Oregon to reallocate public resources currently being spent on health care by creating a system in which everyone has access to a defined set of essential health services. This "core benefit" would be portable and not tied to employment.

Supporters say the "core benefit" would relieve employers and employ-

ees of the cost of paying for health insurance, but would allow employers to offer and purchase secondary insurance for additional services.

In addition, the legislation includes a provision whereby the general public, employers, employees, senior citizens, and health-care providers will have an opportunity to compare the new system with the current system before moving forward with implementation.

The Oregon Better Health Act is the product of the Archimedes Movement, an effort to create a new health

care system by challenging the underlying structure of the current system and offering an alternative to replace it.

"Our current system is based on structures and assumptions that are now 40 to 50 years old and reflect the realities of the last century, not the realities of today," said Kitzhaber, who practiced emergency medicine for almost 20 years before becoming governor. "Without finding the courage to rethink these assumptions in light of today's realities, we will be unable to meet the health-care challenges facing our state and the nation."

There was little debate at the quarterly Board meeting held in Northeast Portland. Board members said the Oregon Better Health Act will certainly be modified to consider labor's interests before it is ever enacted.

"The more we can raise this issue now, the better off we will be," said Ken Allen, executive director of Oregon Council 75 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and maker of the motion to endorse the Act.

The motion passed on a unanimous voice vote.

UNITE HERE Local 9 placed under international reins

Jim Grogan was named trustee of UNITE HERE Local 9, which represents hotel and laundry workers in the Portland metro area. The local was placed under trusteeship by its national office in October. Grogan will be in charge of the local through the end of 2007.

A long-time organizing director for UNITE, Grogan said he hopes to get the Portland local more in line with locals in San Francisco and Seattle, which have focused much attention on organizing hotels. The local is also bracing for what could be difficult contract negotiations this year with the Hilton Hotel chain. Local 9 represents the Hilton Portland and Executive Tower in downtown Portland.

The union also represents employees at the Benson and Paramount Hotels in downtown Portland. Employees at the new Hilton Vancouver and Convention Center in Washington signed recognition cards to join Local 9, but have yet to ratify a first contract.

Local 9 secured a neutrality agreement before the taxpayer-financed convention center and hotel complex was built in 2005. The Hilton operates the hotel under a contract with the City of Vancouver. The hotel and convention center employs 120 workers.

UNITE HERE was formed in 2004 with the merger nationally of UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) and HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union). The merged Portland local has 1,200 members in industrial laundry and 1,000 in hotel and food service.

Grogan replaces financial secretary Jeff Richardson, who resigned Oct. 13 following a routine internal audit by the national union. Richardson was re-elected by acclamation to a third term in 2005.

Local 9 President Gloria Gonzalez, who also was re-elected by acclamation in 2005, will remain on staff during the trusteeship.

Demand is high, so Carpenters Food Bank will open 1 hour earlier

The Carpenters Food Bank will start distributing food one hour earlier each month because of long lines waiting to receive food boxes.

The all-volunteer Food Bank, now in its 24th year, is housed in the basement of the union hall at 2205 N. Lombard, Portland. The Food Bank feeds 450 to 500 families the third Friday each month.

Mike Fahey, a former executive secretary-treasurer of the Portland Metal Trades Council and member of Pile Drivers, Divers and Shipwrights Local 2416, who along with his wife Sandy, coordinates the program, said residents oftentimes start lining up at 6 a.m.

"I hate to see people standing out there, so we let 'em in," Fahey said.

The new distribution hours will be from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The next distribution is Friday, March 16.

The Food Bank is also seeking cash donations to help purchase food items — including meat and turkeys — at bulk rate prices.

Contributions can be sent to: Food Bank, P.O. Box 17358, Portland OR 97217.




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