

Senate votes to restore safety bargaining

SALEM — The Oregon Senate voted March 7 to restore public safety officers' ability to negotiate on safety and staffing issues in their union contracts.

Senate Bill 400 passed by a vote of 16-13. Two Democrats — Joanne Verger and Betsy Johnson — and one independent — Avel Gordly — joined all the Senate Republicans in opposing the bill.

SB 400 restores the ability of firefighters, police and corrections officers to negotiate on safety, equipment and staffing issues when bargaining con-

tracts. That right was stripped from them in 1995 by a Republican-controlled Legislature.

The Oregon AFL-CIO hailed the vote as a major victory this session. "This is a top priority for us and several Oregon unions," said Tom Chamberlain, president of the state labor federation.

"Nobody has earned the right to talk about safety issues more than the Oregonians who put their lives on the line to keep the rest of us safe," said State Sen. Kate Brown (D-Portland), who co-sponsored the bill with State Sen. Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene). "This legislation

allows our firefighters and police to discuss their own safety at the bargaining table."

The issue is important, Chamberlain said, because safety employees are prohibited by Oregon law from striking. Previous to a change in the law in 1995, employees were allowed to negotiate on safety issues.

The bill now moves on to the Oregon House of Representatives. The AFL-CIO is asking union members to call their lawmakers and urge them to support SB 400. The phone number to reach lawmakers is 503-986-1000.

JOBS Plus on the radar of GOP lawmaker

SALEM — Some Republican lawmakers are trying to resurrect Oregon's JOBS Plus program, which died a quiet death June 30, 2005.

JOBS Plus, the brainchild of Klamath Falls conservative Dick Wendt, used unemployment insurance funds to pay employers to hire the unemployed. Unions opposed the program, saying unemployment insurance was meant as a support for workers, not as a subsidy to employers.

JOBS Plus was the result of a six-county welfare-to-work pilot project

approved by Oregon voters in 1990. But it required federal approval to divert funds from other programs. As worked out by the Legislature, the JOBS Plus program had 10 years to prove itself. Its backers tried to reauthorize it in the 2005 legislative session, but opposition from the governor, and the fact that it couldn't get a hearing in Democrat-run Senate, doomed the bill.

Still, Klamath Falls State Sen. Doug Whitsett pledged to give it another go this year, and the Oregon AFL-CIO is tracking the bill to make sure it doesn't

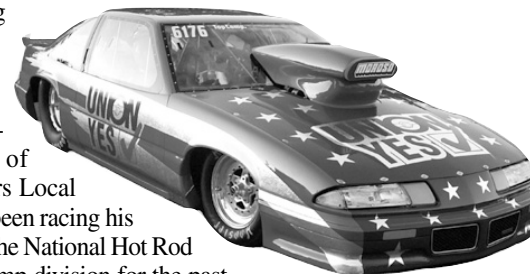
go anywhere.

In a letter to House Speaker Jeff Merkley, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain explained why labor opposes the bill: "JOBS Plus is supposed to limit its subsidies to newly-created jobs, but appears to subsidize jobs that would otherwise be created by market forces."

That ends up displacing other workers, Chamberlain argued, as when JOBS Plus placements filled temporary jobs when Cirque de Soleil came to Portland in 2004.

'Union Yes' race car driver looking for more sponsors

"Union Yes" drag racer Greg Hindman of Boring, Oregon, is looking for sponsors for the 2007 season. A member of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, Hindman has been racing his 1992 Grand Prix in the National Hot Rod Association Top Comp division for the past three years.



Union locals, building trades councils and state and regional labor federations have been some of Hindman's sponsors.

His goal is to go national, but he needs more sponsors to do it. He has been invited to bring his race car to the National AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department Legislative Conference March 25-28 in Washington, D.C. There, he will be able to show off the car and his Union Yes program to leaders of national unions.

The invite was short notice, and the cost to transport the vehicle is steep — about \$12,000. Hindman is looking for financial assistance to help pay for the trip. He must leave Portland on March 19 or 20, so time is of the essence. Union locals, union vendors, money managers and other union supporters are encouraged to donate, and to possibly sponsor Hindman for the '07 season.

Last year, Hindman held "Union Solidarity" days at race tracks in Arizona and Idaho. He's planning a similar event in July at the Woodburn Drag Strip in Oregon.

"The car creates a lot of buzz at the track, especially in the right-to-work states like Idaho," Hindman said. "With all these locals, councils and vendors working together towards one message, 'Union Yes,' this program is a powerful advertising tool. We are able to reach many more people than any one of us could do alone." Contact Hindman at 503-260-5593 or 503-740-8806.

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