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## AFL-CIO's political program to extend far beyond presidency

CHICAGO (PAI) — The national AFL-CIO's political program for the 2007-2008 election cycle is still being formed, but it will extend far beyond the presidential race, the group's political director says.

Seven U.S. Senate seats are on the labor federation's radar screen, including one in Oregon, where Republican incumbent Gordon Smith is up for re-election.

Two Democrats have filed to challenge Smith. They are House Speaker Jeff Merkley and political activist Steve Novick.

Other states being targeted by the national AFL-CIO are Republican Senate seats in Virginia, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire and Colorado. The seventh seat in South Dakota is held by a Democrat. Democrats now hold a 51-49 U.S. Senate majority and a 232-203 majority in

the U.S. House.

Final decisions on the scope, size, funding, and how to pay for the support will be made at meetings of the federation's political committee on Sept. 21 and its Executive Council on Sept. 28, both in Washington, D.C., said political director Karen Ackerman.

Decisions on which races to get involved in are separate from the federation's Aug. 8 vote to take no action in the Democratic presidential primary.

"Every national union affiliate may decide for itself if it wishes to support a candidate in the primaries, and different unions will be ready to make decisions at different times," the AFL-CIO Executive Council said.

The Executive Council's decision not to endorse a presidential hopeful before the big round of primaries in 2008 could change if the political situation changes, Ackerman said after the council vote. But its resolution setting the unions loose to make their own pre-primary endorsements had the presidents "reflecting their membership," she added.

## AFL-CIO to start major health care drive on Labor Day

CHICAGO (PAI) — The national AFL-CIO will start a major drive to put universal quality health care atop the national election agenda, starting just after Labor Day.

The federation's Executive Council said it would add the health care drive to its effort to restore workers' freedom to join unions and bargain collectively through passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

But the council did not endorse specific legislation for universal coverage. At least five unions, including the Steel workers, the California Nurses Association and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, support government-run single-payer health care.

Others support different methods. The labor federation established a special health care panel of union presidents and leaders to work out which specific plan to support. It named longtime Democratic political organizer Heather Booth to direct the drive.

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