

... Smith takes some heat from unionists for past votes

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spent millions of dollars to derail the bill, and the Bush Administration mobilized high-level bureaucrats to campaign against it.

The House already passed the bill by a wide margin and a majority of senators supported it. But to get to an up or down vote supporters needed to end the filibuster. That requires 60 votes, and only 51 senators voted to end debate. Smith was not among those senators voting to end debate and vote on the bill.

So it wasn't surprising that EFCA was the first question posed to him at the labor breakfast.

Smith admitted that "the system isn't perfect. But I don't want the cure to be worse than the problem. That's what I was afraid of."

One of Smith's biggest concerns with EFCA was language imposing binding arbitration. "Not all unions are great, just like there are bad companies," he said. "You can have a bad company and a bad union rig it in a way that doesn't benefit the employee. You go to binding arbitration and the employee has no say in it. That can happen, you know."

Britt Cornman, an organizer for the Machinists Union, told the senator that he has seen workers fired for nothing more than expressing interest in a union. "Ninety percent of workers are afraid to unionize (because they are afraid they might be fired). We need to do something."

Dave Tully, an organizer for the Teamsters Union, said, "Employers now spend thousands of dollars fighting union organizing campaigns. If they do something illegal, the result is only a hand-slap by the National Labor Relations Board."

tions Board."

Smith said he could support a neutral third-party to verify signatures and strategies used during a card-check organizing campaign, and he pledged to work with labor on employer neutrality language during an organizing drive.

"I will commit to work with you on that," he said.

Smith also agrees with labor that last

year's National Labor Relations Board decision in the Kentucky River case in which supervisors were reclassified (such as charge nurses) and therefore ineligible to belong to a union, was wrong.

Smith said he supports the Re-Empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction Tradeworkers

(RESPECT) Act that has been introduced to overturn the NLRB decision.

"Workers should have the right to vote for a union, and when they do, that vote ought to count," he said. "It shouldn't be whittled away by executive rule or anything else."

On other labor issues, Smith said he opposes so-called right-to-work laws and supports prevailing wage laws 100 percent. "When public money is spent to build things, it should be built to union quality and it should pay a family wage. That's a value I share with you."

Smith said he is an "enthusiastic backer" of the Columbia River Crossing project and its efforts to build a new I-5 bridge. "It will happen," he said.

He said he is not against siting liquid natural gas plants in Oregon as long as it can be done to the strictest of safety standards.

Smith took issue with a question from Brad Witt, a Democratic state representative and union rep for United

Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, about creating an "America on the cheap," with tax cuts for the rich at the expense of infrastructure and livability in the U.S.

Smith said under President Bush's tax cuts "revenue has gone up. That's a fact." He said the notion that there are cuts in transportation spending aren't true.

"The deficit is coming way down because the economy is going way up," he said. "Wages are rising now faster than inflation. It's just a fact."

Smith said the only new tax that he willingly supports is the proposed healthy kids program funded by an increase in the cigarette tax. Oregonians will have an opportunity to vote on that tax increase — Ballot Measure 50 — in

November.

"It's money very well spent ... on the health care of children," Smith said, noting that tobacco kills 20 percent of Oregonians who die each year.

If approved in November, Measure 50 would raise the tax on cigarettes by 82.5 cents a pack to provide affordable, accessible health care for Oregon's 117,000 uninsured children.

Smith said those who want to get rid of hydro-electric dams on the Columbia River, "do so at the peril of your jobs."

"Not a job can be created out there unless you create energy first."

He said Oregon's energy-producing dams are being run by the federal courts. He said all the evidence he has seen says that fish mortality rates are no

better by spilling than they are by barging, "yet the federal courts says we have to spill fish."

"We run those dams at half speed. That comes at the expense of your jobs. That's a fact."

He said environmentalists used to like wind energy, but now they call them the Cuisinarts in the sky because they (windmills) chop up birds."

"Oregonians could blanket Eastern Oregon with solar panels and it still wouldn't replace one hydroelectric dam," Smith said.

"We need a constant load: coal, hydro, nuclear, natural gas.

"The sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow in Oregon," Smith said.

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550 WEST WASHINGTON BLVD.
NINTH FLOOR
CHICAGO, IL 60661
P: 312 575-9000
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EAST COAST OFFICE
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