

City of Portland pledges to buy no sweatshop apparel

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

The City of Portland added its name to the list of "sweat-free" governments Aug. 29 when City Council approved a resolution backed by a coalition of unions and community groups.

Under the resolution, a nine-member committee will hammer out details of a Sweat-Free Procurement Policy over the next year, which would then come back to the Council for approval. The way it would work, all city uniform and apparel vendors would have to disclose the name and location of their factories. Then a multi-government consortium would verify that the goods are made under humane working conditions. An oversight committee would report annually on contractors' compliance with the resolution.

"This is a huge step in making sure taxpayers in Portland aren't paying for poverty wages and inhumane working conditions," testified Carol Stahlke, president of American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 189, the largest of the unions representing City employees.

"I have 600 members working at the City of Portland," added Richard Beetle, business manager of Labor-



Just outside Portland City Council chambers, "sweat-free" ordinance backers Margaret Butler of Portland Jobs with Justice and Richard "Buzz" Beetle of Laborers Local 483 celebrate the measure's passage.

ers Local 483, which represents city parks, maintenance and water treatment workers. "When we put on our uniforms and wear city-supplied hats and T-shirts, we need to be assured these products are not produced under sweatshop conditions."

A sweatshop is a factory that violates labor and safety laws.

Chie Abad, a former sweatshop worker in Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, told City Council about her experience working 14-hour days seven days a week in an apparel factory. Workers drank rainwater, Abad said, and lived in "a squalid, overcrowded barracks with a tin roof." Women who got pregnant

were fired. And that was in a United States territory, making clothing marked "Made in USA."

Abad was later part of a lawsuit against Liz Claiborne, Calvin Klein, and other major labels that used the factory; the brands paid \$20 million back wages in a 2002 out-of-court settlement. She now works for the San Francisco-based group Global Exchange publicizing sweatshop abuses. Global Exchange also paid to staff the Portland Sweatfree Campaign.

Portland's City Council resolution came about thanks to a year's patient labor by the campaign's organizer, Deborah Schwartz, who pulled together the labor-community coalition and met repeatedly with city staff and aides to the resolution's sponsor, Portland Commissioner Sam Adams. The campaign collected about 1,000 postcards of support, and was endorsed by 14 local unions and over 30 churches and community groups.

At the hearing, Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, State Sen. Brad Avakian, and State Rep. Brad Witt also testified in support.

Even a vendor spoke in favor. Roger Heldman of Blumenthal Uniforms & Equipment testified to City Council that his company's police and fire uniforms are made in union factories in Kentucky and North Carolina. Uniforms have been the last holdout for the American apparel industry, Heldman said, which

otherwise has been almost entirely displaced by low-wage foreign competition.

With the resolution, Portland commits to become part of the State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium, to which it will contribute about \$20,000 a year — 1 percent of its approximately \$2 million annual uniform and apparel budget. The consortium will start work when it has \$100 million in purchasing power. So far, it's about a tenth of the way there, Schwartz said, with San Francisco and Berkeley, California fully on board, and several other cities and states on the way.

The Portland resolution was approved on a 3-0 vote; Commissioners Adams, Randy Leonard, and Erik Sten. Mayor Tom Potter and Commissioner Dan Saltzman were away on vacation.

Governor taps Chamberlain for Oregon Health Fund Board

SALEM — Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain has been appointed by Gov. Ted Kulongoski to serve on the Oregon Health Fund Board.

Chamberlain, a firefighter/paramedic who spent more than six years on two different health benefit committees at the City of Portland and the Port of Portland, will join six others in an effort to develop a plan to reform Oregon's health care delivery system and create more affordable health care for all Oregonians.

Joining Chamberlain on the Board will be Jonathan Ater, an attorney at Ater-Wynne in Portland; Bill Thorndike, owner of Medford Fabrication in Medford; Eileen Brady, co-owner of New Seasons Market; retiree Ray Miao of Bend; Marcus Mundy, president of the Urban League of Portland; and Charles Hoffman, a physician in Baker City.

The board was created by Senate Bill 329, passed in the 2007 legislative session. The bill states that members shall have experience and expertise in consumer advocacy, management, finance, labor, health care and represent the geographic and ethnic diversity of the state. The Senate Rules Committee needs to confirm all executive appointees.

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