

Labor Council opposes tax-funded day labor center

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council took action Aug. 27 opposing a proposed day labor center that is being subsidized by the City of Portland.

The action came at the request of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 and has backing from the Columbia-Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council.

The labor organizations sent letters to Mayor Tom Potter stating their displeasure.

"It's the facility we're opposing, not

the day workers," emphasized Judy O'Connor, executive secretary-treasurer of the Labor Council.

John Endicott, business manager of Local 290, said a city-financed day labor facility provides encouragement for day laborers.

"Currently, there is an incredibly well-honed system in place to coordinate workers, provide them with job opportunities, negotiate health care, and ensure a family wage. It's called organized labor," Endicott said.

John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council, said having a day labor facility likely would do nothing to alleviate the real problem, which is employers exploiting workers for cheap labor. "If the city wants to do something, maybe it should look at the people hiring day laborers," he said.

Union officials also are miffed at their exclusion from a committee comprised of self-identified stakeholders such as day laborers, Hispanic organizations, businesses, churches and neighborhood groups.

"It was an oversight not to reach out to labor," said Kevin Easton of the mayor's office.

Potter and the City Council set aside a \$200,000 grant as part of the Safe Access For Everyone (SAFE) public safety initiative. The money will be used as "seed money" to help find and secure a location for a day labor center and to contract with a non-profit organization to operate it. Easton said the city hopes the creation of a hiring center will spur more investment from the private and public sectors.

Potter has hired a consultant for \$20,000 to act as project manager. A request for proposal to operate the center will be released Oct. 9. Proposals are due back Oct. 26. The goal is to have a new day labor center operational by January 2008.

A location has yet to be secured, but Easton said the committee is ac-

tively looking at available sites in the city that are currently up for lease or purchase, and possibly space that would be donated.

The mayor and City Council maintain that a day worker hiring site will offer a number of solutions to those affected:

- Small businesses benefit from no longer having workers congregate on streets or impede business traffic.

- Law enforcement officials believe a monitored day worker site separates criminals who prey on day workers from those who are earnestly seeking work.

- A safe and sanitary day worker site will ease traffic congestion in the areas where workers congregate.

- The wages paid to day workers diminish their need to tap social services networks.

Currently, day laborers search for work on street corners along SE 6th Avenue near East Burnside and SE Ankeny Street. Employers and homeowners looking for workers drive through and pick up whomever they need. The city, Easton said, estimates the day worker population to be 80 to 120 people, depending on the season.

Since the upheaval, the mayor's office has reached out to union officials and several meetings have been held with other stakeholders to try to reach some common ground.

"At least we have a seat at the table," said John Kirkpatrick, a busi-

ness representative of Painters District Council 5, who attended a meeting on Sept. 5. "We can at least keep an eye on what's happening."

The last general meeting of stakeholders was Sept. 19, after this issue of the NW Labor Press went to press.

Firefighters use new card-check law to secure union

NEWPORT — In August, a group of eight employees at Newport Fire & Rescue became the first in Oregon to make use of a new state law that requires public employers to recognize a union based on "card check."

Once the Oregon Employment Relations Board determines the appropriate definition of the bargaining unit, a new union, the Newport Professional Fire Fighters Association, will be recognized. The group would be an affiliate of the International Association of Fire Fighters and its Oregon affiliate, the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council.

The new law, passed by the Oregon Legislature earlier this year, makes it easier for public employees to unionize; when a majority of workers in a given workplace sign that they want to belong to a union, that union gets automatic recognition. The national labor movement has been pushing Congress to pass a similar law to cover private-

Washington BCTC supports single-payer health care legislation

The Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council endorsed a bill in Congress that would create a single-payer health care system in the United States.

House Resolution 676, introduced by U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), has 77 co-sponsors in Congress and has been endorsed by 312 union organizations in 44 states, including 22 state labor federations (including the Washington State Labor Council) and 86 central labor councils.

Delegates representing 81 construction union locals passed a resolution at the 51st annual convention of the Washington Building Trades Council stating that HR 676 is "...the best means to provide national health care for all by expanding and improving the current Medicare system."

The Washington State Building Trades Council is the third state build-

ing trades council to endorse HR 676. Previously, state councils in Maine and Texas endorsed the legislation.

HR 676 would institute a single-payer health care system in the U.S. by expanding a greatly improved Medicare system to every resident.

HR 676 would cover every person in the U.S. for all necessary medical care, including prescription drugs, hospital, surgical, outpatient services, primary and preventive care, emergency services, dental, mental health, home health, physical therapy, rehabilitation, vision care, chiropractic and long-term care.

Passage of HR 676 would end deductibles and co-payments and, according to Conyers, would save billions of dollars annually by eliminating the high overhead and profits of the private health insurance industry and HMOs.



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