

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



Aaron Brown honored

THE LABOR HALL OF FAME has welcomed retired Oregon Judge Aaron Brown as a new honoree. He earlier worked as a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, AFL-CIO. The Labor Hall of Fame is sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Retirees Council, an affiliate of the Portland-based NW Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

Brown, now 81, retired in 1995 as a District Court Judge at the Multnomah County Courthouse in downtown Portland. He later presided as a Circuit Court judge in a number of Oregon counties. Retired judges are expected to serve where needed to reduce case backlogs. District Court was merged into the Circuit Court.



AARON BROWN

JUDGE BROWN became Oregon's first black judge in 1968 when then-Portland Mayor Terry Schruck appointed him a pro-tem Municipal Court judge. Within a year, Schruck made the appointment permanent. Municipal Court was housed in the old Police Bureau Building at SW Second Ave. and Oak St. Brown, who started practicing law in 1959, was reluctant to accept the appointment because it meant an income cut, but decided that he could do a lot of good as a judge, and that the pay cut would be offset by a salary increase his

wife Avenice was receiving because of her promotion to a supervisory post in the phone company.

"**ASA JUDGE**, I was able to do something about the injustices I saw," Brown said.

Those injustices included keeping accused people in jail over a weekend if they could not afford to pay a bail bondsman to arrange for their release until they went to court. Also, jail prisoners often were hauled off to pick beans and other crops on farms whose owners were politically-connected. Judge Brown pushed for a reform to release defendants on their own recognizance so they weren't at the mercy of the bail system.

IN 1971, Portland's Municipal Court was merged into the District Court, and then-Gov. Tom McCall appointed Brown to the District Court bench. Judge Brown's populist views made him a popular speaker at various labor functions. "I always felt at home around union people," he said. The labor movement supported Brown in his election campaigns, but only once did he have an opponent. Union leaders also supported him for governor appointments to the Circuit Court bench but behind-the-scenes political shenanigans kept that from happening. Later, the two courts were merged.

Aaron Brown's pro-people viewpoints were a natural result of his upbringing in a home in Houston, Texas, where a picture of the great Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt held a prominent place on a wall in the living room. Brown was also heavily influenced by living under the ugly oppression of racial segregation where Jim Crow prevailed. Racial discrimination prevented his father, Aaron Brown Sr., from getting a good job. Young Aaron's education came at under-financed all-black schools. Aaron Jr. was born in Bell, Louisiana, on Sept. 20, 1926, and the family moved to Houston four years later, settling in the Fifth Ward, which is still a black enclave.

YOUNG AARON left Houston for the U.S Army in 1946 after being brutal-

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AFSCME backs Clinton despite Western leaders' call for no early endorsement

Calling her "the Democrat with the strength and experience who will always stand up for working Americans," the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the largest union in the AFL-CIO, endorsed Sen. Hillary Clinton on Oct. 31 for the Democratic presidential nomination.

The endorsement was made despite opposition from all of the union's international vice presidents on the West Coast. That includes Ken Allen, executive director of Oregon AFSCME Council 75, and Greg Devereux, executive director of Washington AFSCME Council 28.

Allen said the vote came after a nearly two-hour debate. The final tally was 23 to 10 in favor of the endorsement, split along regional lines.

Allen said member leaders in AFSCME's Northwest region — Oregon, Washington, Montana and Alaska — have been opposed to the endorsement.

"Polls for our region do not support an early endorsement for president," Allen said. "So many of our members are unsure and there is division among the top three candidates."

In fact, a presidential straw poll that's been running for weeks on the Oregon AFSCME Website has consistently had Clinton running fourth. While not a scientific survey, Clinton has trailed (in order) John Edwards, Dennis Kucinich and Barack Obama from the poll's outset.

Fred Thompson leads the Republican primary with 28.4 percent of AFSCME members supporting his campaign.

AFSCME representatives from Georgia, Hawaii and Illinois backed Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.).

Clinton welcomed the endorsement from the 1.4-million-member union, especially when International President Gerald McEntee promised to mobilize AFSCME members in Iowa and try to turn out as many of its 30,000 unionists there as possible for the first-in-the-nation caucuses on Jan. 3.

"When it comes to fighting for America's working families, I'll go 10 rounds with anybody," Clinton declared, referring to both the other Democrats seeking the nomination and to the Republicans. "This endorsement

means the world to me."

AFSCME joins the Machinists, the American Federation of Teachers, the Bricklayers and several smaller unions in backing Clinton. Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina is backed by the Steelworkers, the Mine Workers and the Carpenters, an affiliate of the Change to Win labor federation. The Fire Fighters are supporting Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.).

AFL-CIO to host 'Labor Campaign School' Dec. 14-15

SPRINGFIELD — A two-day "Labor Campaign School" is planned for Dec. 14-15 at the Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 Training Center here. Candidates, campaign managers and campaign treasurers will learn the nuts and bolts of running for office, including budgeting and expenditure reporting, volunteer recruitment, and how to communicate with voters and the media.

Class materials and meals will be provided at no charge to candidates who are accepted to participate.

The training is sponsored by the Lane County Labor Council and the Oregon AFL-CIO.

For more information, call Pat Riggs-Henson, executive secretary-treasurer of the Lane County Labor Council, at 541-915-3100.



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