

...Oregon AFL-CIO backs Merkley

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argued against the early endorsement resolution, saying AFL-CIO member unions hadn't had time to make their own endorsement decisions. But numbers argued louder, with delegates representing close to 40,000 union members in favor, and 13,000 opposed. For the federation to take a political position requires a two-thirds

OR Fire Fighters Council endorses Gordon Smith

The Executive Board of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council voted to endorse Oregon U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith for re-election.

On its Web site, the council said it endorsed Smith because of his sponsorship of a national collective bargaining bill, and for his support of the SAFER Act, another priority bill of the union.

The collective bargaining bill was filibustered Dec. 14 by a small group of hard-line anti-labor Republican senators. It won't be revisited until next year.

SAFER grants are used to help fire departments hire more firefighters. On July 26, the U.S. Senate approved \$145 million for SAFER grants. On June 15, the U.S. House approved \$235 million, more than double the \$115 million allocated for 2007. The House and Senate are now working to resolve funding differences between the two bills. "We will continue to support those that support us, regardless of their party affiliation," the Fire Fighters Council said.

The Fire Fighters Council called Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Jeff Merkley "a great friend and supporter of working families." The Council credited Merkley, who has been endorsed by the Oregon AFL-CIO and numerous unions, for helping pass a bill in the 2007 Legislature that allows firefighters and police to bargain safety-related issues in contracts. That right was stripped from them in 1995.

majority; not all affiliates had delegates in attendance.

Merkley's role as House speaker in the upcoming special session of the Oregon Legislature was not weighed in the decision to endorse. It's not clear that any bills of major importance to labor will be voted on in the February 2008 session, which lawmakers scheduled as a way to test the feasibility of annual legislative sessions. The Legislature normally meets only in odd-numbered years.

COPE will look at other endorse-

ments at its next quarterly meeting, including the race for Oregon secretary of state, where several candidates have filed.

Politics is a large part of the reason for the existence of the Oregon AFL-CIO, which pools the clout of affiliated unions to make an impact in the State Capitol. In late November, the federation applied for a quarter-million-dollar grant from the national AFL-CIO, which it would use to ramp up political efforts at the local level; a decision is expected by mid-January.

Happy Holidays!

From the **Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO**

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