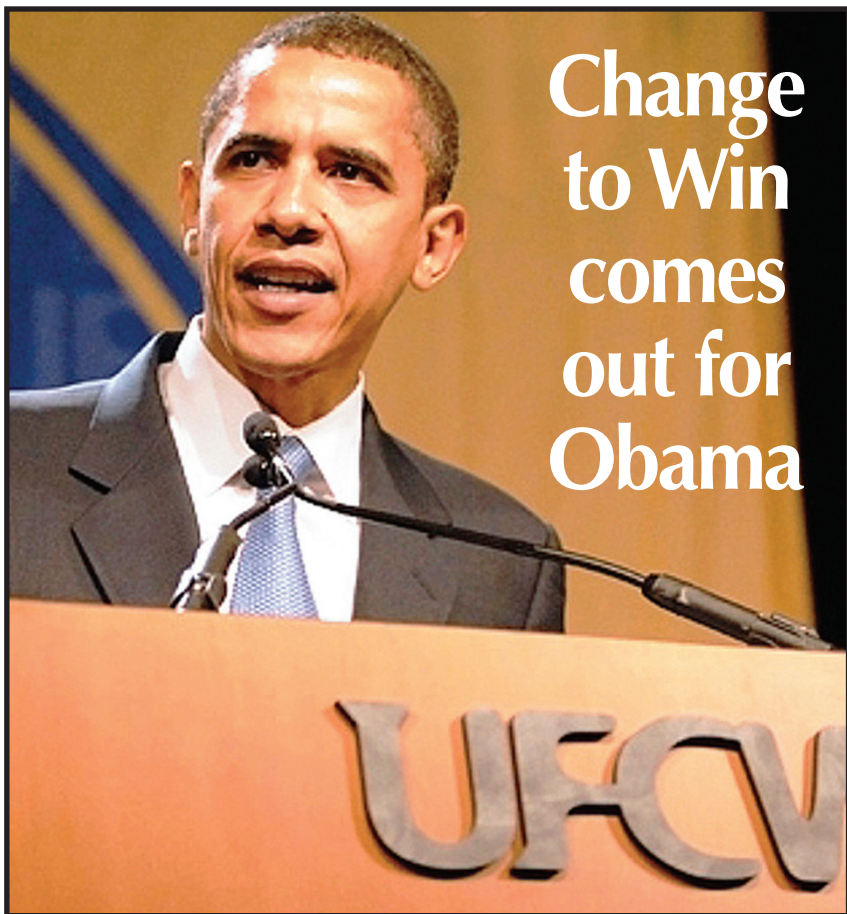




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PortlandChange
to Win
comes
out for
Obama

Democrat presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama spoke at a UFCW conference in Chicago last year. Last month he won the endorsement of that union, along with the Service Employees, Teamsters, UNITE HERE, and the Change to Win federation.

Four large CTW unions say his vision to restore America resonates with members

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI)—Saying his message of changing hope into reality has inspired its members across the country, and that it's time for the Democratic presidential nomination race to end, the Change to Win labor federation on Feb. 21 endorsed Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) for president.

"One reason we endorsed now is because we think we can make a difference," said CTW Chairwoman Anna Burger. "It's time to bring this process to a close. There's a movement building here, and winds of change are blowing for Barack Obama."

The Change to Win endorsement came just weeks before March 4 primaries in Texas, Ohio, and Rhode Island, where a large number of delegates are up for grabs. [The outcome of those primaries was not available at press time on March 4.]

Obama is in a close Democratic primary race with Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York. Clinton — who is endorsed by several large unions affiliated with AFL-CIO — had been the front-runner until mid-February, when Obama went on a tear and won 11 states. Prior to March 4, Obama had won 26 primaries to Clinton's 11 and held a delegate lead of 1,202 to 1,042.

The seven unions in the Change to Win federation broke from the AFL-CIO in 2005 over internal disagreements about organizing and political activity. The national AFL-CIO has remained neutral in the primaries.

The immediate practical effect of the Change to

Win endorsement was to have four of the federation's largest unions — the Service Employees, United Food and Commercial Workers, the Teamsters, and UNITE HERE — join forces to mobilize their members in phone-calling, leafleting, door-knocking and other campaign activities in Ohio and Texas.

Burger said CTW unions have 175,000 members in Ohio and 60,000 members in Texas.

Two other CTW affiliates, the Laborers and Carpenters, have yet to finish their internal canvassing of members. The Carpenters initially endorsed John Edwards, who dropped out earlier this year. The seventh CTW union, the United Farm Workers, is supporting Clinton.

Burger said Obama's stands on trade, on achieving the American Dream and on the war in Iraq "really resonated with our members."

"NAFTA passed when Bill Clinton (Hillary's husband) was president," Burger continued referring to the controversial U.S.-Canada-Mexico free trade treaty that labor fought, arguing it would cost thousands of jobs.

"We have seen and lived through the impact of bad trade policies on working families in this country," Burger added.

Obama has told union audiences repeatedly that if elected, he would tell the Mexican president and the Canadian prime minister that NAFTA must be renegotiated to stop the job losses.

Postal Workers Union claims USPS in Portland is re-routing mail around anthrax-sniffing machines

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Six years after letters containing anthrax killed two Washington, D.C., postal workers, several complaints filed by union workers in Portland suggest caution may be waning at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

In December, to deal with a heightened volume of letters, Portland's central post office processed some letters without using machines that were installed to detect anthrax.

That spurred members of Portland-based American Postal Workers Union Local 128 to file a union contract grievance, a complaint with the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and a report to the USPS postal inspectors.

The anthrax scare started a week after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when letters containing anthrax spores were sent to at least five major news organizations; three weeks later, letters containing a more refined version of anthrax were sent to

two U.S. senators. At least 22 people developed anthrax infections, and five of those died, including two APWU members at the Brentwood postal facility in Washington, D.C. Anthrax is a not-uncommon livestock disease, but particular strains of the bacteria that cause it have been developed for use as biological weapons.

In the wake of the attacks, Congress appropriated \$1.4 billion to protect the mail by buying and installing "biohazard detection systems" in USPS facilities. By late last year, the systems, manufactured and maintained by Northrop Grumman, had been installed at all 283 major USPS processing facilities.

The systems are set up to catch anthrax in stamped letters collected from postal boxes or home mailboxes — not commercial mass mailings, which are the bulk of USPS workload. Anthrax-sniffing machines are integrated into USPS' high speed letter-cancelling equipment. A vacuum takes an air sample from a batch of letters, which is then tested by DNA analysis to look for anthrax. It takes 30 to 45 minutes to get the test

result. If any of the machines ever detect anthrax, an alarm is supposed to go off, and postal workers have been trained to follow procedures to contain the batch and evacuate the building.

That's where mail processing clerk Roseanna Foster-Mikhail comes in. Foster-Mikhail, a 22-year postal employee, is Local 128's safety and health representative, and the person responsible for biohazard training for local postal employees. Her union's members maintain the machine, though another union, the Laborers-affiliated National Postal Mail Handlers Union, represents workers who use the machine.

The Portland post office has eight of the high-tech cancellation machines, each capable of scanning and stamping the cancellation mark on 30,000 pieces of mail per hour. But even that's not enough around holidays like Christmas, when letter volumes soar — from 1.5 million pieces a night to as much as 3 million pieces, according to L.C. Hansen, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82.

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