

America's middle class is rapidly shrinking

By TOM CHAMBERLAIN
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Portland's Thom Hartmann writes about it; Democratic presidential candidates run on it; Republicans ignore it; American working families live it and our children will suffer because of it.

"It" is the knowledge that today it will take the children of low-income families four to five generations to reach the middle class. It is a frightening statistic, but coupled with a shrinking middle class, we are headed toward dark days for future generations of American workers.

How did we go from Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches America, where if you worked hard and played by the rules, then anything and everything was achievable? How did we get to an America where workers fall farther behind every day?

I think most folks know exactly how we got to this moment in time:

- A shrinking union movement
- Corporate driven trade agreements
- Cheaper labor markets
- Privatization
- Out-of-whack timber policy
- High cost of education
- Corporate welfare
- The development of a "me-first"

economy.

As candidates campaign in 2008 and expound on their vision for fixing America, we as workers must dig deeply into what they are saying. For example, recent legislation expanded tax breaks for renewable energy.

There are some projections that tax credits will increase from \$10 million to over \$100 million in little more than one decade. With these tax-credit incentives based on the premise that "green jobs" will create jobs like those lost in the Oregon manufacturing or timber sectors — it sounds like a plan.

But, what exactly are the facts?

To date, in spite of tax incentives, attempting to move Oregon as a hub for green industries fueled by Oregon-produced green energy and the corresponding creation of high quality green jobs — high quality green jobs that are supposed to pay good wages and provide good health and retirement benefits — these jobs have not yet been defined, nor have they even been created.

Instead, we are creating jobs such as solar panel installers that pay \$10 an hour and pay no benefits. Part of the problem lays in competing priorities. For example: What should come first — good jobs or protecting the environment? Most of us believe that you can accomplish both.

Our problem has been well-meaning folks who are talking about good jobs but are not defining what that really means. A definition of good jobs will not occur until the unions representing the worker's perspective become included in the debate.

Unions cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and watch. That is why over the last two years the Oregon AFL-CIO devoted time and effort to the building of the Oregon Apollo Alliance.

The Apollo Alliance is a coalition of unions, environmentalists and businesses whose mission is to develop strategies that create high quality jobs while slowing and ultimately reversing climate change and achieving energy self-reliance.

Oregon AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Byrd has focused her time and talents through the Apollo Alliance in developing relationships within the environmental and business communities, educating them on the importance of the development of middle-class jobs as an essential component of Oregon's debate on global warming and achieving energy self-reliance.

The development of the Governor's Study Group on Renewable Energy in 2006 is a case in point. Unions were not invited into the

process; rather we inserted ourselves. Thankfully, the governor immediately made room at the table for the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Unfortunately, because the process had already begun, our voice was actually an after-thought at that point. Pro-worker components are still sorely lacking from renewable tax credits. As strategies are formulated to create incentives; the development of renewable energy; conservation; and green industries — we must also include in those strategies an evaluation of what types of jobs we are creating. Are we creating short-term entry-level jobs or creating long term employment? Are we creating jobs

that pay good wages and benefits? And if job projections are not met or even considered, how does Oregon recoup our investment from companies that have not met their promises?

The 2009 Legislative session must mandate an evaluation of the impact of tax incentives in job creation. Legislators need to demand that those receiving tax incentives pay them back if they do not fulfill their promises.

Finally, policymakers need to also review the fact that there is no prohibition on the use of state and local tax dollars in opposing a worker's right to join a union and collectively bargain.

Klare's column missed

To The Editor:

As radicals in the labor movement, we will miss Gene Klare's column in the Northwest Labor Press. We thank him for defending the constitutional rights of all workers.

In the early 1990s, Klare supported the Freeway Hall case. This case involved the right of the Freedom Socialist Party to keep its membership list, contributor list, minutes and financial records private.

Strong support from the community and labor activists, such as Gene, helped defeat the McCarthyist attack on the First Amendment. This free speech victory protects the internal documents of other organizations and unions. It allows internal debates, comments and

names to be recorded in minutes without fear they they will fall into the hands of political enemies through court actions.

We need more Gene Klare's in the labor movement — principled unionists willing to stand up for workers who are attacked because of their political ideology.

Glenn Kirkindall
UFCW 555
Portland

Laura Mannen
Forest Grove Education Assoc.
Forest Grove

Travis Giobi
Painters Local 10
Portland



Swanson Thomas & Coon is proud to announce that Governor Ted Kulongoski has appointed Margaret F. Weddell (Personal Injury and Workers' Compensation Counsel Extraordinaire) to the WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD for the STATE of OREGON.

We will miss her bright eyes and good sense.

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Local Motion

February 2008

Union activity in Oregon and Southwest Washington, according to the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Election results

| Company | Date | Union | Location | Results: | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|---|
| | | | | Union | No Union |
| City of Gervais Police Department | 1/3 | Laborers Local 483 | Gervais | card check, unit of 3 |  |

Representation petitions

| Company | Union | Location | # of employees |
|--|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| Three J's Distributing | | Clackamas | 22 |
| Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers | Local 114 | | |