



NORTHWEST

LABOR  
PRESS

Volume 109

Number 7

April 4, 2008

Portland



### Responding to solar demand

In response to an increase in demand for trained solar electricians, the NECA-IBEW Local 280 training center in Tangent is conducting additional 16-hour solar installation classes for journeymen electricians. Above, journeymen Carlos Rivera, Miguel Rivera and Todd Hanson deconstruct a 2.1 kW solar array during a class held March 12. The union has been training electricians on solar panel installations since 2000, said Local 280 Business Manager Tim Nicol. "Solar installation curriculum is taught to every apprentice who goes through our program. Renewable energy has been a top priority for us." Eight more classes will be held this year. Currently there are 350 Local 280 journeymen and women qualified to make Oregon Energy Trust-certified installations.

## Schrader, Kroger garner AFL-CIO endorsements

John Kroger was endorsed by the Oregon AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) to be the state's next attorney general, and State Sen. Kurt Schrader was picked to succeed Darlene Hooley in Congress.

Delegates met March 27 in Northeast Portland to discuss races in the May 20 primary. To endorse a candidate requires a two-thirds majority vote of delegates.

Earlier this year, the Oregon AFL-CIO endorsed Jeff Merkley in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senate and Ben Westlund for State Treasurer. Merkley is facing Steve Novick in the Democratic primary, with the winner taking on Republican incumbent Gordon Smith. Westlund is unopposed.

Three Democratic state senators vying for secretary of state will fight it out in the primary without an endorsement from the AFL-CIO. The state labor federation took no action in the race between Rick Metzger, Vicki Walker and Kate Brown. A motion just to consider endorsing in the race failed to get enough votes to proceed.

Kroger, a Lewis & Clark Law School professor and a former federal prosecutor, is in a heated battle with Lake Oswego State Rep. Greg Macpherson in the Democratic primary. The four-term incumbent, Democrat Hardy Myers, is retiring, and no Republican has filed for the post, which means the winner of the Democratic primary will be the next attorney general.

Kroger captured the COPE endorsement by a vote of 13-4.

Gary Gillespie, president of Oregon AFSCME Council 75, described Kroger as "a fresh voice who will work in connection with the the labor commissioner to make sure workers' rights are enforced."

Macpherson was criticized by several delegates for his leading role in shep-

(Turn to Page 2)

# National health care may be on the horizon

**Clinton and Obama push piecemeal steps to universal care, while McCain proposes eliminating employer-paid coverage**

By DON MCINTOSH  
Associate Editor

Next year could be the year Congress passes some kind of major national health care reform.

By now very few Americans, even among the insured, think the U.S. health care system is fine the way it is. On the contrary, it's widely seen as costly, inefficient, and hard to understand. About 47 million Americans have no health insurance, and for those who have insurance, costs are rising. Family coverage premiums are up 78 percent since 2001 — over four times the increase in wages or inflation. Last year, average employer-paid family health premiums topped

\$1,000 a month for the first time.

America's health care system is unique: No other developed country gives private insurance companies a dominant role, or lets so many citizens suffer from a lack of care. Either, like Canada, they have national insurance (kind of like Medicare, but covering all citizens, not just seniors), or, like Great Britain, they have a national health service (kind of like America's VA hospitals for armed service veterans, where doctors are government employees).

America has a hodge-podge health care system, with different levels of public subsidy for different groups. Servicemen and women, and veterans, get health care directly from government doctors. Seniors 65 and older get government health insurance known as Medicare. Some very poor people get state-administered health coverage through Medicaid. Some children from families not poor enough to be on Medicaid get coverage through a program called the State Children's

Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP. When employers provide health insurance, they pay for it in pre-tax dollars, which works out to be a substantial public tax subsidy. Individuals outside the above groups are mostly on their own; they can purchase private health insurance, or go without.

This year, each major party candidate for president has a set of health care reform proposals.

U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-New York) proposes to require uninsured individuals to get and pay for health insurance. A tax credit would help them pay for it, scaled so as to limit health premiums to a certain percentage of income. Individuals could choose a new Medicare-like plan for all ages, or they could get the same choice of private insurers as members of Congress. Those who are now insured could keep what they have, if they want to. Large employers would be required to provide health coverage, or pay for it. Small employers would get a tax credit if they choose

to provide health coverage.

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Illinois) proposes a new public insurance program which would be available voluntarily to all uninsured individu-

als — and to small businesses that want to cover their employees. A public subsidy would be available to help pay the premiums, using a sliding

(Turn to Page 4)

## Welcome, McMinnville Steelworkers Local 8378

The Northwest Labor Press would like to welcome United Steelworkers Local 8378 as its newest subscribing union.

The McMinnville-based local represents approximately 400 workers at Cascade Steel Rolling Mills, where they manufacture reinforcing bar, wire rod, coiled rebar, and merchant bar from recycled materials.

The mill is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Schnitzer Steel Industries, Inc.

Local 8378 members can find their official Meeting Notice on Page 6 of this issue, and the free Bargain Counter classified ads section on Page 10. To submit a free classified ad, e-mail it to [Michael492@comcast.net](mailto:Michael492@comcast.net) or mail it to P.O. Box 13150, Portland, OR 97213.

The NW Labor Press covers union-related stories in Oregon and Southwest Washington and on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.