

...Over a dozen unions endorse Merkley's Senate campaign

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the Oregon Senate in 1992 and became Senate president in 1995. During his two terms in the State Senate, Smith voted with the Oregon AFL-CIO 25 percent of the time.

In January 1996, Smith lost a close race against Democrat Ron Wyden in a bruising special election to fill the U.S. Senate seat of Republican Bob Packwood, who resigned following a highly publicized sex scandal.

When Republican U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield retired later that year, Smith ran again. This time he defeated political newcomer Tom Bruggere.

Smith easily won re-election in 2002, defeating Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury.

As a U.S. senator, Smith has voted in agreement with the national AFL-CIO 24 percent of the time: In 11 years of tracked votes, Smith agreed with the labor federation 31 times and disagreed 100 times. About two-thirds of the pro-labor votes were cast in an election year or the year before, whereas in the years immediately after his two election wins he voted against the AFL-CIO 100 percent of the time.

Occasions on which Smith agreed with labor included a 2007 'no' vote on a bill that would have banned "card check" as a method of unionization. He also voted for bills that would have allowed Medicare to bargain over drug prices, and would have legalized importation of prescription drugs. Several times, Smith has voted to preserve the requirement that construction workers on federal projects be paid the prevailing wage.

Partly in gratitude for that, the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council endorsed Smith's re-election bid in 2002. This year, however, the council is staying out of the race, and two building trades organizations have endorsed Merkley — the Oregon State Association of Electrical Workers, and Exterior and Interior Specialists Local 2154 of the Carpenters Union.

That may be because on so many key issues — trade policy, workers' rights, tax fairness — Smith is a labor opponent.

When the union movement's top priority, the Employee Free Choice Act, made it to the Senate floor in 2007 with majority support, Smith joined a handful of Republican senators to block it. On a vote of 51-48, the Senate voted for cloture — to shut off debate. Sixty votes are needed to invoke cloture and end the debate and move to a vote on the bill. So even though a majority of the Senate voted for cloture (and supported the bill), Smith and a few others wouldn't let it happen.

That vote is one of the things that cost Smith the support of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, said Joint Council 37 Representative Lynn Lehrbach. Smith's company has had a decent working relationship with

Teamsters Local 839, Lehrbach said. And Joint Council 37 backed Smith for re-election in 2002. This year the union has endorsed Merkley.

Merkley is a strong supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act, and has taken flak for it from voters because national anti-union groups are running television ads criticizing him for it, saying the bill would strip workers of the "secret ballot" in union

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elections.

"The Employee Free Choice Act doesn't take away any right to a ballot," Merkley told the Labor Press. "Since about 1935 there've been two ways for workers to form unions. One is through a majority of folks signing a card. And the other is through an election. But it's the employer who has control of that choice. And I think workers should have control of the choice. It's that simple."

When the Oregon AFL-CIO began pro-Merkley mailings to union members, Smith campaign spokesperson Lindsay Gilbride told the Oregonian that "Jeff Merkley's union bosses" were distorting Gordon Smith's record.

Despite multiple requests, the Smith campaign did not agree to an interview in which he could have defended his record in the eyes of the Labor Press' 50,000-plus union member readers. Nor did Gilbride respond, as promised, to e-mailed questions about trade, workers' rights and retirement security.

The record is left to speak for itself.

Smith voted against allowing airport screeners to unionize. He voted against increasing the federal minimum wage when that proposal had no other provisions attached. He voted to stop a requirement that employers try to prevent ergonomic injuries (the first time Congress had ever stepped in to nullify an Occupational Safety and Health Administration rule).

Smith voted for the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts, in which most of the tax savings went to the wealthiest taxpayers. Thanks to the 2001 cut, income from capital gains and dividends is now taxed at a lower rate than income earned from wages. And the Bush tax cuts sent the federal budget from surplus to deficit.

[Merkley says he would vote to elimi-

nate the Bush tax cuts for citizens earning more than 250,000 a year.]

Smith told Northwest Oregon Labor Council delegates at an August 2007 breakfast that he would work with labor to reform national labor law so that it's not so stacked against workers. Nothing appears to have come of that pledge.

When Bush tried to privatize Social Security in 2005, Smith, who was then the chair of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, took no public position, but echoed Bush Administration talking points about Social Security being in dire need of a fix.

Merkley says he would never support Social Security privatization. He downplays the urgency of Social Security insolvency, and says he would not vote to raise the cap on Social Security taxes — currently individuals pay no Social Security tax on income over \$102,000.

Merkley's Senate campaign is endorsed by over a dozen labor organizations, including the state's largest public and private sector unions. They include Oregon AFSCME Council 75, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, the Oregon Machinists Council, and the Oregon State Police Officers Association.

Just one union is endorsing Smith — the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council.

"Gordon Smith has a great track record on our issues," said Bob Livingston, IAFF's Oregon state council legislative director. Livingston said Smith co-sponsored IAFF's top priority, a bill that would require all states to give collective bargaining rights to public safety workers. Smith also supported increased federal funding for local fire departments, favorable tax treatment for retired public safety officers, and making it easier for surviving spouses to get public safety pensions.

Of course, Merkley, too, is "a great friend and supporter of working families," Livingston said. Last year, Merkley led passage of a state law that restored the right of public safety unions to bargain over safety conditions. That right had been stripped from police and fire unions in 1995 — by a law Smith helped pass when he was Oregon Senate president.

But Smith is the incumbent, and he backed IAFF in the Senate, Livingston said: "Our mantra is that we support those that support us."

Health care is a big issue for union voters. Smith is a co-sponsor of a bill authored by Sen. Wyden, which would replace employer-sponsored health coverage with a requirement that individuals buy insurance. Merkley says he also supports Wyden's plan, but with some reservations: It should not end existing health care plans that workers have negotiated with their employers, and individuals would need to have a public insurance op-

tion to choose from and not be forced to choose among profit-making insurance companies.

When it comes to trade policy, Smith has a perfect record of support for NAFTA-style treaties, "fast track" and normalizing trade relations with China and Vietnam. Even in the Oregon Senate in 1993, Smith voted against a symbolic resolution asking Congress not to ratify NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

Merkley, on the other hand, is a vocal critic of NAFTA, and not just in front of union audiences.

"They call it free trade," Merkley says in a television ad. "Problem is there's nothing free about it, and Oregon has paid a very heavy price, with nearly 70,000 jobs shipped overseas."

"Imagine that in Oregon there was one city that had no environmental rules and no labor rules," Merkley told the Labor Press. "Where would all the manufacturing go? They'd be sucked out of every other city in the state."

"Workers have been getting the short end of the stick," Merkley said.

"For the last 30 years, the standard of living has been flat or declining for 80 percent of Americans. We need two senators representing Oregon working together to fight for our workers and our families rather than doing favors and giving away funds to powerful special interests."

(Editor's Note: U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden has endorsed Merkley's campaign. In a press statement, Wyden pointed to the Democratic Party's slim 51-49 margin in the Senate. "We have seen more successful filibusters from the Republicans in the Senate than we have ever seen in the history of our country," Wyden said. "You've got to have 60 votes to move ahead — to break a filibuster to move on ...")

Two debates are scheduled between Smith and Merkley: One in Portland Oct. 10 will be aired on KGW-TV Portland, and one in Medford Oct. 13 will air on KOB-TV Medford, KOTI-TV Klamath Falls, KLSR-TV Eugene and KEVU-TV Eugene.)

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