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New stimulus package needs cash for infrastructure

Organized labor was pushing lawmakers hard to enact a second stimulus package when the 110th Congress returned for its lame-duck session that started Nov. 17.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and federation Legislative Director Bill Samuel said a "Stimulus II" bill should include extending federal jobless benefits from their current 26 weeks to 39 weeks, billions of dollars in spending for infrastructure projects — rebuilding highways, waterways, bridges and so on that could quickly provide high-paying construction jobs, and extending aid to states to deal with rising costs of Medicaid.

Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden agrees with that plan. Wyden told some Portland union members and local politicians during a post-Election Day tour of the state that a second stimulus package is his top priority.

"Good roads create good jobs in the short term and make commerce hum over the long term," he said at stops in Portland, Bend, Medford and Eugene. "Oregonians are struggling, and Congress now has a new beginning and an opportunity to invest in people, right here in America."

In Portland on Nov. 6, Wyden was joined by Sen.-elect Jeff Merkley, Mayor-elect Sam Adams, City Commissioner Randy Leonard, and



Portland Mayor-elect Sam Adams (at podium) introduces, from left, City Commissioner Randy Leonard, U.S. Sen.-elect Jeff Merkley and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden at a Portland press conference promoting a second federal stimulus package that would include money to shore up a crumbling infrastructure. In the background are union construction workers. Wyden toured the state after Election Day to help promote the stimulus package.

Multnomah County Chair Ted Wheeler at a press conference promoting the infrastructure portion of a stimulus package.

Adams said the City has put in a request for \$850 million in federal tax dollars to help fix roads and infrastructure in Portland and Multnomah County. He said there are eight "ready-to-go projects" in the area that will immediately create 312 local construction jobs — and more than 8,800 jobs over the next 18 months.

"We have been struggling with bailing wire and used dental floss and some gum to keep the local transportation system together, in addition to our sewers and water systems," Adams said.

Some of the projects Adams listed include \$435 million for replacement of the 100-year-old water reservoirs, \$75 million for a Portland Streetcar eastside extension, \$68 million in arterial street paving, \$22 million in bridge repairs, and \$86 million in parks and trails construction.

"These are all projects that need to be done. They aren't make-work jobs," said City Commissioner Randy Leonard, who was asked by Adams to spearhead the federal money request.

Senator-elect Merkley "seconded" the strategy, stating that "this sort of stimulus is the type we need in America and we need here in Ore-

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Labor's Election Day scorecard: A+

Organized labor enjoyed one of its biggest election night victories in decades.

The Oregon AFL-CIO took action in 65 federal, state, legislative races, and ballot measures in the general election — and 94 percent emerged as the winner (or loser, in the case of ballot measures the labor federation opposed).

The Change to Win labor federation of Oregon did not issue endorsements as an organization, but its affiliates endorsed most, if not all, of the same candidates as the AFL-CIO.

"One year ago — maybe even months ago — no one would have dared to dream of the kind of change we have experienced this election cycle," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. "The results are proof positive of the power of working people to bring change to Oregon and change to our country when the policies of Washington have left them behind."

At the top of the list, of course, was the historic election of the first

African-American — Barack Obama — as president of the United States.

Next was the election of Jeff Merkley to the U.S. Senate. Merkley defeated two-term Republican incumbent Gordon Smith. Smith spent nearly \$12 million — much of it on negative television advertising — trying to hold on to his seat. Merkley is the first challenger to unseat an incumbent U.S. senator in Oregon since 1968, when Republican Bob Packwood defeated Democratic Sen. Wayne Morse.

Merkley was among at least six labor-friendly senators nationwide to win election. The outcome of races in Alaska, Minnesota and Georgia were still undetermined at press time.

When the 111th Congress convenes in January 2009, Democrats will hold at least 55 seats in the Senate, with two Independents — Joe Lieberman and Bernie Sanders — caucusing with them.

Democrats also increased their majority in the U.S. House of Representatives to 259-176 — the largest ma-

majority in that chamber in 15 years.

Kurt Schrader in Oregon's 5th District will be one of the new members in the House. He soundly defeated Republican Mike Erickson in the race to succeed Democrat Darlene Hooley, who is retiring.

Labor-endorsed Democrats won every statewide race in Oregon. They included Kate Brown, secretary of state; John Kroger, attorney general; Ben Westlund, treasurer; and Brad Avakian, labor commissioner.

Labor-friendly candidates also were elected to the Oregon House and Senate. Come January 2009, Democrats will hold an 18-12 majority in the Senate and a 36-24 edge in the House.

One of labor's biggest legislative victories was Greg Matthews in House Dist. 50, where the president of Fire Fighters Local 1062 defeated incumbent Republican John Lim.

Matthews will be among eight new labor-endorsed members of the Oregon House. The others are Chris Garrett, Dist. 38, Lake Oswego; Jules

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Union members made a difference Nov. 4

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

In Oregon and around the nation, union staff, volunteers and members made a difference Nov. 4.

The AFL-CIO spent an estimated \$53 million on the election, and member unions spent an additional \$200 million. In the weeks prior to the election, national union offices virtually closed down as staff headed out to battleground states to do political work. About 4,000 paid staff worked on the AFL-CIO mobilization nationwide to inform union members on issues and candidates and getting them out to vote.

AFL-CIO union voters received 70 million phone calls, 10 million door knocks, 57 million pieces of mail and 27 million worksite fliers, focusing on economic issues. And the AFL-CIO community affiliate, Working America, sent out as many as 1,000 full-time canvassers in 11 battleground states to knock on more than 300,000 doors.

Nationwide, about 21 percent of voters were members of a union or union household. According to a post-election analysis by the national AFL-CIO, more than 80 percent of union members received union publications and union mail, 59 percent received live phone calls and 32 percent received worksite fliers.

Those contacts made a difference. While voters overall went for Barack Obama 52 percent compared to 45 percent for John McCain, union voters supported Obama 67 percent to 30 percent. In battleground

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