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# LABOR PRESS

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## Inauguration Day festivities

Retired International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48 business manager Ed Barnes and his wife, Luanne, were among many union members from Oregon and Washington to attend the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Barack Obama. "It was one of the greatest experiences of my 75 years of life," Barnes said. "We finally have an open door policy at the White House for labor." For more on organized labor's participation in the inauguration, see Page 12.

## Recession deepens *But help is on the way, say elected leaders*

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

It's getting scary out there. The recession that began officially in December 2007 worsened rapidly in November and December. Daily announcements of business closures and mass layoffs are pushing up unemployment numbers to levels not seen in decades.

As of December, unemployment was at 7.2 percent nationally, while in Oregon, the figure was 9.0 percent, the highest level since 1983. As of December, about 175,000 Oregonians were unemployed, 70,000 more than the year before.

And sectors where union workers are concentrated — like manufacturing and construction — are some of the hardest hit. John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia-Pacific Building & Construction Trades Council, said 10 to 25 percent of local construction union workers were on their unions' out-of-work lists as of mid-January, depending on the craft.

"My guess is some are going to be

out of work for quite a while," Mohlis said — because few projects are in the pipeline for the warm-weather busy season.

"The contractors have nothing to bid on," said Frank Regalado, business manager of Elevator Constructors Local 23. "I think by June we're going to have problems."

At the Daimler Trucks North America Portland truck plant (formerly Freightliner) 192 workers were laid off January 30, including members of Machinists Lodge 1005, Teamsters Local 305, Sign Painters and Paint Makers Local 1094, and Service Employees Local 49. The company had earlier planned to start week-long shutdowns once-a-month, but instead decided to lay some workers off.

For Daryl Payne, 39, the layoff means he'll go from \$860 a week to \$482 — the maximum weekly unemployment benefit. Payne, a 15-year production technician, is looking at taking two years of welding classes at Clark College in Vancouver, which he hopes will help him become a union

steamfitter like his father.

Some unions have worked out creative ways to cushion the blow of layoffs. In McMinnville, Cascade Steel Rolling Mills laid off 77 union workers in December, leaving just over 300.

When United Steel Workers Local 8378 President Joe Munger learned further layoffs might be coming, he met with company managers and they came up with a way to match production to lowered demand. Members approved a "rolling layoff" by a strong margin. The way it works, the company shuts down department-by-department for a week or two at a time. Workers get unemployment benefits for the weeks they're off. Cascade Steel guarantees everyone will work at least two weeks out of every four, and agreed to pay full health care premiums for at least the first month. The two sides will meet each month to extend the deal. It's good for the company because they'll be ready if and when demand rebounds; steel industry analysts say that could be six to nine

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## Employee Free Choice Act

# Labor wants Obama to prioritize, help promote EFCA

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The AFL-CIO wants President Barack Obama to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to campaign for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act.

By "speaking positively about unions and workers' rights to organize," by promising to "stand with and protect" workers' rights and "by criticizing employers who interfere" with unionization, Obama's administration "can set a new tone and put our nation's labor-relations system back on the right track," the national labor federation said.

Looking at history, union officials noted that as president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt told the country that if he worked in a factory, the first thing he would do is join a union. That led to significant growth in labor's ranks.

Forty years later, President Ronald Reagan sent exactly the opposite message when he fired striking air traffic controllers. "That led to employer anti-union tactics at a level not seen in decades," the AFL-CIO said.

"The Obama Administration can make a

tremendous difference by publicly sending the message that the administration believes in, and supports, workers' rights to form and join unions, and the importance of a thriving labor movement to our nation's economic health and well-being," the AFL-CIO concluded.

Last month, labor rolled out a new \$3 million advertising campaign mobilizing members of churches, consumer groups, civil rights groups, and environmental groups to push Congress to enact the Employee Free Choice Act.

Pro-EFCA advertisements are airing on national cable television networks, as well as on news talk shows, said Mary Beth Maxwell, executive director of American Rights at Work, which assembled the coalition.

Speakers at a press conference launching the campaign said giving workers organizing and bargaining power raises their standards of living, which in turn injects more money into workers' pockets.

"When the law passes and the long decline in unionization stops, workers will have increased

bargaining power, higher living standards, more health care, better pension benefits and higher wages," said Dean Baker, director of the Center for Economic Policy Research.

That same point was made by Rhode Island Price Rite grocery worker Joe Sorrentino, one of the campaigners for the United Food and Commercial Workers' organizing drive at the firm. "I don't see any big problem with giving Americans better pay and medical coverage," he said.

Price Rite is resisting the organizing drive, even though its parent grocery chain operates 95 percent union.

The Employee Free Choice Act would not only write majority sign-up into labor law — with workers rather than bosses deciding how to move forward — it would also impose heftier fines for labor law breakers, order the National Labor Relations Board to get court injunctions against flagrant violators, and mandate binding arbitration for a first contract if the workers' union and the bosses can't agree on one within 120 days.

AFL-CIO Legislative Director Bill Samuel

said the ad campaign is concentrating on 15 to 16 key states whose senators — Democratic and especially Republican — hold the key to overcoming a planned GOP filibuster against the law. A majority of senators supported EFCA last session, but it was procedurally blocked from a vote by Republicans in the minority.

Samuel said backers now count 60 votes to stop a filibuster, including Senate co-sponsor Arlen Specter, R-Pa. But they want to clear that barrier with plenty to spare and they have to do so in the face of a multi-million dollar business advertising campaign against it.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has indicated that he won't take up the Employee Free Choice Act until sometime this summer. It's an "important piece of legislation," Reid told the Las Vegas Sun newspaper. "We're going to get to that."

"It will not be an easy lift," said Wade Henderson, executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, who was at the press con-

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