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Area politicians pledge to spend federal stimulus funds locally

The Multnomah County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution April 30 pledging to use American-made and Oregon-made goods and services when spending grant dollars it receives under the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Five other government agencies in Oregon and a couple in Southwest Washington have passed similar resolutions. They include Albany City Council, Sweet Home City Council, Carlton City Council, Yamhill County Board of Commissioners, and Yamhill School District in Oregon; the Clark County Board of Commissioners, Kelso City Council and the Regional Transportation Council in Southwest Washington.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is a \$787 billion economic stimulus package enacted by Congress in February to boost the U.S. economy in the wake of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

The "Make Our Future Work" resolution is the brainchild of the United Steelworkers Union, which is lobbying support from more than 1,000 governmental bodies nationwide. To date, 400 resolutions have been passed.

"This can help stop job losses by purchasing Oregon goods and services first," said Judy O'Connor, executive secretary-treasurer of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, who testified in favor of the resolution along with Gaylan Prescott, a Steelworkers international union representative from the 12th District, and Bob Tackett, a Workforce Investment Act labor liaison for the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Prescott said the intent of the resolution is to get local and state governments and leaders to keep the taxpayer-provided stimulus dollars in America to create jobs locally.

He told Multnomah County commissioners that stimulus money could help put more than 100 unemployed Steelworkers at Cascade Rolling Mills back to work making construction rebar. "This kind of resolution speaks directly to them," he said.

Prescott said steelmaking capacity in the U.S. is at only 50 percent, while



Special delivery

Volunteers John Vandermosten (left) and Sam Smith were among 21 volunteers from the Democratic Party of Multnomah County to sort through food donations at the Gresham Post Office May 9, part of the Stamp Out Hunger food drive sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers and the U.S. Postal Service. Members of NALC Branch 82 in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties brought in 684,661 pounds of food this year, a 2.5 percent increase from a year ago. Gresham accounted for 34,854 pounds — an 8.5 percent increase. Total collection statewide had not been calculated at press time. Smith is a member of Branch 82 who took time from his vacation to volunteer. His wife and teen-age children also have helped sort food at the event for more than a decade. Vandermosten is a retired member of IBEW Local 48. The Oregon Food Bank distributes the food.

China is at 100 percent capacity.

County commissioners voted unanimously in support of the resolution.

"I don't think you'll get any arguments here," said Chair Ted Wheeler. "It's a longstanding philosophy of this board to buy local and to encourage others to buy local."

Wheeler said a vast majority, "if not all" of the grant money that comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will be spent locally.

Commissioner Deborah Kafoury

advised the union officials to take the resolution to the Oregon Legislature, where lawmakers are debating a transportation funding package.

Prescott told the Labor Press after the hearing that the deadline to file bills in the Oregon Legislature had passed and that efforts to attach the resolution to another bill were unsuccessful.

Union officials are now lobbying Gov. Ted Kulongoski, trying to convince him to issue an Executive Order in support of the resolution.

Legislature rattles Washington unions

Most of labor's priority bills didn't get a vote

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, is still sifting through the wreckage of its hopes for the 2009 legislative session, weeks after the session's end. WSLC staff are trying to come up with a fair way to rate lawmakers when most of labor's priority bills never got a vote, and in one case, a majority of Senate Democrats colluded to prevent a record of how they voted on a bill important to labor.

Lawmakers passed no significant pro-labor bills during the session, which ran Jan. 12 to April 26. And that was despite the overwhelming majority held by Democrats: 64 to 34 in the House and 31 to 18 in the Senate.

Republicans could not be blamed for halting progress on a paid family leave benefit, for example, which the Legislature approved in 2007 but never funded. Now it was the Democrats' own leadership who nixed labor's agenda — chiefly Gov. Chris Gregoire, House Speaker Frank Chopp and Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown.

And the most dramatic betrayal took place mid-March, when the three Democratic leaders killed WSLC's top priority bill, using a leaked internal e-mail from a WSLC staffperson as an excuse. The three even asked police to investigate whether the e-mailed threat to withhold future contributions crossed a legal line into undue influence. Washington State Police said no law was broken, but that didn't give the Worker Privacy Act a second life. The bill would have stopped employers from disciplining workers who refuse to attend anti-union meetings at work.

But it wasn't just the state-level labor law reform that was shot down. Virtually every legislative position staked out by labor went down to defeat. A labor-backed bill to give organized labor a non-voting seat on local transit district boards died without a vote. So did a bill giving a group of community college teachers the right to unionize. And a bill requiring payment of the prevail-

ing wage on mixed public-private construction projects. And a bill to protect farm workers from unscrupulous labor contractors. All died without a vote.

In Washington as in other states, the recession is cutting deeply into state revenues. Rather than heed calls by labor and others to look for new revenue sources and get rid of business tax breaks, legislators passed an "all-cuts" budget. That was in keeping with Gov. Gregoire's "no new taxes" campaign pledge. As a result, about 40,000 low-income Washingtonians will lose state-subsidized health benefits. As many as 8,000 public workers will be laid off, including 3,000 to 5,000 public school teachers. And university tuition will be going up as much as 14 percent a year for the next two years. The Evergreen State College Labor Center, which provides educational and research services to labor unions, had its budget cut by two-thirds.

Lawmakers voted to delay, for three more years, implementation of the paid family leave program, which is supposed to provide up to five weeks of partial wage replacement of up to \$250 per week upon the birth or adoption of a child.

In the final hours of the session, the Senate stripped pro-worker amendments from a business-backed cut in the unemployment insurance tax, and the House followed suit. Changes made by previous legislatures to the state unemployment insurance system reduced unemployment benefits slightly. As a result, unemployment trust fund reserves swelled: By early 2009, reserves were enough to cover 21 months of benefits. This year, business used that as a justification for lowering unemployment insurance taxes, and won passage of a Senate bill to do that.

In the House, WSLC fought and won amendments to the Senate bill: eliminating those earlier benefit cuts, and restoring the right of workers to get unemployment insurance benefits if they quit a job to move when a spouse gets a job in another area. But the House and Senate have to pass the same version before a bill can go to the governors' desk. When the Senate voted on the bill a second time, there

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