

At Oregon Legislature

For some union-backed bills — better luck next time

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

SALEM —The Democratic-controlled Oregon Legislature's 2009 session was successful overall for organized labor. Lawmakers increased the share of taxes paid by the wealthiest, increased aid to the unemployed, and made it harder for employers to browbeat workers during union campaigns. But other union-backed proposals failed to win passage. Some of those may rise to the top of labor's priority list next time around.

Reform of the state's Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC) was one high priority, said Oregon AFL-CIO spokesperson Elana Guiney. BETC gives businesses back 50 cents for every dollar they put into wind or solar energy, and the price tag of that incentive has swelled to over \$100 million a year. The Oregon AFL-CIO wanted some ac-

countability added — like wage and benefit standards for the jobs that result from the projects, or even just a report on the number and quality of the jobs. Lawmakers voted to extend the BETC to electric vehicle manufacturing, and curtail it for wind farms. But union proposals for accountability and job standards just didn't gain traction.

Meanwhile, HB 2831, a collection of union-backed reforms to Oregon's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act, passed the House 35 to 21, but failed on a 14-16 vote in the Senate. The bill was intended to undo parts of SB 750, which was passed by a Republican House and Senate in 1995 to weaken labor law for public employees. But this year's Democratic lawmakers heard from city and county leaders that the reforms would increase costs and make management harder. All 12 Republicans and four Senate Democrats voted

against it; the Democrats were Betsy Johnson, Rick Metsger, Martha Schrader, and Joanne Verger.

Building trades unions were unable to win passage of a bill requiring payment of the prevailing wage to construction workers employed by large projects that receive enterprise zone property tax abatements.

And a bill making it easier to get permits to construct pipelines, such as several proposed for liquid natural gas, failed to win approval.

"A lot of pro-worker legislation had a hard time in the Senate," Guiney said.

The Oregon House has at least half a dozen "labor legislators" who have had direct membership in or involvement with unions, but the Senate has only one — former Communications Workers of America leader Diane Rosenbaum.

Rosenbaum pushed hard for a union-backed bill providing a modest benefit for workers who take family leave. Workers would get the benefit after the birth or adoption of a child or to care for a family member with a serious health condition. But that too went nowhere. Business associations opposed it and said, incredibly, that it would hurt working people.

And some perennial proposals backed by some unions never got off the ground, such as:

- Setting minimum nurse-to-patient staffing ratios at hospitals;
- Reining in the overuse of part-time no-benefit faculty at community colleges; and
- Narrowing the definition of "dis-

ability" under a state program that lets government agencies contract out to non-profits that employ the disabled. [Oregon School Employees Association has argued that some "qualified rehabilitation facilities" are abusing the law by employing people with little or no real disability.]

The Legislature will meet in a limited special session in February 2010, and then face election in November 2010 before the next regular session begins again in January 2011.

Guiney said the Oregon AFL-CIO's individual ratings of lawmakers will be released in late summer.

Governor signs Oregon AFL-CIO's top priority bill with little fanfare

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski was scheduled to travel to Bend July 15 to sign a law that renames U.S. 97 "World War II Veterans Historic Highway." There were signing ceremonies scheduled for laws mandating school coaches be trained to recognize concussions, making roads safer for farm equipment, and requiring that insurance companies pay for phenylketonuria treatment. Press releases gave public notice when he signed bills clarifying sex offender reporting procedures, and eliminating minor requirements for appointment to the Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee.

But on June 30, when the governor signed the Oregon AFL-CIO's top priority bill of the session, there was no fanfare, no signing ceremony, no announcement of any kind. SB 519, the Worker Freedom Act, will give workers the right to skip management-led anti-union meetings. The Oregon AFL-CIO requested a signing ceremony, but only learned the bill was signed after the fact.

"Our members who testified on the bill would have loved to be there" said Oregon AFL-CIO spokesperson Elana Guiney.

Still, Guiney said, the bill was signed into law, and the labor federation is appreciative of that fact. Oregon is the first to pass this particular advance for workers, and the national AFL-CIO hopes to get other states to do the same. Plans were afoot as of press time for national AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka to call Kulongoski and express thanks.

Former Oregon AFL-CIO president Tim Nesbitt, now the governor's deputy chief of staff, said Kulongoski was busy with the budget when SB 519 was signed.







Rem Nivens, the governor's spokesperson, said there are too many bills to sign for the governor to have a ceremony for each one, but added that plans will be made for a private ceremony in which the governor will sign a parchment copy of the bill in the presence of representatives of organized labor.

Local Motion

June 2009

Union certifications and decertifications in Oregon and Southwest Washington, as reported by the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Recognition elections






Date	Name of employer	Name of union	Location	Results:		
				Union Yes	Union No	
6/4	UPS Ground Freight (decertification)	Machinists	Portland	8	2	
6/10	Alstom APComPower	Laborers Local 320	Troutdale	3	0	
6/16	Lincoln County Road Department	Lincoln Cty EA vs. CWA	Newport	14	0	
6/23	Lincoln County Transportation Service District	Lincoln Cty EA	Newport	14	0	
6/23	City of Ontario	Ontario Police Assn	Ontario	21	0	

Recognition by card check

Date	Name of employer	Name of union	Location	Number of employees
6/15	Lane County Fire District #1	Fire Fighters Local 3242	Veneta	5

Requests for recognition election

Date	Name of employer	Name of union	Location	Number of employees
	Tricont Trucking Company	Machinists District Lodge 24	Portland	6
	YRC Inc. (unit of clerical workers at a trucking company)	Teamsters Local 81	Portland	11

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820 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 200
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