

# Oregon retirees to Congress: 'We're watching you'

By **VERNA PORTER**

During the week of June 1-4, I was the Oregon delegate at the national legislative conference for the Alliance for Retired Americans in Washington, D.C.

I was elected first vice president of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans (OARA) at our state convention in March, having stepped down after two terms as president. As first vice president my responsibility is to function as a legislative liaison to political entities at both the state and national levels.

ARA is an organization affiliated with the AFL-CIO to organize union member retirees into an active voice in the community. There are 40 states with active ARA memberships.

At the annual conference we get together to hear union leadership on current issues (this year it was AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka and Teamsters President Jim Hoffa); to participate in workshops; and to lobby our congressmen and women.

Val Jack (who also represents American Federation of Teachers-Oregon) and Bill Holayter, the regional representative of the ARA Board, were the Oregon delegation lobby team.

We were able to meet with four of our legislators and the staff members of two others. The two main issues we discussed were the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) and national health care reform.

Our first conversation was with Sen. Jeff Merkley. Sen. Merkley avidly supports EFCA and is totally aligned with labor retirees on how health care reform should be accomplished.

Our second conversation was with

Sen. Ron Wyden. Sen. Wyden seemed to accept the EFCA. At the onset of the health care conversation, I reminded him that organized labor in Oregon is watching him very closely, as they are concerned about the outcome of this issue. We were very direct in explaining to him that we want to see a public option in the health plan, we do not like the idea of taxing beneficiaries, and we want to see acceptable health care coverage given to the citizens of this country and less consideration given to insurance companies.

Our visits in the House found both Reps. Peter DeFazio and Kurt Schrader too involved in committees to meet;

their staff members met with us instead and seemed to be strongly with us on all the issues, leaving us feeling that the meetings were very productive.

Rep. Earl Blumenauer was able to give us some time, and he supports us on the EFCA and our need for national health care reform. Rep. Blumenauer is currently working on a bill advocating for a national system that provides home health care for people diagnosed with chronic diseases. This correlates beautifully with Oregon Project Independence, which provides home health care in our state. Oregon's plan is the first home health care plan in the nation, and was one that Blumenauer supported

when he was in the State Legislature.

Congressman David Wu was able to take time to talk with us, and we felt that he also was supportive of the EFCA and national health care reform.

Because we spoke with a large percentage of Oregon legislators, both Val and Bill agreed with me that our attempts at legislative communication were very productive and that our mission was accomplished.

*(Verna Porter is a retired member of the Oregon Nurses Association and a former secretary-treasurer of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union's Columbia River Pensioners.)*

## Open Forum

### Please give to United Way

By **TOM CHAMBERLAIN**  
**President Oregon AFL-CIO**

America's working families and the middle class are being squeezed harder than ever in an unfair economy. Between job layoffs, stagnant wages, and soaring costs for fuel, food, and health care, many hard-working families are hurting like never before.

Many of our neighbors are facing the threat of mortgage foreclosure. One housing organization estimates that as many as 2 million children will become homeless over the next few years as their families' homes are foreclosed.

As the Oregon AFL-CIO works to turn America around, we want to remember our neighbors in need, many for the first time ever.

United Way has been the human services partner of unions through the AFL-CIO Community Services network for more than 60 years. United Way works to see that contributions go directly to programs having real impact in communities, really changing the lives of those they help. United Way has also partnered with unions to promote health care for children, early childhood development, education, and financial stability for families.

I endorse the 2009 United Way Campaign in the communities where our members live and work, and I invite members of the Oregon AFL-CIO to consider a contribution in support of the good work of the United Way and the AFL-CIO Community Services network it helps fund.

## Fred Meyer boycott may be premature

**To The Editor:**

The July 17, 2009 article "Move to put Fred Meyer on Unfair List is tabled" described an attempt, successfully tabled by my union, to put Fred Meyer on the NW Oregon Labor Council's Unfair/Do Not Patronize list.

The Cement Masons Local 555 and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48 are rightfully concerned that Fred Meyer (Kroger) uses nonunion contractors to remodel stores. We grocery workers should be concerned because lower wages means less grocery sales and work hours, plus weaker unions.

But urging the public not to patronize unionized retailers is premature. In fact my first reaction as a supermarket employee was confusion, alarm and re-

sentment. Before economic weapons are used, all effective options should be exhausted.

My company (QFC) is also Kroger, and it could be included on the Unfair list. Before that happens, I would want to be fully informed and consulted and have opportunities to discuss the issue with rank-and-filers of mine and other affected unions.

As the article implies, Fred Meyer is delaying bargaining in The Dalles and, along with Albertsons and Safeway, in the Portland area. In fact, using the eco-

nomics crisis as an excuse, Kroger has cut labor hours (think "speed up") and refuses to bargain reasonable increases to wages and benefits despite the increasing sales and profits it reports.

Rather than struggling over parliamentary procedures we need a strategy that informs and consults rank-and-file members of all affected unions to build solidarity instead of confusion and resentment.

**Stuart Fishman**  
**UFCW 555**  
**Portland**

## Try living within your means

**To The Editor:**

Too many people work their whole life and die owing more money than they have. It's really a shame that a lot of old people have to choke down that reality to the end of their days.

Without having a scientific calculator handy, anyone can roughly estimate the cost of borrowing money. It's all money down the tube, and if you get in debt trouble it could cost you everything.

I'm sure you could come up with a thousand reasons why people should

borrow money. But looking back, how many of those reasons truly ended up being good reasons? And were those reasons worth living under a mountain of debt? Was it or is it really worth giving up pieces of your life to pay it back? My revelation may have come a bit late, but here it is: "Live within my means." Although I may never reach my goal of being debt free, I hope that having read this, you might.

**Carroll Wikander**  
**Machinists 1005**  
**Portland**

## Kudos to Kulongoski for shining light on potential of green energy

**To The Editor:**

The officers, staff and 4,000 members of IBEW Local 48 wish to express sincere thanks to Gov. Ted Kulongoski for his strong support of green energy such as solar, wind, and electric vehicles.

Our members have erected numerous solar arrays and wind towers; we are anxiously awaiting the electric vehicle charging stations. All of our projects have come in on time and under budget. The main reasons behind this success are our dedication to training, work ethic and the resultant productivity. Our training center is considered one of the best, if not the best, in the nation. Unlike our nonunion counterparts, our training center is funded entirely by private funds, yet more incentive to make certain that the training uses the best instructors, methods, equipment and environment for education.

Our workers adopted and live up to the IBEW Code of Excellence, which can be found on our Web site at [www.ibew48.com](http://www.ibew48.com).

Oregon leads the nation in green en-

ergy employment growth; Gov. Kulongoski should be commended for making certain that our beautiful state stays as clean as possible, oil independent as possible, and ahead of the rest of the nation in the green energy market.

His leadership will continue to create jobs for our residents; if nothing else, to continue to replace jobs lost due to foreign competition and the offshoring of America. It will take some time for the infrastructure to be put into place; the grid needs upgraded, the panels and turbines have to be manufactured, the standards for charging stations need to be regulated and standardized.

Thanks to the governor's efforts, our elected legislators that hadn't seen how bright the light could be, and how to use more of the renewable resources that are available, are now seeing a light as bright as the sun and as constant as the wind.

**Clif Davis**  
**Business Manager**  
**IBEW Local 48**  
**Portland**

## Freightliner sends jobs South, ignores contract

**To The Editor:**

I worked at the Freightliner Mt. Holly TMP for 24 years. Now, me and some 1,500 more employees are jobless. Yes, the economy bust last fall had a major impact. However, to a larger degree it is due to Freightliner's blatant disregard for our current collective bargaining agreement, which provides us 70 percent of the medium class market. The new facility is running wide open in Mexico, as is their older plant farther south in Mexico.

Our local union president states that third step arbitration is set for August. After all is said and done, we, the displaced workforce at Mt. Holly, shall most probably still be jobless.

My concern is that such a blatant

contractual violation has been perpetuated by Freightliner, and the general public has no idea that the reason for a great number of good union jobs being sent to Mexico was NOT due to our unionizing, but rather it has been largely due to Big Business' total disregard for a legal contract. The public should be made aware that had Freightliner honored its union contract, a large number of us would still be building trucks here in the U.S.A.

As for arbitration, anything short of monetary recompensation for us workers who shall never recoup our losses, along with legal fines to the company for its arrogance, there will be no sign or incentive for anyone here in North Carolina to form a union, but rather a

loud resounding voice echoing the age-old sentiment in these parts: "Unionize and we will send your jobs to Mexico" and cite us, United Auto Workers Local 5285, as a prime example!

A light needs to be shed upon Freightliner's tactics and its disregard for contracts. Old-time, hard-core union Brothers and Sisters at Mt. Holly now hear what they said back in 1988 when organizing began at our plant.

Freightliner should pay severely for its actions, and it should be made public in order for unions to regain what UAW Local 5285 did to promote unionism in the Carolinas.

**John Wraie**  
**UAW Local 5285**  
**Dallas, NC**