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Washington unions plan to 'Bring Change Home'



WSLC President Rick Bender discusses formation of a new political action fund that will be used in 2010 to back "real labor champions" at the labor federation's annual convention Aug. 6-8 in Wenatchee.

Washington AFL-CIO convention delegates say there will be no more business as usual when it comes to state politics

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

WENATCHEE — Washington State Labor Council delegates, meeting over three days Aug. 6-8, resolved to "bring change home," in several senses of the phrase. State labor federation delegates want to see the Obama Administration bring "to home plate" plans for health care reform, labor law reform, and rescue of the economy. They also want to see an Obama-style spirit of change come to the state of Washington, where this year Democrats in the State Legislature catered to big business and ignored organized labor.

That betrayal was one of the most energetic themes of the convention. Delegates showed their support for a change in polit-

ical practice with a boisterous chant of "not another dime."

"Last year at this convention we were making investments in our Democratic leadership," said WSLC President Rick Bender. "We heard their promises and we believed them."

But top state Democrats broke those pledges when they refused to hold a vote on the federation's priority bill, the Worker Privacy Act, Bender said.

"Boeing pulled out all the stops. They threatened to leave the state, again, and then we began to see exactly how easily our so called friends — the Democrats who promised to help us get this bill passed — we saw how easily they crumbled."

Delegates applauded

the formation of a new political action fund, DIME PAC, and representatives of WSLC affiliates stood up during the convention to pledge \$100,000 to the fund, bringing its total to \$300,000. WSLC spokesperson Kathy Cummings said none of that money will be going to candidates this year, but rather will accumulate in a war chest to be used to back real labor champions in the 2010 election.

The convention's keynote address was delivered by national AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker, the highest ranking African-American official in the union movement. Holt Baker shared a message from President Obama to labor leaders: "Do not underestimate me on health care." And she assured delegates that the Employee Free Choice Act will pass before the year is out.

Holt Baker also said the national AFL-CIO hopes to foster greater labor unity by inviting local affiliates of the

Oregon construction unions ready for work

But Congressman David Wu won't support two large private projects

LINCOLN CITY — "Jobs, jobs, jobs" was a theme of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council annual convention held Aug. 11-14 at Chinook Winds Resort.

"We're in a depression — we're long past a recession in our industry," said Executive Secretary Bob Shiprack.

Unionized construction workers have enjoyed a run of full employment for more than five years now. However, as larger projects such as high-rise condominiums in Portland's South Waterfront and biotechnology giant Genentech's new plant in Hillsboro are completed, no new projects are breaking ground.

"With the exception of ongoing work at Intel, and a Kaiser hospital in Hillsboro, private investments have virtually ground to a halt," Shiprack said. "Banks aren't loaning money."

So, throughout the convention, Shiprack and other union leaders reminded legislators and state administrators, who had been invited to speak from the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Oregon Department of Energy, and the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, that construction unions have highly-trained workers ready to go to work.

Those administrators responded in kind, telling delegates that federal and state monies are in the pipeline for work on roads, bridges, and "green" renewable and energy efficiency projects.

Lincoln County Commissioner Terry Thompson said that in 2011 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Operations Center will relocate from Seattle to Newport, which means a new \$38 million headquarters building and port for six research vessels needs to be built.

Tim McCabe, director of the Economic and Community Development

Department, said Oregon is ready to explode in solar work.

"Around the solar panel industry there are thousands of potential jobs installing solar panels," he said, noting that Oregon — the largest solar manufacturer in the United States — currently has 20,000 solar systems installed, with an opportunity for another 100 million down the road.

"For every installed megawatt, that's 20 full-time jobs. Next year alone, that's over 19,000 installers," McCabe said.

Mark Long, acting director of the Oregon Department of Energy, said his agency is sitting on \$1 billion in requested wind, solar, wave, volatiles, and biomass projects using the state's Business Energy Tax Credit incentive program.

Long is realigning the Department of Energy into a business development center that offers developers "a one-stop shopping experience." He said the agency has \$200 million available for loans over the next biennium and that it will get \$60 million in federal stimulus dollars from the feds and has \$100 million in BETC tax credits to offer.

"We're the only bank really loaning on the commercial side. A lot of folks aren't aware of that," he said. "We have decent interest rates at 6 to 7 percent, and flexible terms as far as pay-back period."

Long said his agency is working with the Economic Development Department "to try to get your folks back to work." He suggested that training centers, if they aren't already, "get up to speed" in areas of biomass, solar and wind. "You need to be up to speed in training so you are ready to get those jobs when they come."

During a question and answer session, Clif Davis, business manager of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48, said, "We keep hearing the need for money to train workers for solar. We're already trained."

IBEW officials estimate that they have 1,600 people trained in solar who are ready to go to work now.

ODOT director Matt Garrett said



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