Inside **MEETING NOTICES** See Page 6

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Kitzhaber gets early backing from UFCW

Former Oregon governor John Kitzhaber heard words of encouragement from organized labor in the first few days after his Sept. 2 announcement he will run for governor again in 2010.

The state's largest private-sector union, 17,800-member United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, had its Active Ballot Club and Executive Board meetings the day after the announcement, and voted to endorse Kitzhaber.

Then Sept. 7, Kitzhaber attended the Northwest Oregon Labor Council Labor Day picnic in Portland, where he did burger flipping duty for Local 555 members, and got a personal escort around Oaks Park from Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain and Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Ken Allen.

Allen said Kitzhaber got a very positive response from picnic attendees.

"On health care, the environment, green jobs … there's nobody better to be our governor," Allen said. Oregon AFSCME has yet to announce any timetable for its endorsement process.

Kitzhaber, a Democrat, was Oregon's governor from 1995 to 2003, and faced a Republican-led Legislature all eight years. During that time, he set a record for the number of bills he vetoed.

As of press time no other Democrat had announced, though two-term former secretary of state Bill Bradbury has been considering a run, and said he will make an announcement Sept. 17 (after this issue went to press). At least three candidates are seeking the Republican nomination: Allen Alley, Jason Atkinson, and John Lim.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate John Kitzhaber serves hamburgers to members of UFCW Local 555 at Oaks Park on Labor Day. With him is Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson. (Photo courtesy of Renae Miller)

UFCW Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson said Local 555 was also the first union to back Kitzhaber the first time he ran for governor.

"We think he's going to be very instrumental as governor

(Turn to Page 10)

Youth Movement

As rank-and-file ages, labor ponders how to bring in the young

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

This week in Pittsburgh, Oregon native Liz Shuler was confirmed as second-in-command of the national AFL-CIO; she's 39 years old. Her ascension, on the slate of incoming AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, signals new attention to labor's need to reach out to the young.

Young workers have fallen behind in the last 10 years, according to an AFL-CIO report released Sept. 1. Peter D. Hart Research Associates conducted a nationwide survey of 1,156 people for the AFL-CIO, and found that more than one in three workers under age 35 are living at home with their parents. Compared to workers over 35, young workers are less likely to be employed, less likely to have health insurance, and less likely to have a retirement savings plan. And that gap is wider than it was a decade ago when the AFL-CIO commissioned a similar survey. Long story short: Young people are in serious need of a union. But where are they?

Every now and then at a local union meeting, a member looks around, sees only older faces, and asks, "What is it about young people that keeps them from getting involved in the union?"

Bob Bussel, director of the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon, says a more useful question may be, "What is it about our movement that is unattractive to young people?"

Interviews with nearly a dozen union leaders and activists generate a variety of answers.

For starters, the first introduction new members get to unions in some workplaces is a hefty initiation fee — and it's managers who break that news to new hires, along with word that the union contract requires termination if they don't pay union dues. New members may start at the bottom of the wage scale, work through a probationary period before getting full union rights and health benefits, and wait years before vesting in the pension.

Meanwhile, some of labors' biggest selling points — guaranteed pensions, full-family health coverage, seniority rights — have more appeal for older workers than young. The AFL-CIO survey found that young workers do care about health and pension coverage. But for older workers — who are closer to retirement, more likely to have depend-

(Turn to Page 8)

Trumka, Shuler elected to lead AFL-CIO

Richard Trumka and Liz Shuler

PITTSBURGH, Pa. (PAI) — Prepare yourselves for unionism with an edge.

Richard Trumka was elected president and Liz Shuler was tapped secretary-treasurer of the national AFL-CIO in elections held Sept. 16 at the federation's convention. [The AFL-CIO convention was held Sept. 15-17. This issue of the NW Labor Press went to press Sept. 15.] The pair, who ran on a ticket with incumbent executive vice president Arlene Holt Baker, were unopposed. Shuler, 39, is a member of Portland-based International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 125 and is the first woman ever elected secretary-treasurer.

A former coal miner and president of the Mine Workers Union, Trumka, 60, has served as secretary-treasurer under John Sweeney for the past 14 years. Sweeney retired this year.

While campaigning for president, the fiery Trumka threw down labor's gauntlet on health insurance reform and the Employee Free Choice Act. He described three "absolute musts" Congress has to include in any health insurance reform bill to keep organized labor's support for it.

"The public option is an absolute must. You have to have an employer mandate. And you can't tax employees to pay for it," Trumka said. "That means we won't support the bill if it doesn't have the public option in it. Without those three things, the present system goes on and on and on."

As for the Employee Free Choice Act, labor's top legislative priority in this Congress, Trumka said the final bill must satisfy three basic principles: Giving workers the right to form or join unions free of boss' intimidation, harassment and lawbreaking, a set procedure guaranteeing that once the union is recognized there will be a contract between the two sides within a specific time period, and hefty fines for lawbreakers.

That answered the question, in part, of whether labor would compromise on the sections of the Employee Free Choice Act that business most opposes: Writing "majority sign-up" into the law as a way to automatically recognize unions once they get a verified majority of workers to sign election authorization cards, and binding arbitration of first contracts when the two sides can't agree within 120 days.

The legislation is stalled in the Senate as supporters try to round up the 60 votes needed to break a planned GOP filibuster against it.

Trumka strongly warned that lawmakers who cross labor on these two issues would pay the penalty at the polls next year.

"We'll tell our members the truth: Who stood with them, and who wanted to make the insurance companies happy, versus who wanted to make Americans healthy," Trumka said.