

'Thank You Sen. Merkley'

Amendment in health insurance reform bill levels playing field in construction

The Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council is sending a letter to Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley thanking him for an amendment he attached to the Senate health care reform bill that requires construction contractors with over \$250,000 in payroll or more than five workers to provide employee health insurance or pay a \$750 penalty.

"This is a great victory for our union contractors, as it helps level the playing field with nonunion contractors who don't provide health insurance for their employees," said John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the CPBCTC.

"We commend Sen. Merkley for standing up to sponsor this amendment," said Lake Coulson, executive director, government affairs of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA), in a press release. "Construction employers who fail to provide health care for their workers should not gain a competitive advantage."

The Senate's initial health care reform bill contained a small business exemption for companies with fewer than 50 employees. However, the construction industry is dominated by small employers (20 employees or less), so under that threshold up to 90 percent of contractors would have

been exempt. And because unionized construction contractors provide health insurance for their workers, the exemption would have written into law a competitive advantage for nonunion contractors.

Merkley's amendment was co-sponsored by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sen. Al Franken (D-MN) and had wide support throughout the Senate.

The Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council encourages all construction workers to contact Merkley's office and thank him for the amendment. In Portland, call 503-326-3386.

Daimler gets \$40 million to develop fuel efficient trucks

Portland-headquartered Daimler Trucks North America was awarded a \$40 million grant from the federal government to develop new technologies aimed at improving fuel efficiency for heavy-duty trucks.

In a conference call with Energy Secretary Steven Chu, members of Oregon's congressional delegation, and Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski, Sen. Jeff Merkley said he was told 85 jobs will be created in Portland the first year, researchers, engineers, and managers who will develop the new technologies, and more than 400 jobs long term.

The Daimler grant is the largest of nine awarded by the U.S. Department of Energy. Projects were selected nationwide to improve fuel efficiency for both trucks and cars. Awardees also committed to a 50 percent cost-share, which means Daimler will invest \$80 million in research, development and demonstration. Total funding is more than \$187 million and includes more than \$100 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Chu said the nine projects will create over 500 jobs initially, and as many as 6,000 jobs — many in manufactur-

ing and assembly — by 2015.

Daimler is currently in negotiations with four unions that represent roughly 600 employees at its truck manufacturing plant in Portland. Daimler had planned to close the Swan Island facility in June, but has since changed its mind.

The sides hope to have a tentative agreement by Feb. 1.

"I believe Daimler has every intention of staying in Oregon and growing," said Kulongoski, who recently met with top Daimler officials in Germany.

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