

...Oregon AFL-CIO launches Good Jobs Now! campaign

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ergy economy, toward a first-rate infrastructure, can we expect to have a real economic recovery.

“The stimulus recovery effort, it’s a good first step, but more needs to be done,” Juntunen continued. “And it shouldn’t be a system that creates 10 layers of contracting schemes that gives money to everyone except the workers who are actually out there doing the work.”

Jones was one of seven City planners in her department to lose their job. She said two have found work — one took a 30 percent pay cut at a temp job that ends in June. The other, who was desperate for health insurance because he and his wife were expecting a baby, took a 50 percent pay cut, also for a temp job ending in June.

Jones has taken several classes through WorkSource Oregon to try to obtain funding for skills upgrade courses, but has been stymied from filling out the skills upgrade form because it requires a person to include two job announcements in need of a worker with the missing skill set.

“When there are no job announcements, it becomes impossible to meet this requirement,” she said.

Santos said that since losing her home and car, she has found it difficult to find work *anywhere* because prospective employers look at applicants’ credit histories. Car insurance is the same, with insurers jacking up premiums if drivers have poor credit.



Oregon State Rep. Lisa Kotek (left) listens to story of unemplyed Laborer's apprentice Rachel Santos during a "Good Jobs Now" roundtable discussion Jan. 19 sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO. A half-dozen jobless union members described to area politicians the problems they are facing without jobs. The AFL-CIO is lobbying Congress and local lawmakers to devote more resources to create jobs over the short-term.

“I’ve never been in an accident. I’ve always paid my bills on time. I’ve had no issues at all until work went away,” she said.

After listening to their stories, Rep. Kotek said the agenda for the Oregon Legislature’s February special session “is all about jobs. We have a limited set of tools, but we’re looking at ways to get monies out into the economy. Having another jobs package from the federal government will be extremely helpful.”

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Kotek said she and State Sen. Diane Rosenbaum will introduce a bill to end employers’ use of credit histories when hiring. The Job Applicant Fairness Act would restrict employers’ access to a job applicant’s credit report, with limited exceptions; give workers a fair chance to get hired based on qualifications not credit history; and preserve

employers’ right to check criminal records and all other job-related reference checks.

Labor Commissioner Avakian praised labor’s five-point plan. “The AFL-CIO plan is smart to say you’ve got to extend unemployment insurance and other benefits for a longer period of time, because we’re not going to have a fast solution. It’s an impossibility.”

Avakian blamed two decades of “complete disinvestment” by federal and state governments both in job training and education.

“We’ve passed things like NAFTA that gives an incentive to ship jobs overseas so (workers) don’t have as many options here. We don’t fund our job training and our public education programs. We’ve eliminated shop classes from our schools. There’s a series of things we’ve done for almost 20 years now that put folks like you — when you lose a job — in a position that you really don’t have other places to turn because the jobs just aren’t there. And now we’re doing everything we can to play catch up.”

Avakian said stimulus-backed job training programs that have developed since the recession hit will benefit Oregon and the U.S. in the long term. “But it makes it much more difficult in the short term to find all of you jobs when

we need them now,” he said.

Chamberlain said private industry won’t be able to create jobs quickly enough to put folks back to work, which is why government has to devote more resources to productivity-enhancing investments.

“We need to put people back to work doing real work — tutoring kids, working in woods — real jobs with real pay needs to be part of the recovery plan,” he said.

The AFL-CIO is encouraging all union members and their families to write or call their state and congressional representatives and ask them to support jobs programs.

In Congress, the Jobs for Main Street Act, HR 2847, has been passed by the House and is awaiting action in the Senate. The bill would do most of the things the AFL-CIO has called for, although not for the length of time union officials would like to see. For instance, HR 2847 would extend COBRA health insurance and unemployment insurance for six months. The AFL-CIO plan calls for a 12-month extension.

Chamberlain said most of the funds in the bill have already been appropriated — as they are left over bank bailout (TARP) funds and not new debt.

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