

Bureau of Labor Statistics report:

Union membership dropped by 771,000 in 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C.— With the economy hemorrhaging jobs — almost 3.3 million jobs lost in 2009 — the latest figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) show union membership in 2009 dropped slightly, from 12.4 percent of the workforce to 12.3 percent.

Nationwide, union membership dropped by 771,000, to 15.3 million in 2009, according to the BLS.

The recession eliminated jobs across the private sector, but was felt most deeply in manufacturing, transportation and construction — the most heavily unionized sectors of the nation's economy.

"The loss in union membership," said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, "is another indicator of the terrible toll the economic crisis is taking on the nation's middle class — not just union members."

In the state-by-state breakdown, Washington ranked No. 4 in terms of union density in 2009, with the state's 574,000 union members accounting for 20.2 percent of the overall workforce. The union-density percentage rose

slightly from 19.8 percent in 2008, as total jobs in Washington dropped 65,000 and the number of union members dropped 4,000.

Oregon ranked 11th in union density, with its 250,000 union members accounting for 17 percent of the workforce (up 0.4 percent from 2008). Total jobs in Oregon dropped 95,000 and the number of union members dropped 9,000.

Only New York (25.2 percent), Hawaii (23.5 percent) and Alaska (22.3 percent) have higher unionization rates than Washington.

"While I'm very encouraged that Washington remains one of the most unionized states in the country, polls show that many more workers would like to gain a voice at work by forming a union, but they can't," said Rick Bender, president of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. "Outdated labor laws allow employers to coerce, threaten and fire workers who support unionization, with relative impunity. That's why passage of the Employee Free Choice Act is so important."

The data on union membership

were collected as part of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households that obtains information on employment among the nation's civilian noninstitutional population age 16 and over.

Some highlights about the union workforce in the BLS survey included:

- Unionized workers still far out-earn their nonunion colleagues, and the gap is widening. The median weekly salary for union members last year — the point at which half are above that dollar figure and half below — was \$908, up \$22 from the year before. The median for nonunion workers was \$710 in 2009, up \$19 from 2008.

- The "wage gap" between men and women is narrower for union members than for everyone else — and it's closing for union women while widening for nonunion women.

The median weekly wage for union women last year was \$840, almost 88 percent of the \$957 median for union men. In 2008, union women earned 86 percent of what union men earned. The median weekly wage gap among non-

union women versus nonunion men in 2009: \$628 to \$786. In 2009, nonunion women earned 79.9 percent of what nonunion men earned, down from 80.3 percent the year before.

- More public sector employees (7.9 million) belonged to a union than did private sector employees (7.4 million).

- Workers in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rate at 38.1 percent.

- Black workers were more likely to be union members than were white, Asian, or Hispanic workers.

- Among states, New York had the highest union membership rate (25.2 percent) and North Carolina had the lowest rate (3.1 percent).

- The biggest absolute increases in union numbers from 2008 to 2009 were in the South: Texas (+59,000, to 508,000), Georgia (+26,000, to 177,000), Virginia (+20,000, to 166,000), and Louisiana (+19,000, to 99,000). Union densities in those states still were all under 6 percent.

- Women are catching up in union ranks: 13.3 percent of men are mem-

bers of a union, compared to 11.3 percent of women. Last year, nearly 44 percent of all union members were women. "The gap between their rates has narrowed considerably since 1983, when the rate for men was about 10 percentage points higher than the rate for women. Between 1983 and 2009, the union membership rate for men declined by 11.4 percentage points, while the rate for women declined by 3.3 percentage points," BLS said.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis said the data shows that, along with better wages, union members "have access to better health care, retirement and leave benefits. These numbers make it clear that union jobs are good jobs. These numbers show a need for Congress to pass legislation to level the playing field to enable more American workers to access the benefits of union membership."

(Editor's Note: Press Associates Inc., the AFL-CIONow blog, and the WSLC Reports contributed to the report.)

Employees at Kaiser Permanente in Los Angeles leave SEIU for new union

LOS ANGELES (PAI) — Three groups of health care workers at Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center voted Jan. 26 to leave Service Employees International Union for the newly created and independent National Union of Healthcare Workers.

SEIU has represented the more than 2,000 registered nurses, psychiatric counselors, social workers and health care professionals for the past 30 years.

Final tallies in the National Labor Relations Board-monitored elections showed registered nurses voted 746-36 for NUHW, while health care professionals went for the independent union by a 189-29 margin. Psychiatric counselors and social workers favored NUHW 717-192.

Elsewhere in California, the National Union of Healthcare Workers has petitioned to hold elections at

dozens of health care facilities where workers are currently represented by SEIU.

SEIU has filed charges of unlawful conduct against NUHW and investigations of the charges by the NLRB blocked those elections. "Some charges have been withdrawn and those remaining are expected to be resolved soon, clearing the way for future balloting between the two unions," the NLRB said in its announcement of the Los Angeles returns.

Some 100-plus other Kaiser units — including more hospitals — could vote between now and June in representation contests involving 65,000 workers statewide.

The National Union of Healthcare Workers victory in Los Angeles is part of a long battle over California health care workers, and over SEIU's direction at the national level. The conflict

began several years ago when SEIU officials at the national level reached contract terms with various California hospitals, going over the head of its California affiliate, the 150,000-member United Health Care Workers-West. Affiliate President Sal Rosselli, then an SEIU vice president and Executive Board member, strongly protested what he called sweetheart contracts and how SEIU reached them without member input. Rosselli also challenged top-down practices at SEIU.

In response, SEIU put United Health Care Workers-West into trusteeship, uncovering what it said was evidence of misuse of union money. It ousted Rosselli and other officers. A hearing on the charges produced no proof. The conflict led Rosselli, other officers, staffers and activists to leave SEIU and form the independent National Union of Healthcare Workers.

Soccer deal a good one for Portland workers

A deal has been reached between the City of Portland and Portland Timbers' owner Merritt Paulson's Peregrine, LLC to turn PGE Park into a major league soccer stadium.

Included in the \$31 million pact is an agreement guaranteeing that the stadium will be built by workers who earn a family wage and get health and retirement benefits, and an agreement by the stadium operator to stay neutral during any union organizing campaign. The City has set a goal of 30 percent minority-owned contractors and 10 percent women-owned contractors on the redevelopment project.

The City has committed \$11.9 million in bonds to help pay for the changes.

In a press release, Portland Mayor Sam Adams said the deal will "bring immediate construction jobs to Portland and continuing revenue, visitors, and vital spending to Portland's central city in the long term."

Renovating the stadium will create approximately 200 construction jobs. Initial work has already begun. Construction will cease during the baseball season and start up again in early September. Turner Construction is the general contractor.

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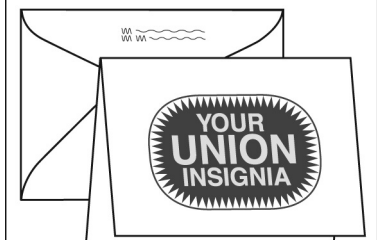
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