

Unions tracking several jobs bills in Washington Legislature

OLYMPIA — Washington State Labor Council (WSLC), the AFL-CIO umbrella organization, is ramping up its legislative efforts as the 2010 session of the Washington Legislature winds down.

The session began Jan. 11 and ends March 11.

Jobs, jobs, and jobs are labor's top three priorities, and front and center is the Jobs Act of 2010 (HR 2561 and SB 6547), which would ask voters to approve \$850 million in bonds to pay for energy efficiency retrofits at schools, colleges, and other public facilities. The proposal would create an estimated 38,000 prevailing wage jobs. It passed the House 57-41 on Jan. 20.

Another public works jobs bill — the Working for Clean Water bill (HB 3181 and SB 6851) — would pay for storm water pollution cleanup in every county by tripling the "haz-

ardous substances" tax voters approved in 1988. The \$1.50-a-barrel tax on oil exported from Washington refineries could raise \$339 million over five years and put thousands of people back to work in construction.

Stopping further job losses in the public sector is also a priority. Last year, the Legislature made \$9 billion in budget cuts, but the continuing recession has drilled another \$2.6 billion hole in the state budget. WSLC is working with the Washington Federation of State Employees, AFSCME, to oppose proposals to close corrections facilities and state health institutions. And they're opposing SB 6503, which would close all state agencies and furlough workers one day a month; the bill passed the Senate Jan. 22 by 27-17.

WFSE Executive Director Greg Devereux suggested that lawmakers instead furlough some of the 154 tax breaks the Legislature has approved in the last decade.

WSLC is also supporting changes to I-960, an initiative voters passed in 2007 that requires a two-thirds majority in both legislative chambers for any tax increase. Opponents say the measure (which itself passed by just 51 percent) is undemocratic because it prevents legislative majorities from doing the jobs they were elected to do. SB 6843 would suspend parts of Initiative 960 through June 2011, and permanently change other parts.

Meanwhile, something has to be done for those who are jobless in a down economy through no fault of their own. WSLC is fighting to expand eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits and renew a temporary unemployment benefit increase of \$45 to \$71 a week that expired Jan. 1.

WSLC successfully opposed efforts by business lobby groups to further reduce employer contributions to the unemployment insurance trust fund; the Legislature already reduced rates last year, and two bills to reduce them further died Feb. 5.

Finally, HB 2553/SB 6334 would make unemployment insurance benefits available to workers who quit jobs for good cause, and SB 6526 would make it available to laid-off workers who are only seeking part-time work; the latter would cost the state unemployment insurance fund \$36 million a year, but would bring in \$98 million in federal funds.

Some other bills WSLC is supporting:

- HB 1992 would require the prevailing wage to be paid on public-private partnership projects (construction projects that get tax incentives, government loans or free land).

- HB 2986/SB 5757 would add nonvoting labor members to public transportation governing bodies.

- HB 751 would add labor representation to community college boards of trustees.



Student engineers get lesson in bricklaying

Structural engineering students from Portland State University get a real world look at bricklaying from Matt Eleazer (right), president of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1. For several years the Masonry Institute of Oregon has invited engineering students to the Bricklayers Apprenticeship Training Center in Northeast Portland to give them some practical experience in the art of laying bricks. For instance, each student lifted and placed a 12-inch and 8-inch block to illustrate the difference in weight and mobility of each piece. On paper, it might be quicker to lay 12-inch block, but the wear and tear on bricklayers can be extensive. "It's food for thought when you go to design a building," Eleazer told the students. Joining Eleazer teaching the class was Bricklayer apprenticeship coordinator Shawn Lenczowski.

... 'Vote your job' rally

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fore a set deadline.


Shiprack said SB 1020 would have helped build and improve the state's energy infrastructure by easing the permit process on "lateral" construction projects such as roads, bridges, rail lines, pipelines, and transmission lines.

"This bill actually makes it easier for landowners," Shiprack said. "Under current law, (state, county etc.) has to first condemn a property before a developer can start negotiating with a landowner. SB 1020 would allow a developer to start talks with a landowner prior to condemnation."

Environmental groups opposed the bill, as did the Yamhill County Democratic Central Committee, which passed a resolution Jan. 21 asking lawmakers to kill it.

Other jobs bills being tracked: SB 1050 is a Buy America law that would require use of American-made construction materials on public works projects. HB 3651 would require paying prevailing wage rates on construction and installation of solar energy systems on public-owned land. HB 3604 requires public agencies to buy locally when purchasing goods for public projects.

The special session is scheduled to conclude by February 26.




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