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Walmart employees get more state-subsidized medical care and food stamps than any other Oregon business

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Walmart is at the top of a list of Oregon employers whose workers receive food stamps and/or state-subsidized medical coverage.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) agreed to compile such a list in response to concerns raised in 2007 by State Rep. Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie) and other legislators. The data are neither verified nor exhaustive, but DHS said the sample size was robust enough to ensure a large degree of confidence as to who the top 50 employers were that had large numbers of employees receiving public assistance: The list was compiled two years in a row, and almost all the same employers made the top 50 both years.

Walmart, which last year reported an 8.8 percent jump in profit to \$14.4 billion on sales of \$405 billion, topped the list both years, with 468 Oregon employees getting one or both forms of assistance in 2009, and 875 in 2008.

McDonalds, Taco Bell, Burger King, and Subway were in the top 10 both years, and their competitors weren't far behind: In all, a dozen restaurant franchises were among the top 50 both years.

Other names near the top of the list included Harry & David, Dollar Tree, and Target, as well as Goodwill and temp agencies like Labor Ready.



Perhaps surprising, perhaps not: Public sector employers were on the list in a number of spots. Oregon's Home Care Commission was number 2 or 3. And added together, "various school districts," Oregon State University, and "various departments" of the State of Oregon were in the top 50.

Even some unionized private-sector employers were on the list,

including Safeway, where most employees belong to United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555. Rep. Witt, who is also a full-time staff rep at Local 555, said Safeway probably made the top 10 both years because many of its employees are part-time.

That raises the question: What does the list mean? Are these simply large employers that happen to be in low-skill, low-wage industries? Or are they "irresponsible" employers with a "low-road" market strategy that ends up burdening taxpayers? Both, says Witt.

"These reports are an indictment of companies that fail to pay their fair share and provide a full-time work week," Witt told the Labor Press, "and the end result is that we the taxpayers end up subsidizing their workforce."

Witt sponsored a bill in the 2007 session to require DHS to track employers whose workers get food stamps or state medical assistance. The bill didn't pass, but DHS tried to accommodate his search for information by adding a field for "employers" in the intake databases DHS staff fill out when individuals apply for benefits.

As it stands, households qualify for food stamps if they're at or below 185 percent of federal poverty guidelines. So a single person living alone would get food stamps if they earn below \$20,035 a

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Labor groups make primary endorsements for governor, State Legislature, Congress

Democratic gubernatorial candidates John Kitzhaber and Bill Bradbury each secured major labor endorsements over the past two weeks, splitting labor in the May 18 primary.

On March 5, the Oregon AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education endorsed Kitzhaber on a 17-4 standing vote.

The following day, Bradbury, a former secretary of state, picked up endorsements from the 47,000-member Oregon Education Association (OEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT)-Oregon and its affiliated Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). Later that week the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82 endorsed Bradbury.

In addition to the state labor federation, Kitzhaber, who served two terms as governor from 1995 to 2003, has endorsements from the 30,000-member Teamsters Joint Council No. 37; the Oregon State Council of Fire Fighters; the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council; the Columbia Pacific and Pendleton building and construction trades councils; Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 1; Insulators Local 36; Roofers Local 156; Cement Masons Local 555; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Locals 48 and 112; Iron Workers Local 29; Plasterers Local 82; Sheet Metal Workers Local 16; Boilermak-

ers Local 500; Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555; and the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters.

On March 13, the Oregon State Council of the Service Employees International Union took no action in the race. SEIU represents 50,000 public employees, home and child care providers, and hospital, janitorial, and nursing home workers in Oregon.

SEIU, Teamsters, and UFCW are affiliates of the Change to Win labor federation. The Carpenters Council and OEA are independent. None are affiliated with the AFL-CIO.

An endorsement by the Oregon AFL-CIO requires a two-thirds' majority vote. The motion to endorse Kitzhaber did not come as a recommendation from the state labor federation, but rather from Board member Ken Allen, executive director of Oregon AFSCME Council 75. It was seconded by Jeff Smith, president of Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 8.

Board members representing AFT, OSEA, and the Oregon Machinists Council forwarded a motion asking that an endorsement be postponed until after the primary, or at least until their organizations could meet and take a position.

"The Oregon Machinists Council doesn't meet until the end of April, but with two labor Democrats in the primary, the Machinists don't tend to take a position out of respect for both candidates," said OMC Chair Steve Wilson.

"John Kitzhaber was a good governor," Allen said. "We had a good relationship in the past. He has always been honest with us. We know there is going to be a \$2.5 billion budget problem next biennium; we can't think of anyone else we would want to work with."

Representatives from the Fire Fighters and the Building Trades Council spoke against the motion to postpone.

"We generally don't get involved in primaries," said Kelly Bach, president of the State Fire Fighters Council. "But this was a race we felt we needed to get into early."

The motion to postpone the endorsement failed on a standing vote of 14-11.

Abstaining from the 17-4 endorsement vote were delegates representing OSEA, Machinists, Steelworkers, National Association of Letter Carriers, Oregon Nurses Association, Marion-Polk-Yamhill Counties Labor Council, and the South-eastern Oregon Labor Council.

No candidates were endorsed in the Republi-

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Democratic gubernatorial candidates John Kitzhaber, left, and Bill Bradbury, right, have been chasing labor endorsements since last October. Above, the two candidates talk to delegates at last year's Oregon AFL-CIO convention in Bend. Each has received support from unions, with Bradbury winning the coveted Oregon Education Association endorsement and Kitzhaber getting backing from the AFL-CIO.