

Washington State Labor Council wants attorney general to withdraw from lawsuit challenging health insurance reform

OLYMPIA — Decrying it as a “partisan political showmanship on the taxpayers’ dime,” the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) has urged Republican State Attorney General Rob McKenna to withdraw participation in a lawsuit to undermine the federal health care reform signed into law by President Barack Obama. The WSLC is the largest labor organization in the state, representing some 400,000 rank-and-file union members.

“By participating in this lawsuit, Rob McKenna is using our precious

state tax dollars to advance a partisan political agenda,” said WSLC President Rick Bender. “McKenna isn’t speaking for the governor and he isn’t speaking for the more than 1.5 million Washingtonians who will be helped by this legislation. He is forcing Washington taxpayers to finance partisan efforts originating in Florida, Texas, and South Carolina that aim to maintain the status quo and help the insurance industry that profits from it. And he is aligning his personal political fortunes with the radical fringe of teabagging extremists.

“His participation in this suit without consulting with the governor and our elected state leaders is inappropriate and we call on him to withdraw his name — and our state — from this partisan political showmanship on the taxpayers’ dime,” Bender said.

Gov. Chris Gregoire has come out against the lawsuit and called it a money-losing proposition for the state at a time when the budget is in crisis. She has said that McKenna’s actions are risking the state’s future.

Constitutional law experts across the country are predicting the lawsuit by McKenna and other attorneys general will fall flat and likely amount to no more than a speed bump for health care legislation. Most observers say it is a political exercise, not a legal one.

Support for President Obama’s health care legislation has been growing as people find out the benefits of the bill. A USA Today/Gallup Poll reports that since the bill passed the House of Representatives March 21 there has been a 9 percent jump in Americans who have a favorable view of the health care overhaul. Only four in 10 of the people surveyed describe the bill in a negative way.

McKenna says he is fighting health care reform legislation on behalf of the people of Washington, claiming that it is unconstitutional to require people to get health insurance.

Because the health reform bans insurers from denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions, that requirement, which takes effect in 2016, keeps people from buying insurance only after they are sick. The WSLC said McKenna’s attempt to remove it undermines the foundation of reform and effectively maintains the status quo, “where uninsured patients get uncompensated care from hospitals and those costs are socialized onto the rest of us.”

Studies by the consumer advocacy group Families USA show this “hidden health tax” increases health care premiums an estimated 8 percent, or \$1,017 for a family and \$368 for an individual with coverage.

Many observers note that McKenna has aspirations to run for governor in 2012, and this effort may be laying the groundwork for that campaign.

“If McKenna wants to run for governor of this state by advocating the radical teabaggers’ agenda, I say ‘good luck with that,’” Bender said. “But do not

force Washington taxpayers to finance that campaign with this partisan political lawsuit.”

WSLC is asking members to contact Rob McKenna at 360-753-6200 and tell him: “Don’t fight health care reform! Not in MY name and not on MY dime!”

(Editor’s Note: This article appeared on the WSLC Reports Web site.)

Letter Carriers Food Drive scheduled Saturday, May 8

Letter carriers in Oregon and Clark County, Wash., will help “Stamp Out Hunger” on Saturday, May 8, part of the annual National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive.

Prior to that day, plastic bags will be delivered to every household, along with a postcard reminder. All you have to do is fill the bag with nonperishable food items such as canned meat, fish and soup, cereals, pasta and rice, and leave it at your mailbox on the morning of Saturday, May 8. (Please do not include glass items, homemade items or previously opened containers.)

Letter Carriers will collect the bags and deliver them to drop points, where volunteers will sort the donations and forward them to the Oregon Food Bank. (Food collected in Clark County will benefit Clark County hunger-relief agencies.)

The 18th annual Food Drive is the largest one-day food collection of the year in Oregon — and across the nation. Last year more than 1.6 million pounds of food was collected in Oregon and Southwest Washington — and a record

73.4 million pounds of food was collected nationwide.

According to the Oregon Food Bank, an estimated 240,000 people get meals from emergency food boxes in an average month.

Oregon AFSCME backs Kitzhaber

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 75 has endorsed John Kitzhaber in the Democratic primary for governor.

The former two-term governor is challenging Bill Bradbury, who served as secretary of state from 1999 to 2009. Current Gov. Ted Kulongoski is term-limited and cannot run for re-election.

The AFSCME endorsement marks the 24th labor endorsement for Kitzhaber, who also picked up the support of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 5 and the United Steelworkers Union.

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