

Working Families Party aims to ramp up efforts in 2010

This could be a big year for the Oregon Working Families Party.

The union-supported minor political party hasn't yet won "fusion" voting — the right to use its party line on the ballot to cross-endorse other parties' candidates. But thanks to a change in Oregon law, starting with the November 2010 general election, candidates' names in partisan races will be followed by the names of all parties that endorse them. Oregon Working Families Party hopes to use the carrot of its endorsement to get other parties' candidates to support its agenda.

Oregon Working Families Party

doesn't take sides on issues that divide working people, like abortion and gun control. Instead, it puts forth a platform of economic justice: decent jobs, universal health care, quality debt-free higher education, secure retirement, affordable housing, fair lending practices, and the right of workers to organize and negotiate with employers.

The party's first experience at the ballot box suggests that voters may be receptive to that agenda: J. Ashlee Albies, who ran as a Working Families Party candidate for attorney general in 2008, got over 10 percent of the vote statewide, and over 16 percent in 10 ru-

ral Eastern Oregon counties that traditionally vote Republican. And Albies' campaign consisted of little more than a Voters' Pamphlet statement and \$100 worth of bumper stickers.

"Across the country, Americans are leaving the major parties in droves," said Teamsters Local 206 President Tom Leedham at a March 30 Oregon Working Families Party meeting in Portland. "This void in leadership can be filled by right-wing crackpots or fake populists, or it can be filled by a political party dedicated to the economic interests of working people. We intend to be that party, not as a spoiler, but as an organization willing to hold politicians accountable. We're dedicated to supporting candidates, Democrats, Republicans, or independents, who are committed to fighting for affordable health care, decent jobs, and quality education."

The March 30 gathering drew 150 participants, including many young people and labor leaders, and some elected officials, such as Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian. At the meeting, party leaders announced that the party will campaign:

- For creation of a state-owned bank, which would take government funds that are now deposited in big commercial banks and instead use them to make loans to Oregon businesses, farms, and students;
- For creation of a state disability insurance program, funded by a small employee-only payroll tax, to pay lost wages in the event a worker suffers

short-term disability;

- Against state college tuition increases, and proposals to semi-privatize state universities along the model of Oregon Health & Science University; and

- For attaching "blue strings" to "green jobs" — in other words, requiring businesses that get government handouts to create decent jobs with livable wages and benefits.

The party also will need to expend effort to maintain its ballot status. It formed in 2006 by collecting the signatures of 19,000 registered voters on a petition, but to remain a party, legally, at least one statewide candidate must get at least 1 percent of the total vote, or at least 10,000 voters must be registered as members. As of early April, the party had 2,325 registered members, but hired organizers are registering new members at venues like Portland Saturday Market, with hopes of meeting the requirement.

In New York and Connecticut, Working Families parties are farther along, and members have won elections for public office.

Oregon's party has the endorsement and financial backing of five unions representing about 26,000 workers: Communications Workers of America Local 7901, International Longshore

and Warehouse Union Oregon Area District Council, Operating Engineers Local 701, Teamsters Local 206, and United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555.

NOLC recognition dinner set June 5

Mark your calendars for Saturday, June 5, when the Northwest Oregon Labor Council hosts the 13th annual Labor Appreciation and Recognition Night.

This year's dinner and awards ceremony, which serves as a fundraiser for Labor's Community Service Agency, will be held at Milwaukie Elks Lodge, 13121 SE McLoughlin Blvd. Dinner tickets are \$15 per person. Raffle tickets also will be sold for \$1 each or seven for \$5.

Through May 7, the labor council will be accepting nominations for persons to be recognized for their contributions to the labor community.

The labor council also is accepting cash and prize donations for the raffle.

For more information or to order tickets, call 503-235-9444.

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.

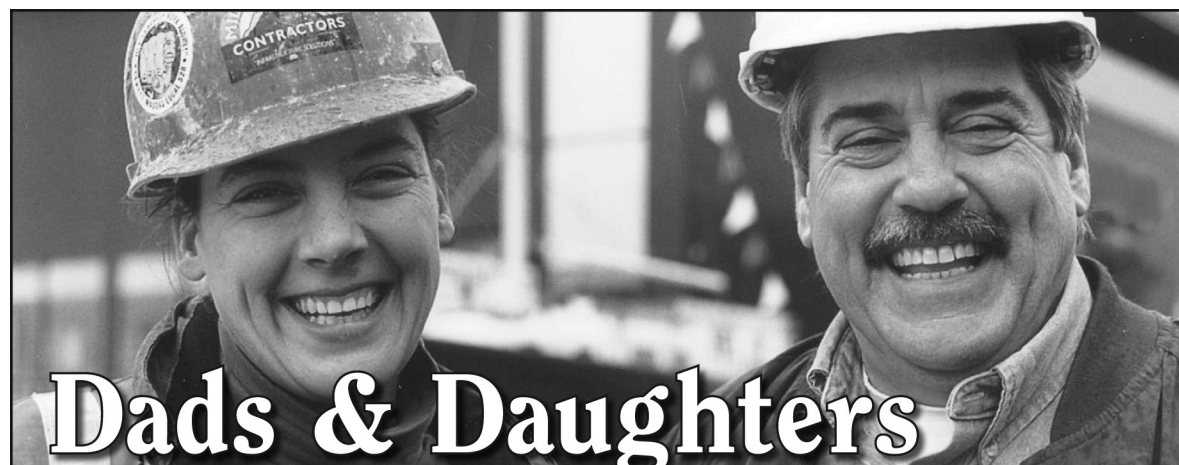
Prior to that day, plastic bags will be delivered to every household, along with a postcard reminder. All you have to do is fill the bag with nonperishable food items such as canned meat, fish and soup, cereals, pasta and rice, and leave it at your mailbox on the morning of Saturday, May 8. (Please do 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.



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