

Labor-friendly Democrats square off in governor's race

Union Democrats have a welcome choice in the May primary race for Oregon governor: The two leading contenders have longstanding close relationships to organized labor, and have been competing for labor's support.

John Kitzhaber, a former Roseburg emergency room doctor, served as state representative, state senator, senate president, and two-term governor from 1995 to 2003.

Bill Bradbury, a former Coos Bay restaurant owner and KGW television newscaster, served as state senator, Senate president, and Oregon secretary of state from 1999 to 2009.

Most unions back Kitzhaber, but several are behind Bradbury, and at least one remained neutral. The Labor Press interviewed both candidates and sifted through their records and campaign platforms to see how they measure up on the issues most important to working people and their unions.

Dr. Kitzhaber is best-known as architect of the Oregon Health Plan, which he helped create as Senate president and sustain as governor. After leaving office, Kitzhaber founded the Archimedes Project to advocate even more far-reaching health care reforms.

Jeff Anderson, secretary-treasurer of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, said health care was the central issue that led Oregon's largest private sector union to be the first to endorse Kitzhaber. By providing health insurance to otherwise uninsured low-income individuals, the Oregon Health Plan takes financial pressure off union health plans, and it serves as a safety net when union members and other workers lose their jobs. Anderson said Local 555 expects Kitzhaber to lead the next wave of reform as national health care legislation is implemented.

Kitzhaber told the Labor Press he's open to a state-level public insurance option. His priority would be system-wide reform in how health care is delivered — to focus more on prevention and management of chronic illnesses. That would restrain costs, and improve outcomes; for example, getting Medicare to pay for a \$500 air conditioner and visit from a community health professional for a 90-year-old woman, instead of \$50,000 when she shows up at an emergency room with congestive heart failure brought on by heat exhaustion.

Bradbury, meanwhile, would like to be known as "midwife" to Oregon's vote-by-mail-system, which he helped implement as secretary of state. It's not a big union issue, but it did figure in the decision of the National Association of Letter Carriers to endorse him. Kitzhaber vetoed a bill to establish vote-by-mail when he was governor.

With the Great Recession continuing to wreak economic havoc, every candidate for political office is pushing back-to-work plans.

Kitzhaber's Jobs Plan consists of 21 pages of bullet points like "incorporate the non-profit sector in identifying and initiating changes in past practice," and "use available resources to help busi-

nesses ... reach their job-creating potential." By phone, Kitzhaber got down to specifics: "The no-brainer, for next year, is embarking on really large-scale energy efficiency projects," Kitzhaber said. "I would start with public schools." Oregon public schools account for 94 million square feet of space, Kitzhaber said, with energy costs from 22 cents to \$2.10 a square foot. So the potential cost savings — and jobs creation — would be tremendous. Kitzhaber wants to fund energy retrofits by selling bonds and repaying the bonds with the money saved on energy.

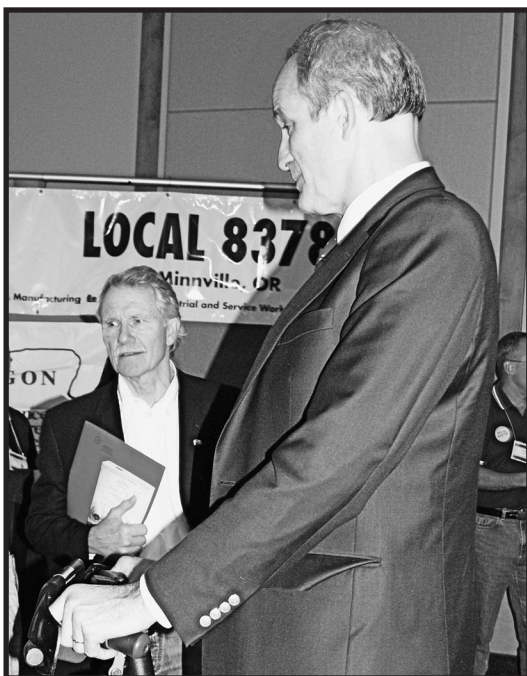
For Bradbury, the central jobs idea is to create a new state bank that would partner with credit unions and community banks to make small business loans with money the state now deposits in the big out-of-state banks. No, Bradbury said, he did not steal the idea from the union-backed Oregon Working Families Party, which is also advocating it. North Dakota has had such a bank for nearly 100 years.

Tax and budget issues will plague the next governor. Projections are for a recession-caused budget shortfall next year, but even in normal times, Oregon's fiscal picture is unstable. Both Kitzhaber and Bradbury say they would seek to refer to voters a ballot measure diverting the kicker to a rainy day fund. Oregon is the only state that refunds money to taxpayers if tax collections exceed projections. Bradbury said getting rid of the kicker would "level-ize" the budget, but he would go farther than Kitzhaber in advocating tax reform. Bradbury is proposing to reduce tax loopholes 11 percent, and use the resulting \$1.2 billion a year to restore funding to K-12 public schools.

That plank — and the fact that Kitzhaber has flirted with teacher pay-for-performance proposals — were major reasons Bradbury won the endorsement of the Oregon Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, and their affiliated Oregon School Employees Association.

That completes the list of Bradbury's labor endorsements, however. Virtually every other union is backing Kitzhaber.

One reason is a slight difference between the two over two projects of major importance to building trades unions. Both Kitzhaber and Bradbury describe themselves as environmentalists, and oppose a 12-lane bridge over the Columbia River and a liquid natural gas terminal and pipeline. [Both also want to close PGE's coal-fired power



Democratic gubernatorial candidates John Kitzhaber (left) and Bill Bradbury crossed paths at last summer's Oregon AFL-CIO convention in Bend. Kitzhaber has received the state labor federation's endorsement in this month's primary election.

plant in Boardman.] But Bradbury takes the stronger environmental position on these. Kitzhaber wants a smaller, cheaper bridge; Bradbury to reinforce the existing span and build a transit-only bridge. Kitzhaber says he doesn't support any current LNG proposal, but doesn't slam the door. Bradbury is running television ads touting his opposition to LNG.

"You can't take the attitude that any job is okay," Bradbury said. "I'm not

supportive of committing ourselves to 50 years of dependents on foreign fossil fuels ... but I am a strong supporter of additional supplies of gas from the Rockies and Canada, and they're going to have to build pipelines. I'm okay with that."

Among unions, Bradbury had another liability: his failure, during the nine years he served as secretary of state to aggressively fight abuses by union foe and ballot measure scofflaw Bill Sizemore.

"Leaders of organized labor met with Bradbury on a few different occasions to try to get enforcement," said Oregon AFSCME Council 75 Executive Director Ken Allen. "We always got, 'Oh yeah, we'll do it,' and then we never got any action."

Unions spent millions and millions of dollars fighting Sizemore-sponsored ballot measures, some of which qualified for the ballot thanks to fraud. Two unions spent millions in legal expenses suing Sizemore for abuses he and his groups committed, and won a jury verdict against him for racketeering. They even at one point sued Bradbury himself to get him to enforce the law.

Bradbury's answer to that was that those were tough times for him. "I did not like getting on the opposite side of some of my very good friends," Bradbury said. "But the reality is, as an administrative officer of the state, my responsibility is not to have a political view. My responsibility is to administer the law to the best of my ability."

But it calls into question how likely he is to follow through on what he's promising.

Kitzhaber, meanwhile, doesn't al-

ways say what labor wants to hear. His campaign has emphasized "post-partisanship," and he has said that stakeholder politics is the biggest problem facing Oregon. To the Labor Press, he confirmed that public employee unions are one of those stakeholders.

Public employee union members with long memories may fault Kitzhaber for signing Senate Bill 750 into law in 1995. The bill, crafted by leaders of the Republican legislative majority, rewrote public employee collective bargaining law in ways that unions have tried ever since to overturn. But Allen said it was Kitzhaber who made the bill much better than it might have been. Kitzhaber told the Labor Press he was afraid that if he didn't sign something, Republicans would go around him with a referendum; by agreeing to sign it, he was able to get Republicans to remove some of the most objectionable provisions.

Even if they favor one or the other, most in labor look at both candidates as having been labor allies. When they were legislators, Kitzhaber had 96 percent rating from the Oregon AFL-CIO for his votes, and Bradbury's was 93 percent. Bradbury was Senate president right after Kitzhaber was, and it was Kitzhaber who appointed Bradbury secretary of state when Phil Keisling stepped down in 1999.

In the Republican primary, several candidates are seeking the GOP nomination. One, Chris Dudley, is a former secretary of the National Basketball Players Association and a player's union rep for the Portland Trail Blazers. No candidate has received a union endorsement.



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