

Oregon AFL-CIO makes endorsements for November election

The Oregon AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) on June 4 set its political agenda for November's general election.

Not surprisingly, jobs — creating them, protecting them, and making sure they pay a living wage — dominated the discussion.

Jobs that have been lost as a result of U.S. free trade agreements were the focus of debate during endorsement votes for U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-3rd District).

COPE delegates from the Steelworkers and Oregon Machinists Council, which includes a division of the Woodworkers, expressed disappointment in the politicians' continued sup-

port of free-trade deals and their refusal to get behind a bill to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"We've lost a lot of jobs because Wyden is a free trader," said Bob Petroff, directing business representative of Machinists District Lodge 24. "The Oregon Machinists Council did not endorse him."

Wyden and Blumenauer were not endorsed at the AFL-CIO's primary election COPE meeting in March because neither had turned in a questionnaire. Questionnaires are mandatory to be considered for endorsement.

So, with questionnaires in hand this time around, the COPE Executive Committee first recommended endors-

ing Wyden, whose Republican opponent in November is Lewis & Clark Law School professor Jim Huffman.

Elected to the Senate in 1996, Wyden has compiled an 89 percent COPE voting record on bills tracked by the national AFL-CIO. During the first year of this 111th Congress, he has an interim scorecard of 78 percent on 23 votes cast.

Delegates were reminded that, despite his position on trade, Wyden is a co-sponsor of labor's top priority legislation, the Employee Free Choice Act. Regardless, on a standing vote, Wyden failed to get the required two-thirds majority for endorsement.

After Blumenauer was recommended for endorsement, a motion for

a roll-call vote passed, and the seven-term congressman, who has a 93 percent COPE voting record, was supported by a wide margin.

Delegates referred an endorsement recommendation on first-term Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-5th District) to the Executive Committee, after which they approved a motion to reconsider Wyden's race. Another roll-call vote was called, and this time he easily attained the two-thirds majority. Still, many delegates while casting their votes made known their displeasure with his position on trade.

In other action, COPE endorsed Ted Wheeler for state treasurer. The treasurer's post opened earlier this year following the death of Ben Westlund.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski appointed Wheeler interim treasurer prior to the May primary.

The Oregon AFL-CIO didn't take a position in the Democratic primary, in which Wheeler defeated labor-friendly State Sen. Rick Metsger of Mt. Hood. Both candidates ran with endorsements from various local unions or building trades councils. Wheeler will face Sen. Chris Telfer (R-Bend) in November.

COPE has already endorsed John Kitzhaber for governor, and Congressmen David Wu (D-1st District) and Peter DeFazio (D-4th District).

For all legislative endorsements, go to the Oregon AFL-CIO's web site at <http://orafclcio.org/>.

Trumka seeks to channel worker anger in a positive direction

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Calling workers "frustrated, anxious and angry" about "an economy that doesn't work for them," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka says labor's mission this election year is to channel the anger in a positive direction.

And, he warned, that mission may not always be in the direction of supporting Democratic Party congressional candidates. "We'll partner with the Democratic Party when they work for working people — and won't when they won't," Trumka stated.

Trumka and other panelists, including Rep. Donna Edwards, D-Md., Working America Executive Director Karen Nussbaum, and journalists Chris Hayes of The Nation and Peter Wilson of The Wall Street Journal, discussed the popular anger, its causes and its electoral consequences June 3 at a packed house at the AFL-CIO headquarters.

Those consequences appeared in both parties, the panelists noted: Sen. Arlen Specter, (D-Pa.), lost his primary and Sen. Robert Bennett, (R-Utah) lost his nominating convention to a "Tea Party" candidate. Sen. Blanche Lincoln, (D-Ark.), who antagonized unions by opposing the Employee Free

Choice Act, barely won her runoff over labor-backed Lieut. Gov. Bill Halter.

Those and other electoral upsets are manifestations of a deeper problem, the panelists said: an economy that does not work for workers, who are frustrated and confused about how to respond — and who are also vulnerable to the extremism of the Tea Party and right-wing talkers, notably Glenn Beck. Labor has to fill a vacuum of information, not yield it to Beck, Nussbaum said.

"We've been preaching about this

economy since at least 1995, when we first started saying corporations are not acting in our best interest," Trumka stated. The message apparently didn't get through — though now it is doing so with a vengeance, panelists said. They differed on how to respond and use voter anger.

Edwards said the Democrats "have to stop saying, 'It was the other guy's fault,'" blaming the economic disaster on Republican policies in general and those of former GOP President George W. Bush in particular. "We have to have

an idea ourselves about what we want to do," she said.

But the party's message is handicapped because "we have a raucous caucus," unlike the monolithic anti-everything GOP, Edwards said. "Unless we get back to talking about jobs, jobs, jobs, we'll lose this fall — and we'll deserve to lose."

Hayes said workers soured not just on the Obama Administration, Congress or on specific policies but on all institutions — labor, business and government — and the policies they pro-

note.

He called the sour grapes "a reaction to a terrible, terrible disaster" that hit workers as a result of "a massive cascade of institutional failure, covering everyone from the Catholic Church to major league baseball to the government to GM."

Hayes' solution: Restore accountability, getting everything out in the open. Right now, "people see Washington and Wall Street in cahoots — and


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