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*IBEW Local 125 fights to save members' jobs*

## Decision nears over closure of PGE Boardman coal plant

By DON McINTOSH  
Association Editor

BOARDMAN — From Interstate 84, 160 miles east of Portland, all that's visible of the Boardman Coal Plant is its smokestack. That smokestack, 11 miles south of the freeway, is Oregon's tallest man-made structure, 656 feet tall — 110 feet taller than Portland's highest skyscraper. And what comes out of the smokestack is the subject of fierce debate.

The Boardman Coal Plant, owned and operated by Portland General Electric (PGE), is Oregon's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases and of gases that contribute to haze and acid rain. It's also one of the state's cheapest power sources, generating up to 585 megawatts — enough power to meet the needs of a third of a million residential customers. And, for 110 members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 125, the Boardman Coal Plant is a livelihood.

"Where's the smoke?" is often the



"I'd like to retire here," said Russ Scholl, a service mechanic and structural welder at PGE's Boardman coal-powered electricity generating plant. But Scholl, 37, said that seems increasingly unlikely, as the company and regulatory agencies exchange proposals to close Boardman, which is Oregon's single biggest stationary source of carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides.

first question asked by visitors to the plant. People expect clouds of soot at the top of the stack, or at least a puff of something. But giant electrostatic precipitators remove nearly all the particles from Boardman's exhaust.

Instead, what comes out of the 30-foot diameter chimney is nearly invisible: 5 million tons a year of carbon dioxide, 28,000 tons of sulfur oxides (SOx) and nitrogen oxides (NOx), and 221 pounds of mercury. None of that is trifling. Mercury, a potent neurotoxin, contributes to learning disabilities in children; nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides cause haze and acid rain, which obscure views and erode petroglyphs in the Columbia Gorge; and carbon dioxide is the best-known greenhouse gas, responsible for planetary climate change.

What's it like to work at a plant that KOIN-TV news dubbed Oregon's "dirty little secret"? Under-appreciated and misunderstood, say workers at the plant.

"If there was a green answer, I'd

stand behind it 100 percent," said Local 125 member Russ Scholl, a service mechanic and structural welder at the Boardman plant.

Wind turbines are proliferating on ridgetops up and down the Columbia Gorge, but what happens when the wind stops blowing? For reliability, wind must partner with a "baseload" power source. Because of population growth and increased energy consumption, hydropower can no longer satisfy the Pacific Northwest's energy needs. PGE closed its nuclear plant in 1992. That leaves coal and natural

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## City draws road map for new marine terminal

The Portland City Council on July 29 passed a resolution authorizing staff to develop a legislative proposal for annexation of West Hayden Island, to protect at least 500 acres as open space and to identify no more than 300 acres for future deep water marine terminal development.

The council voted 4-0, with Commissioner Randy Leonard absent.

Union members turned out in droves in support of the resolution, saying it was a jobs issue. Workers donning "Jobs" stickers filled a good portion of the council chambers, plus half the balcony seats. The Port of Portland estimated that some 1,200 family-wage jobs would be created if a marine terminal were to be built.

"The kind of jobs that are associated with maritime development are high wage blue collar jobs," said port director Bill Wyatt.

The Port of Portland purchased the 814-acre island in 1994 with the intention of building a large cargo facility. The island was brought into the Metro urban growth boundary in 1983 specifically for that purpose.

Jeff Smith, president of the Inter-

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## Supporters of private casino say secretary of state invalidated valid signatures; judge agrees to hearing

Chief petitioners of a labor-endorsed petition to build a privately-operated casino in Wood Village filed a lawsuit after the Elections Division determined that the initiative lacked enough valid signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

According to Secretary of State Kate Brown, the amendment failed to obtain the required 110,358 valid signatures for a constitutional amendment. Backers turned in 172,136 raw signatures. Of those, only 60.78 percent — or 104,629 — were determined to be from registered Oregon voters.

The announcement stunned officials from the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council. Developers of the \$250 million-plus entertainment center/casino to be built at a shuttered dog track in Wood Village signed a project labor agreement with the council, guaranteeing it would be union built. In turn, affiliated construc-

tion locals helped collect signatures.

"Obviously, this is a huge disappointment for the building trades," said John Mohlis, executive secretary of the building trades council. "The construction industry is in desperate need for work, and this would have helped."

Matt Rossman, co-chief petitioner, said the secretary of state's determination is wrong.

The campaign's signature gathering firm — Democracy Resources of Portland — evaluated 35,000 of the signatures submitted and found a validity rate far above the number needed to qualify for the ballot, Rossman said. The Elections Division evaluated 8,500 signatures and found one of the lowest validity rates in a decade — 60.78 percent. The Oregonian reported the average validity rate since 2000 has been 73 percent.

The petitioners' goal, with a budget of \$1.2 million, was to collect 160,000

signatures.

"Our signature gathering firm has the best validity record in the business," Rossman said. "Therefore, we think the secretary has made mistakes in checking signatures. We've asked the secretary for the rejected signatures and access to the signatures on file so we can evaluate whether the secretary made the mistakes we're sure she made. If the secretary cooperates, we won't need to continue the lawsuit."

At a July 30 hearing, Marion County Circuit Court Judge Paul Lipscomb denied the petitioners' request for an injunction to block the secretary of state's certification, which became official Aug. 1. However, he did agree to hear arguments disputing the results on Aug. 20. That hearing is set for 1:30 p.m. at the Marion County Courthouse.

A companion statutory measure to site a casino in Wood Village did qualify for the ballot. That initiative —

which required 82,769 signatures (petitioners submitted 136,938 raw signatures) — detailed how much would be spent initially to build the casino and entertainment center (\$250 million) and where some of the profits would go. The statutory initiative authorized 25 percent of adjusted gross gaming revenues — estimated at more than \$100 million a year — be dedicated to K-12 education and other public services.

Both initiatives needed voter approval in order for the project to move forward. But because the statutory initiative did qualify, Oregonians will still have a vote on the entertainment center.

"Oregonians deserve to continue the conversation about how we are going to solve Oregon's budget crisis," said co-petitioner Bruce Studer. "A casino that actually pays taxes is worthy of a decision by Oregon voters."