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Laborers to rejoin AFL-CIO

The 500,000-member Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) will rejoin the AFL-CIO effective Oct. 1, Laborers President Terry O'Sullivan announced Aug. 15.

The announcement capped months of talks between the union and the larger labor federation. The Laborers disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in June 2006 and joined six other unions to form the Change to Win labor federation. But even as it left the AFL-CIO, Laborers leaders expressed hope for eventual reunification, and the union remained an active member of the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department. The union also continued to coordinate much of its political effort through the AFL-CIO.

"Working people and our country need a united union movement," O'Sullivan said in a press statement announcing the re-affiliation. "A united union movement can better focus Congress — and particularly the U.S. Senate — on helping to lead our nation, rather than being locked in inaction."

In a statement of his own Aug. 16, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka thanked O'Sullivan and welcomed the

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AFL-CIO President Trumka to speak at Portland town hall

National AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka and International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) President Robert McEllrath will be in Portland Monday, Aug. 23, for a "jobs and the economy" town hall meeting with gubernatorial candidate John Kitzhaber.

The event, which is open to all union members and their families, starts at 6:30 p.m. at the ILWU Local 8 Hall, 2435 NW Front Avenue, Portland.

All three men will be open for questions about jobs, politics, or whatever topic participants want to talk about.

The following morning, at 7:15 a.m.,

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On day 1,003 without a first contract, members of United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555 and community activists joined together Aug. 14 for a demonstration at The Dalles Fred Meyer. Non-food employees at the store voted Nov. 16, 2007, to join Local 555 — the same union that represents their colleagues in grocery, meat, and central checkout. The bargaining unit of 87 workers is still waiting for a contract. "Fred Meyer is denying these workers the exact same benefits that all other union employees in their stores have and all other union non-food employees in the state have," said Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson. Fred Meyer, owned by grocery giant Kroger Inc., is trying to force this particular unit of non-food workers into a 401(k) pension plan and a high-deductible health insurance plan. Other unionized grocery workers have a defined benefit pension plan and pay much lower health insurance premiums. "We'll keep this up until Fred Meyer shows these workers some respect," said Local 555 President Dan Clay, pictured in the photo left with Anderson (on drums) leading about 200 people through the streets of The Dalles. No talks are currently scheduled.

Green jobs in Portland pay a living wage

Pelosi touts retrofit program as stimulus success

By Don McINTOSH
Associate Editor

These days, the most popular words in the Democratic Party political vocabulary are "green" and "jobs." Aug. 15, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) was in Portland highlighting a program that combines the two.

Clean Energy Works Portland does "home energy retrofits" — insulation, high-efficiency furnaces and water heaters — using federal stimulus act dollars as seed money for a revolving loan fund. Homeowners repay the loans on their utility bills. Workers, including some union members, earn a living wage.

For a year, the program's local boosters have been describing it as a national model. Now it's official. "It really is a model for the country," said Pelosi, who as speaker is third in line of succession to the U.S. president.

Pelosi was given a tour of a North-east Portland home that was retrofitted by Neil Kelly Co. Neil Kelly is the only full-fledged union-signatory contractor that is participating in Clean Energy Works Portland thus far. The company

employs members of Carpenters Local 247 to do basic weatherization.

Thanks to Clean Energy Works Port-

land, Pete and Heather Ficht, whose home was showcased for the press, got \$28,000 worth of energy efficiency im-

provements for only \$300 up front. The work included insulation, a high-efficiency furnace, and a tankless water heater. Rebates and tax credits lowered their cost, and the remainder they will repay with a \$100-a-month charge on their natural gas bill over the next 20 years. Because they got more work done than most participants in the program, the loan payments are likely to be higher than what they'll save in energy costs, but they also got big improvements in the comfort and usability of their home.

Pelosi was joined by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon), Portland Mayor Sam Adams and a gaggle of press to see 22-month-old Sabine Ficht's new bedroom, an upstairs space that previously was too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter to be usable.

"Insulation is the least sexy thing we've had done, but it's made the biggest difference," said Heather Ficht, who works as a project manager at Worksystems, Inc.

The program's "green" aspect is easy to see, but the "jobs" are harder to nail down.

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U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (right) tours a Portland home where union members made energy efficiency improvements using stimulus funds.