

AFL-CIO to establish special council for young workers

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Responding to demands from its first-ever Youth Summit less than three months ago, the national AFL-CIO will establish a special council of young workers from around the country to consider, refine, and channel their issues and to help connect the labor movement to young workers, or those 35 and under.

The council is the most fully developed part of the federation's increased outreach to youthful workers, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler told Press Associates Union News Service Aug. 5 at the labor federation's Executive Council meeting in downtown Washington, D.C.

Shuler, 39, was the prime mover behind the summit — along with data showing union members are older and grayer than the U.S. workforce as a whole. Only 5 percent of workers aged 18-24 are unionized, compared to 16 percent of those aged 45-64.

Further, according to the 300 youth-



LIZ SHULER

ful activists at the summit, labor doesn't know how to reach and involve young workers, needs to adapt to changing non-traditional work environments, and must start two-way communication, among other things.

Shuler's report to the Executive Council touched on all those issues and more, including the need to educate young workers about unions. "There are a lot of moving parts to this and it's still being developed, and will be road-tested through 'webinars,'" she said.

"People felt really comfortable with what we recommended," Shuler said of the other union leaders. "First and fore-

most, we're going to establish a Young Worker National Advisory Committee, drawing on the participants from the summit" and other youthful activists named by local unions. The committee will sift through the summit's recommendations, investigate best practices for drawing young workers in, and propose concrete actions unions can take to bring in and encourage young activists.

"And the committee is going to look at all our programs through the eyes of young workers" to see if they're effective, and if not, how to change them. Shuler said.

Youth summit participants also noted young workers are in different arrangements from traditional ones unions are used to. The new arrangements include part-time work, contract work, work from home, and freelance work. Unions must figure out how to both organize and benefit workers in those new arrangements. The committee will handle that task, too.

Recruiting and involving younger unionists also involves mentoring, the summit participants said.

Shuler reported that her colleagues were surprisingly receptive to the idea, but warned that local union leaders

may be another story. There, mentoring and participation opportunities — such as holding union office or serving as a national convention delegate — often go to older veteran members who worked their way up.

"Don't just give me a mentor and a program is what we're saying," Shuler explained. "I want to be able to pick the mentor, help develop the program and have two-way communication. And another thing is that union meetings are boring and need to be turned into educational opportunities that appeal to members," she added.

Young labor activists — YELL — to meet in Portland, Saturday, Aug. 28

A newly-formed youth organization of the Oregon AFL-CIO, dubbed Young Emerging Labor Leaders (YELL), will convene for a daylong meeting Saturday, Aug. 28.

Participants will elect one person to become a voting member on the Oregon AFL-CIO General Board.

The meeting will take place at the NECA-IBEW Electrical Training Center, 16021 NE Airport Way, Portland. Meals are provided, beginning with breakfast from 8:30 to 9:30, and ending with a barbecue social at 5:30 that will include union entertainment.

Workshops will delve into what it

means to be a union member, why unions are involved in politics, and how to organize and mobilize for change.

And longtime political consultant Steve Novick will moderate a forum for candidates seeking the Oregon AFL-CIO General Board seat.

To register, e-mail or call Oregon AFL-CIO organizer Ian McEwen at ian@oraflcio.org or 503-224-3169. There are no hard and fast guidelines as to what constitutes a young union member, said YELL co-founder Jaimie Sorenson, but the target age is 35 or under.

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require a secret ballot for workers voting to unionize.

If passed, the secret ballot initiatives would have little immediate effect because federal law already allows employers to require a secret ballot.

Rather, the ballot measures are an attempt to pre-emptively undermine the Employee Free Choice Act. EFCA would allow a majority of employees to create a union by signing cards.

EFCA has stalled on Capitol Hill, but businesses worry congressional Democrats will bring it up in a lame duck session after the midterm elections.

Arizona Democrats said Republicans were pandering to their base hoping to boost Republican turnout in the Nov. 2 election.

Arizona Republicans cast the measure as an economic development opportunity that would send a message that the state is business-friendly.

Lawmakers originally referred the issue to voters more than a year ago, but a judge kicked it from the ballot because it was improperly crafted. The state Supreme Court recently upheld the decision, so Gov. Jan Brewer called lawmakers into a last-minute special session last week to address the issue.

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