

Against incumbent Ron Wyden

Oregon Working Families Party runs Senate candidate

The Oregon Working Families Party — a union-backed minor political party — has set a course for the November general election. The party is cross-nominating 37 Democrats and one Republican, and running its own candidate for the U.S. Senate seat held by Democrat Ron Wyden.

The Working Families Party doesn't take positions on divisive social issues, but instead promotes what the party's state director Steve Hughes called "good old-fashioned economic populism."

"Our party, at its core, is about moving an issues agenda," Hughes said. "It's about using political power to enact legislation beneficial to working people."

Last year, the Working Families Party helped win a reform that could increase the clout of minor parties. On November 2010 general election ballots, Oregon voters will see a partial form of electoral "fusion." Also known as cross-nomination, fusion means candidates can run as the nominee of more than one party. In "full fusion" states like New York, candidates' names appear on more than one party's ballot line, so they can see ex-

actly how many votes a minor party's nomination contributed. Under Oregon's new fusion law, candidates' names will be followed on the ballot by the names of all political parties that nominate them.

To earn the Working Families Party's nomination, candidates had to answer questions about their level of commitment to the Working Families Party's priorities. Candidates for state office were asked to support the establishment of a publicly-owned bank and the creation of a disability insurance program; to impose minimum labor standards whenever state funds are used to stimulate the economy; to publicly support union organizing drives, contract campaigns, and strikes; to fully fund the state's need-based grant program for college students; and to oppose privatization of Oregon's public colleges and universities.

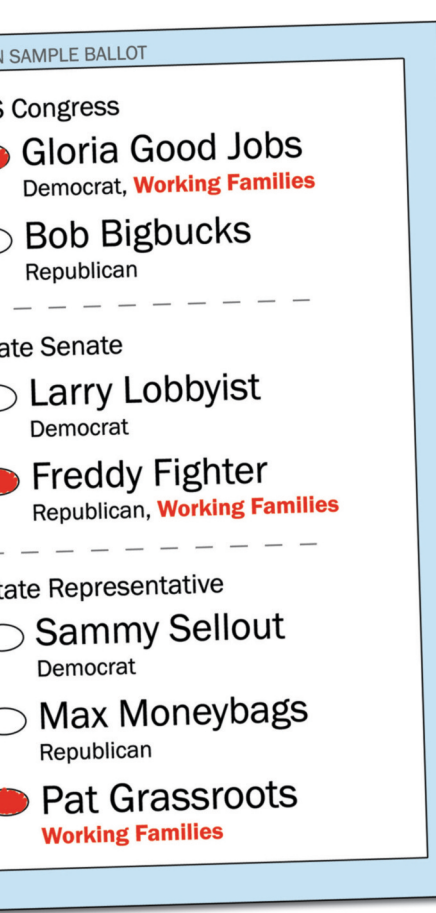
Candidates for Congress were asked to support moves toward a single-payer, not-for-profit system of universal health care; to insist on labor standards when federal funds are used to stimulate the economy; to co-sponsor and actively support the TRADE Act, a bill that would turn away from

NAFTA-style trade policy; to support legislation to make it easier for workers to unionize and get a first contract; and to vote for the strongest possible financial regulatory reform.

The party's nomination process began with a questionnaire all candidates were asked to fill out. Then registered party members in each of the state's five congressional districts met to review their responses and make nomination recommendations, which were binding on the state nominating committee unless two-thirds of the committee disagreed. Hughes said only one such recommendation was overturned — a move to nominate a Democrat in a race where the Republican incumbent supports the state bank proposal.

Democrat Peter DeFazio was the only Oregon member of Congress to win the Working Families Party's nomination. Kurt Schrader also turned in the questionnaire seeking the party's nomination, but Earl Blumenauer, David Wu, and Republican Greg Walden did not.

For U.S. Senate, the Working Families Party plans to run its own candidate, Roseburg resident Bruce Cronk. Cronk is a retired member of the United Steelworkers Local 5074. His run for Senate is intended to satisfy the party's need to get 1 percent of the vote in a statewide race in order to maintain its legal status as a minor party. Wyden's was the race chosen



A fictional ballot, above, gives an idea of how the union-backed Oregon Working Families Party intends to use Oregon's new partial fusion voting law: sometimes endorsing Democrats or Republicans, other times running candidates of their own.

because he is unlikely to lose re-election and because the Working Families Party has disagreements with him over trade policy and health care reform. Wyden voted for NAFTA and most of the other NAFTA-style free trade agreements.

The Working Families Party also nominated Democrats John Kitzhaber for Oregon governor and Ted Wheeler for Oregon treasurer.

For the Oregon Legislature, the Working Families Party cross-nominated Democrats in 25 state house races and nine state senate races. The sole Republican to get the party's nomination was Pendleton state Rep. Bob Jenson. Last year, Jenson defied his party's majority by voting to refer

measures 66 and 67 to voters; the measures raised taxes modestly on corporations and high-income taxpayers.

"What we're finding in this nominating process is that as the Working Families Party, we do have something that's valuable to these candidates," Hughes said. "They're realizing this broadens the base, brings more voters into the fold."

One pothole on the road to fusion: Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown has determined that on the newly reworked ballots, all parties will be identified by a three-letter abbreviation, with a legend below that spells out the party name in full. The Democratic and Republican parties would appear as "Dem" and "Rep," and the Oregon Working Families Party would be WFP. The Working Families Party and other parties are opposing that decision.

"It undermines the whole spirit of what fusion is about," Hughes said. "The law itself says the party's name, not initials."

Whether or not that decision is overturned, the Working Families Party will have a statement explaining what the party stands for, which will appear near the end of the Voters's Pamphlet that is mailed to all registered voters.

The Oregon Working Families Party is endorsed and backed financially by six unions representing about 30,000 workers: Communications Workers of America Local 7901, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Oregon Area District Council, Operating Engineers Local 701, Teamsters Local 206, and United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555.

The full list of Working Families Party nominations is available at <http://oregonwfp.org/elections/2010-state-legislative-nominations/>.



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