

...Election night bittersweet for Washington unions

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In the Oregon Senate, Democrats were clinging to a 15-13 advantage, with two races still undecided at press time. A majority requires 16 seats.

Union Steelworker Bruce Cronk, the Working Families Party candidate for U.S. Senate, got 12,412 votes — 1.22 percent of the total, and the highest of three minor party candidates. That result of over 1 percent means the party will continue to be certified as an official minor political party.

On statewide ballot measures, Oregon voters turned back a proposal to allow a private developer to build a casino in Multnomah County. Measure 75 had support from the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council.

Voters approved Measure 70, making low-interest home loans available to more military veterans; Measure 71, requiring the Legislature to meet every year; Measure 72, to allow the Legislature to use bonds with lower interest

rates for building projects; and Measure 76, dedicating 15 percent of lottery funds for protecting waterways, preserving natural areas and staffing state parks.

Oregonians also passed Measure 73, to boost the mandatory minimum sentences for repeat drunken drivers and sex offenders. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Oregon Nurses Association, as well as Dudley and Kitzhaber, opposed Measure 73 because the increased prison costs aren't offset, so funding will have to come from other state services.

Measure 74, to create nonprofit medical marijuana dispensaries and a producer supply system was soundly defeated.

In the race for Metro president, labor-endorsed Tom Hughes, a former mayor of Hillsboro, led environmentalist Bob Stacey 51 percent to 49 percent in incomplete returns at press time.



Steven Araujo, Richard Ramirez and Everice Moro, all officers of the Oregon School Employees Association, have mixed reaction to early election results at the Hilton Hotel Grand Ballroom.

In Portland, voters rejected the city's public campaign finance system for city-wide elected offices; the so-called

Voter-Owned Elections ballot measure had union backing.

Multnomah County voters passed ballot measures to fund the Oregon Historical Society, and to allow future votes on library funding. Both measures were supported by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

Former Wyden aide Loretta Smith, who had a wide range of labor endorsements, won the race for Multnomah County Commission, District 2.

In Lane County, Pat Riggs-Henson, a retired member of AFSCME Local 2831 and former AFL-CIO Executive Board member, lost her bid for the Lane

County Commission. She was defeated by Springfield Mayor Sid Leiken.

Election night was bittersweet for the Washington union movement.

In Southwest Washington's Third Congressional District, Republican Jaime Herrera defeated labor-endorsed Democrat Denny Heck for the seat vacated by Democrat Brian Baird.

Ballot measures supported by the Washington State Labor Council were rejected by voters: A measure to establish the state's first-ever income tax on the highest income earners was defeated by a wide margin, and so was a measure that would have put building trades members to work retrofitting schools.

Meanwhile, at least two initiatives opposed by labor passed: repeal of the soda and candy tax, and a measure that requires a two-thirds' majority for the Legislature to raise taxes.

But the initiative that was most heavily opposed by unions — a measure to privatize Washington's workers' compensation system — also failed, to the relief of union leaders. And two ballot measures privatizing liquor sales — both opposed by labor — appeared headed to defeat.

In Clark County, former AFSCME union member Tony Golik was elected county prosecutor, while incumbent county clerk Sherry Parker, a former member of Office and Professional Employees Local 11, was in a dead heat against Scott Weber as of press time, leading him by less than 100 votes.

Saturday mail delivery to continue — for now

Earlier this year, the U.S. postmaster general proposed eliminating mail delivery on Saturdays, but so far, Congress isn't going along with it.

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is a government enterprise, but since 1970, Congress has required it to be self-supporting. The problem is: Recession and the Internet are reducing mail volume and thus cutting postal revenue. USPS lost \$3.7 billion last year. On top of that, a relatively new requirement by Congress that USPS "pre-fund" its retirees' medical benefits is costing USPS over \$5 billion a year. USPS has now amassed \$41 billion in its future retiree health fund, enough to fund retiree benefits for decades.

Ending Saturday delivery was proposed as a cost-cutting measure, and it was supposed to happen at the beginning of October. Postal unions fought the proposal vigorously.

And Congress didn't agree to it. On Sept. 29, Congress adopted a "continuing resolution" to fund the federal government through early December. In the

resolution, Congress didn't approve ending Saturday delivery, but it didn't help USPS out of its financial squeeze either. Senate Republicans voted unanimously to block a provision that would have deferred \$4 billion of the \$5.5 billion payment to future retiree health benefits. Congress deferred the payment last year. The provision was

backed by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC).

USPS made its payment Sept. 30, and is as a result very short on cash — less than \$2 billion. And according to the postmaster general's current forecast, USPS won't have enough money to make next year's payment on Sept. 30, 2011.



NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

(International Standard Serial Number 0894-444X)
Established in 1900 at Portland, Oregon as a voice of the labor movement.

4275 NE Halsey St., P.O. Box 13150,
Portland, Ore. 97213
Telephone: (503) 288-3311

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Published on a semi-monthly basis on the first and third Fridays of each month by the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co. Inc., a non-profit corporation owned by 20 unions and councils including the Oregon AFL-CIO. Serving more than 120 union organizations in Oregon and SW Washington. Subscriptions \$13.75 per year for union members.

Group rates available to trade union organizations.

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