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to a new group of in-home care givers, authorizing \$140 million in bonds for renovation and new construction, and reforming the Business Energy Tax Credit.

- **Walmart** was at the top of a list compiled by the Oregon Department of Human Services of employers whose workers received food stamps and/or state-subsidized medical coverage. Walmart, which in 2009 rang up profits of \$14.4 billion on sales of \$405 billion, had 468 Oregon employees getting one or both forms of public assistance in 2009, and 875 in 2008. McDonalds, Taco Bell, Burger King, and Subway also made the top 10. Other names near the top of the 50-employer list included Harry & David, Dollar Tree, Target, Goodwill and temp agency Labor Ready.

- On March 25, Congress passed historic **health insurance reform** after a year of debate, multiple versions, hundreds of town halls and months of procedural hurdles. It's a complicated law, 2,310 pages long. The core element, beginning in 2014, is a de facto requirement that uninsured adults under 65 purchase health insurance in government-regulated state-by-state exchanges, aided by subsidies, and enforced by tax penalties. The state exchanges, administered by government agencies or non-profits, will serve as clearinghouses for private insurance plans, which will be available at five benefit levels. Subsidies, available on a sliding scale, will limit premiums to 2 percent of income for those at 133 percent of the poverty level (\$14,404 for individuals/\$29,326 for a family of four) — rising to 9.5 percent of income for those at 400 percent of the poverty level (\$43,320 for individuals/\$88,200 for a family of four).

- In May, Oregon's new **Worker Freedom Act** survived its first legal challenge by business groups. The nationally watched legislation, which took effect Jan. 1, 2010, gives private-sector workers the right not to attend workplace anti-union meetings. Those mandatory-attendance meetings — which follow scripts provided by anti-union consultants — are employers' most effective tactic in squelching union campaigns. So the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Associated Oregon Industries sued in federal court to stop the law. The judge didn't rule on whether the law illegally pre-empts the National Labor Relations Act, as the business groups argued, but instead dismissed the suit because the business groups had jumped the gun, suing before any business had suffered real impact from the law.

- For hard-hit local **construction workers**, the one notable bright spot of the year was the Oct. 19 announcement that **Intel** will spend close to \$4 billion in new facilities in Hillsboro, starting in 2011. With commercial and industrial construction still in a bust, and unemployment up to 30 percent in some crafts, Intel's announcement is "a really good shot in the arm," said Paul Riggs, executive secretary of the **Columbia-**

... YEAR IN REVIEW: Top labor stories of 2010

Pacific Building Trades Council.

- In August, we reported on efforts by **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 125** to save **PGE's Boardman Power Plant** from closure. Later that month, the investor-owned utility proposed to close the coal-fired electric plant in 2020 rather than spend \$500 million to comply with the Clean Air Act. In December, the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission approved the proposal, which commits the company to install \$60 million worth of technology in 2011 and 2014 that will reduce nitrogen oxide emissions by 50 percent and sulfur dioxide emissions by 75 percent. PGE would then close the plant by the end of 2020.

- The Labor Press continued to report the aftermath of a June 2009 mass firing of 17 pro-union workers by **BrucePac**. Workers at BrucePac, a cooked meat processor with plants in Silverton and Woodburn, Oregon, wanted to join **Laborers Local 296**, but nearly every worker who attended an early-stage union meeting was fired several weeks later. Local 296 filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). As is often the case, the NLRB chose not to pursue charges in 13 of those firings, since there was no "smoking gun" employer admission that workers were fired *because of* their union sympathies. But four cases did go to trial, in February 2010; in April, a judge dropped one worker's case, but ordered BrucePac to reinstate three other workers, with back pay. One had found a better job by then, but two workers were reinstated Aug. 31, 2010. They are continuing to work at BrucePac. But their supervisor was fired. His slip-up — telling a friend that he selected pro-union workers for termination — lost BrucePac the case. Workers

have also filed charges with the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI). Seven complaints against BrucePac have been filed with BOLI since July 2009, alleging sexual harassment, sex discrimination, age discrimination, and other abuses. Investigators dismissed two charges for lack of evidence; two are still being investigated; one was transferred to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for investigation; and two are moving forward with hearings after investigators found substantial evidence that violations occurred. Meanwhile, the workers' union campaign continues, with pro-union workers meeting regularly to discuss plans, said Local 296 dispatcher Dagoberto Aranda.

- National AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka** rallied with Portland union activists Aug. 23-24, encouraging them to stay politically active. Trumka sat alongside Oregon gubernatorial candidate John Kitzhaber answering union members' questions at an indoor rally that drew 500 people to the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 8 hall in Portland.

- The **Northwest Labor Press** celebrated its 110th anniversary with a special 32-page Labor Day edition Sept. 3. Portland unions started the Labor Press in 1900 because of the lack of coverage of labor activities by the commercial press. Over the years the newspaper's name has changed from Portland Labor Press, to Oregon Labor Press, to Oregon/Washington Labor Press, to Northwest Labor Press. But it's mission has remained the same, to report on stories about organized labor that the commercial press ignores.

- Portland Jobs With Justice named **Portland French School** "Scrooge of the Year" for the outrageous and per-

sonal anti-union campaign waged by the private school's principal, Elimane Mbengue. Patricia Raclot, a teacher who was fired because she supported a campaign to join **American Federation of Teachers (AFT-Oregon)**, turned down an offer of two years salary to settle her case against the school. Even though her work visa expired, Raclot has remained in Portland, hoping for vindication. AFT-Oregon locals are passing the hat at meetings to give her support. AFT awaits a judge's decision in the case; final arguments were submitted Nov. 10. Meanwhile, bargaining began Dec. 20 for a group of Portland French School assistants at the school who did vote "Union, Oui!" The teachers, however, failed to show majority support for the union after an intensive anti-union campaign that involved illegal threats and intimidation. If the government rules that the school broke the law in that campaign, it could order a re-run election.

- The heat is on at **TriMet** among members of **Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757**, over employer proposals to reduce cost-of-living increases and weaken the employer commitment

to full family health benefits. The old contract, covering 2,000 active members plus retirees, expired November 2009. Bargaining reached an impasse in July 2010, after which the contract is supposed to go to an arbitrator for a final decision. But TriMet decided to impose some of its terms in the meantime, and some unfair labor practice charges filed by the union must first be adjudicated before the arbitrator can consider which side's offer is more reasonable. Since September, anger over TriMet's imposition of terms has spilled out in a series of protests at TriMet board meetings and outside the house of general manager Neil McFarlane.

- Seven-union, 1,800-member **District Council of Trade Unions** ratified a new contract in October with the City of Portland, with improved protections against contracting out, and cost-of-living raises in future years.

- In the **November general election**, support from Oregon labor helped elect John Kitzhaber governor, Tom Hughes as Metro president, and helped four incumbent Democrats return to Congress. It also brought a divided Oregon House of Representatives for the first time in history, with 30 Republicans and 30 Democrats. In Southwest Washington, labor-backed Denny Heck lost a race for Congress. Washington voters agreed with unions in rejecting a ballot measure to privatize the state's workers' compensation system.



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