

Actions nationwide defend workers and the American Dream

By JAMES PARKS
National AFL-CIO

Last weekend, more than 100,000 people jammed into the square surrounding the Wisconsin state Capitol for an all-day series of rallies that sent a message to Republican legislators and Gov. Scott Walker that the assault on working people will not stand and their struggle is far from over.

Meanwhile, several organizations joined together to hold rallies nationwide March 15 (after this issue went to press) as part of the "Defend the American Dream" event to defend public services and the workers that deliver them. One such event was held in downtown Portland at Terry Schunk Plaza sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO, Northwest Oregon Labor Council and Jobs with Justice.

In Madison, Wisconsin, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler joined the crowd, which gave a heroes' welcome to the 14 Democratic state Senate members who left the state to prevent the body from considering Walker's proposal to cut off public employees' bargaining rights. The legislators then rigged a vote to pass the bill in the middle of the night.

Saturday, March 12, was the 27th straight day of protests in Madison. Another highlight of the rally was a "tractorcade" by Wisconsin farmers to support state workers and protest Walker's budget, which will hurt rural communities. During that rally, farmer Tony Schultz made a passionate statement of support for public employees.

"Public workers are our friends, neighbors and family members, and we stand in solidarity with them," he said. "We're all in this together. We all go up together or we all go down together."

Upcoming rallies in the Pacific Northwest

- An International Solidarity rally is slated Saturday, April 2, at Peace Arch Park in Blaine, Washington. The rally will bring together unionists, students, and activists from Canada, Washington, and Oregon to extend hands across the border in solidarity with all workers. The event is co-sponsored by the British Columbia Federation of Labour; the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO; and the Oregon AFL-CIO. The Oregon AFL-CIO will charter buses to take participants to the rally and back. Cost is \$30 and breakfast and lunch will be provided. Contact Chris Hewitt at chris@afcio.org or 503-287-3114 to book a spot on the bus.

- "Keep Dr. King's Dream Alive" rally Monday, April 4, starting at 5:30 p.m. in a Portland location that had not been determined at press time. Carl Wolfson, comedian and talk show host will emcee the event.

- "Portland Rising" rally and march for jobs will take place Saturday, April 16, at noon at Pioneer Courthouse Square.

Union leaders vow that as long as attacks on workers continue, so will actions in solidarity with workers across the country.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Oregon Legislature one third of the way through

SALEM — One third of the way through this year's five-month Oregon legislative session, several bills backed by organized labor are progressing through the legislative process. Others are still at the starting line.

To become law, bills must be approved by both the House and Senate and be signed by the governor. That's a little harder to do this year, because the Oregon House is divided 30-30 along party lines. But it doesn't mean organized labor won't keep trying. The way it works, a bill is referred to a committee, and the committee must hold a hearing and vote to approve it before the bill can be voted on by the full House or Senate. So hearings and committee passage are milestones on the way to a bill becoming law.

Bills that could help people get back to work are labor's big focus this year.

- **House Bill 2700** would let developers of gas, water, and electric transmission lines get a conditional permit before obtaining permission from landowners. The bill is backed by the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council and the Oregon AFL-CIO and opposed by environmental groups. On March 2, it passed the

House 40-18 with the support of most Republicans and about half the Democrats. It's now being taken up by the Senate Business, Transportation and Economic Development Committee headed by Lee Beyer (D-Salem).

- **House Bill 2960** would finance energy-efficiency projects at public schools across the state, which would create jobs in the construction industry and save school districts money on the future utility bills. It's backed by a coalition of business, environmental, labor, school, and other groups. A hearing was held Feb. 21.

- **House Bill 3349**, a "Buy America" bill introduced by Rep. Mike Schaufler (D-Happy Valley), got a hearing March 11. The bill would prohibit government agencies from awarding public works contracts unless the iron, steel, wood products and manufactured goods used are produced within the United States. "It's about putting Oregonians to work with Oregonians' tax dollars," says Iron Workers Local 29 Business Manager Kevin Jensen, who testified at the hearing. Why should construction materials be imported from China on public works projects, Jensen asks, when union-represented firms like Fought &

Co., Oregon Ironworks, and GT Metal-fab are making them in Oregon? Associated General Contractors opposes the measure.

- **House Bill 2352**, which would require cities and counties that reduce prime industrial land to replace it with equivalent land, had a hearing Feb. 23. And Senate Bill 766, which had a hearing March 10, would ensure that industrial land is available and can move from the planning stages to breaking ground quickly.

Some union-backed bills have not yet had a hearing in the House Business and Labor Committee, which is co-chaired by Schaufler and Bill Kenemer (R-Oregon City):

- **House Bill 2355** would create a short-term disability insurance program to pay up to a year of benefits at 55 percent of an employee's wage.

- **House Bill 2966** would ensure that public contracts for services are not awarded to companies who will perform the work outside of the United States.

- **House Bill 2586** would require companies that benefit from Enterprise Zone property tax exemptions to pay prevailing wage on construction projects in the zones.



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