



## In Washington Legislature

# Bills banning collective bargaining are buried

OLYMPIA — If working people have a voice in the Washington Legislature, it's in no small part through the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. WSLC coordinates labor union lobbying efforts in Olympia, and tracks dozens of bills that could help or harm union members and working people.

So far this year, WSLC has had some successes pushing bills toward passage, and has helped kill a number of objectionable bills, but also has seen a number of proposals that it backed die for lack of support. Bills were declared "dead" if they failed to pass at least one committee by Feb. 25, or to pass in either the House or the Senate by March 7. However, WSLC publications director David Groves cautions that every "death" is relative in Olympia, since bills necessary to implement the budget can be passed until the final day.

Democrats in Washington control the governor's office, the state House 55 to 43, and the state Senate 27 to 22.

One top priority for WSLC is defending the state's workers' compensation system — yet again — from "reforms" that would deprive injured workers of benefits. Four months after voters rejected a ballot measure that would have privatized the state's publicly-run workers' compensation system, WSLC is contending with **Senate Bill 5566**, which would allow employers to settle workers' compensation claims with lump-sum buyouts of injured workers. The buyouts would amount to benefit cuts, WSLC says, because disabled workers — desperate for having lost their income — would settle for less in the short-term than they'd be entitled to in the long term. The bill passed the Senate March 5 by 34-15 (with the support of all state senators representing Southwest Washington) and now is in the House.

**House Bill 2002**, on the other hand, would allow the workers' comp system to provide wage subsidies for light duty or transitional work, to help injured workers return to work. WSLC supports it. It passed the House 54-43 and now is in the Senate Labor Committee.

Several other WSLC-backed bills

are still in the running:

- **House Bill 1832** would give employees of airport service contractors — such as cafeteria workers — some security: If their employer loses a contract, workers are assumed to continue their jobs at the same wages and benefits with the new contractor. It passed the House 52-44, and now awaits action by Senate Labor, Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee.

- **House Bill 1701** and **Senate Bill 5599** would increase penalties on construction contractors that misclassify employees as "independent contractors." WSLC and the Washington State Building Trades Council have campaigned in previous legislative sessions against this abuse, in which unscrupulous employees undercut competitors by shirking their responsibility to pay unemployment and workers' compensation insurance. The bill passed the House 54 to 43, and is now in the Senate Labor committee.

But several proposals deemed worthy by the WSLC died when they failed to move by the Legislature's deadlines:

- **House Bill 1320**, sponsored by Seattle State Rep. (and Teamsters

leader) Bob Hasegawa, would have created a state bank, along the lines of a similar proposal in Oregon, to invest state government bank accounts in Washington businesses instead of placing those deposits in big out-of-state banks.

- **House Bill 1889**, also by Hasegawa, would have required the state budget to itemize the estimated impact of tax breaks.

WSLC also helped bury bills that would have harmed workers' interests:

- Several bills would have restricted collective bargaining rights for Washington State Ferries workers, cut their wages and benefits, and privatized parts of the system.

- Other bills would have banned state employee collective bargaining; made Washington a so-called "right-to-work" state by banning contracts from having union-security clauses; or banned public employee unions from bargaining over the contracting out of state services.

- **House Bill 1824** would have taken away the right of armored car employees to have rest and meal breaks.

WSLC publishes daily updates on the bills it's tracking at [www.wslc.org/legis/tracker11.htm](http://www.wslc.org/legis/tracker11.htm). The Legislature's 2011 session began Jan. 10. It's scheduled to end April 24, but could go into overtime.



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

Editor: Michael Gutwig  
Staff: Don McIntosh, Cheri Rice

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