

Listen Schrader, Wyden — jobs flee U.S. in the name of ‘free’ trade

To The Editor:

While driving by The Heritage House last week I was surprised to see a large vocal demonstration against Rep. Kurt Schrader, who was hosting a fund raiser there. What surprised me was that the demonstrators were protesting his position on the Korea Free Trade Act (he is “leaning towards supporting” it) and I thought that issue had been resolved last year.

So I went to a town hall meeting hosted by the congressman the next day and arrived just in time to pose a question. I identified myself as a member of the state committee of the Oregon Working Families Party who

worked on the nomination’s committee last year for political candidates seeking our party’s endorsement. Rep. Schrader had submitted a written questionnaire in which he indicated that he would not support the Korea Free Trade Act as written. He took issue with that part of the treaty relating to “financial takings” and domestic sovereignty.

As written, the Korea Free Trade Act grants investor-to-state rights that transcend U.S. and, for that matter, Korean laws; if a Korean investor thought he’d sustained financial losses as a result of, say, Oregon’s land use policies, he could seek redress from an interna-

tional tribunal and the American taxpayer would have to foot the bill.

When I questioned the congressman about this prior commitment, he said he’d been advised that that language was no longer in the treaty. For the record, the treaty’s original wording is unchanged since President Bush signed it three years ago; perhaps it’s time for the congressman to take his advisers to the woodshed.

During U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden’s recent round of town hall meetings he was repeatedly challenged for his support of Korea Free Trade Act. One time a constituent asked the audience: “Is there ANYBODY in the room who thinks the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Central American Free Trade Agreement have been good for America?” The silence was deafening, yet the good senator continues to support the treaty.

The message here for both Sen. Wyden and Congressman Schrader is listen to your constituents. We are the unemployed and underemployed who have watched our jobs flee the country in the name of “free” trade. We are the small business owners whose communities can no longer support them. Although we don’t have the money and lobbyists to control the debate, WE are your constituents, not the stateless multinational corporations and their Wall Street financiers who are the only

entities that profit from such trade deals.

Ray Kenny
IBEW Local 48
Portland

OPEN FORUM

Rallies are great; next step should be a general strike

To The Editor:

I greatly appreciate the statement by Jeff Johnson in the April 1 Northwest Labor Press and applaud his leadership in bringing unions together as a fighting force against the horrible attacks on us made in the guise of budget cuts.

Thanks also to grassroots community groups such as Sisters Organize for Survival and the Olympia Fair Budget Coalition that pushed for the huge and invigorating community-labor rallies in Olympia on the Days of Action.

As a next step, I’d love to see the community-labor coalition continue by holding public meetings where folks can plan civil disobedience to stop the draconian cuts in services. Building for a general strike should be a fruitful way to get the attention of the powers that be in both political parties.

And, I’d like to see a constitutional challenge to the new law requiring a

two-thirds majority to raise taxes.

Legislators are hiding behind it rather than taxing the rich folks and corporations.

Henry Noble
IAM 751
Retired
Seattle

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“The rich are always going to say that, you know, just give us more money and we’ll go out and spend more and then it will all trickle down to the rest of you. But that has not worked the last 10 years, and I hope the American public is catching on.”

WARREN BUFFETT
CEO OF BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY INC.

Building Trades’ Ayers pulls no punches blasting politicians

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Pulling no punches, AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department President Mark Ayers blasted politicians of both parties for not supporting workers, while strongly defending the Davis-Bacon Act, project labor agreements, and other pro-worker laws as good for workers and the vitality of the country.

Ayers’ remarks came in a keynote address April 4 at the Department’s 3,000-person legislative conference.

His comments were timely, as a day later an influential group of House Republicans announced an agenda for a concerted campaign to kill laws it deems “unconstitutional, anti-free-enterprise, or otherwise counter to economic, national security, or social conservatism.” Atop their list was repeal of the 80-year-old Davis-Bacon Act.

Delegates spent the last day of their conference, April 6, lobbying lawmakers to preserve Davis-Bacon and

PLAs, among other issues, including retaining regulatory powers of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

OSHA rules are needed, delegates said, because construction is still one of the most hazardous industries in the United States, accounting for 60 percent of OSHA inspections. Their legislative handbook noted the average fine when a worker is killed on the job is \$1,050. House Republicans want to cut OSHA funding by \$99 million, or more than one-sixth.

In his speech, Ayers warned delegates that the radical right of the Republican Party have the political juice to accomplish their goals.

“Anti-union conservatives have as many elected lawmakers” at all levels of government as they did before the Great Depression, he said.

“The radical worldview that is hell-bent on purging America of unions believes in individual responsibility alone,” Ayers declared. “The radical right *does not* believe government should ever help its people ... unless of course those citizens just happen to be their wealthy political benefactors who are clamoring for more subsidies or tax cuts. But things like prevailing wage laws, project labor agreements, trade adjustment assistance and safety standards are on the chopping block. Why? Because they are actually designed to protect and assist middle class working America.”

Ayers also faulted the Democrats for not defending workers. He cited “a sense of ambivalence” among Democrats about labor’s concerns.

“Sure, they are jumping on the bandwagon now ... But it’s fair to ask where the hell they have been for the last three years, not to mention the last 30 years? ... In recent years, we have been viewed by some within the Democratic Party as nothing more than a source of funds and votes,” Ayers said. Those who “want to turn this nation around must openly embrace unions as the centerpiece of that movement.”

...US Bank

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“US Bank ReliaCards are a good deal for Oregon and for Oregonians who use them,” asserts a fact sheet put out by Treasurer Ted Wheeler’s office in anticipation of the demonstrations. They may be an even better deal for US Bank, which got access to \$1.05 billion in funds last year through the program.

In tight budget times, the state is right to look for savings in its contracts, Unger told the Labor Press. But if it’s going to look at labor contracts for savings, it must also scrutinize business contracts, Unger said.

According to the state treasurers office, US Bank was selected through a competitive bidding process in late 2004. Contract performance is reviewed at least annually. The current contract expires Dec. 31, 2011.

SEIU plans to raise the issue at an April 18 US Bank shareholders meet-

Who’s On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Many look at the anti-worker agenda being advanced throughout America in states like Wisconsin, Ohio, Maine, and Idaho and think that it could never happen in Oregon.

This anti-worker agenda, which vilifies public employees, is focused on the elimination of worker power and furthers an agenda that continues to shift wealth from the poor and the dwindling middle class to the wealthy. Some legislation will eliminate workers’ ability to band together and bargain. Others will prohibit unionized construction jobs. No matter what, it shifts wealth. This isn’t a state-by-state agenda but rather a national effort funded by deep-pocketed backers such as the Koch brothers. These funders like to stay behind the scenes: letting others such as the Tea Party, Americans for Progress, Freedom Works, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Legislative Exchange Council form a shadow federation of think-tanks and activist organizations.

This shadow federation doesn’t just develop and work to pass anti-worker legislation but has collabo-

rated with the corporate media to drive the national debate toward a pro-corporate solution.

It isn’t a coincidence that both federal and state deficit debates are focused on cutting public services that are vital to families and to the survival of the middle class. Education, job creation, health care, social security, and services that provide for the elderly and less fortunate are targeted for cuts. Those who provide such services are vilified while those who brought about this recession that created our current revenue crisis are not held accountable.

The current worldwide recession is the direct result of a corporate financial strategy based on fraud and abuse. In 2008, when their folly brought the world’s economy to the edge of an economic abyss, taxpayers bailed them out. Three years after the bailout, profits are at record highs and the stock market is close to pre-recession levels. Isn’t it ironic that while the deficit focuses on service cuts and the reduction of public employee wages and slashing of benefit packages at state and federal levels, billions are given away to corpo-

rate America? The media is buying into the elite’s portrayal of this crisis as a choice of which services to slash, rather than holding corporations accountable for the mess they have created.

During the 2011 Oregon legislative session, anti-worker legislation similar to Wisconsin’s has been introduced. And just like Wisconsin, the focus of our state budget debate is on cuts while at the same time giving billions to corporations under the guise of job creation with little guarantees or safeguards that jobs will actually be created. Just like Wisconsin, Oregon’s corporate media writes stories that perpetuate a corporate agenda. For those who think what occurred in Wisconsin could never occur in Oregon, it already has begun.

And unless we stop it, the results won’t be on our side.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.