

May 17 ballot measures could put union members to work

Portland Public Schools is asking voters to approve two property tax measures in the May primary election. Both are backed by the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council, Portland Association of Teachers, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, Portland Fire Fighters Association Local 43, Portland Police Association, and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

The big one is Measure 26-121, which would pay for \$548 million in building remodels and other improvements: 86 schools would be upgraded, and nine would be rebuilt. Upgrades would include plumbing, wiring, heating and ventilation, fire alarms, security systems, and lighting; updated classrooms, science labs, and libraries; seismic safety improvements and improved handicapped access; and improvements to school grounds and building exteriors.

Because the work would pay the prevailing wage, union-signatory contractors would be on a level playing field to bid on the work.

The measure would authorize short-term bonds of one to three years, to be repaid by a six-year property tax levy of \$2.74 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Work would start as early as this summer, and projects would employ

roofers, electricians, ironworkers (for seismic upgrades), fitters (for boiler replacement and repair), sheet metal (for duct work and HVAC control systems) and insulators.

"The hope and expectation is there will be work for our members," said Paul Riggs, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council.

The second item, Measure 26-122, would extend and increase an existing operating levy that pays for teacher positions. The district estimates the expanded levy would protect at least 200 teaching positions from cuts. A current property tax school operating levy — at \$1.25 per \$1,000 assessed value — runs one more year. This measure would replace it with a new one at \$1.99, which would run five years. The new levy would raise \$57 million a year, \$19 million more than the current one. Property tax levies like this one are a local solution to inadequate school funding from the state. PPS is Oregon's largest school district, with 47,000 students.

Campaign manager Ben Unger is calling on supporters to put up lawn signs, volunteer, and contribute funds. The campaign can be reached at 503-284-6346 or by visiting the web site portlandersforschools.org.

Northwest Oregon Labor Council and the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council also are backing several school board candidates in the May 17 primary, including: Chuck Riley for Portland Community College (PCC) board, Zone 7; Maggie Brister-Mashia for Portland Public Schools board, Zone 2; and Mike Smith for Reynolds School District board, Position 7. Smith is a retired business agent and 32-year member of Sheet Metal Workers Local 16.

Riley, a former state representative, has been recommended by both local labor unions at PCC: the PCC Federation of Faculty and Academic Professionals, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 2277, and the PCC Federation of Classified Employees, AFT Local 3922.

The Labor Council also is endorsing Mike Delman for an at-large seat on the Multnomah Education Service District, while the Building Trades Council endorsed Harold Williams for

the Portland Community College board, Zone 2.

In Cottage Grove, Merlene Martin, a past president of the Oregon School Employees Association, is running for the South Lane School Board — where she worked for 22 years as an educational assistant. Martin has been endorsed by the Lane County Labor Council.

Ballots were mailed to registered voters April 29, and must be received May 17 to be counted.

...Portland Rising for good jobs, no cuts

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example, in 2009, Bank of America made \$4.4 billion in profit, paid zero in federal income tax and received a \$119 million tax credit. In 2010, General Electric (GE) made over \$14 billion in profits and along with Exxon Mobil, Bank of America, and other giant corporations, also paid no U.S. income taxes.

In a press release, rally sponsor Jobs with Justice said, "Instead of addressing the real crisis in this country — good jobs — Congress and their corporate allies push cuts in programs that

benefit working people like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. While tens of thousands of Oregonians are expected to lose their unemployment benefits, Congress is cutting the safety net."

Comparing the attack on workers' rights and the middle class to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Mitchell told the crowd: "It is time for us to regain our moral outrage and our righteous indignation, because we have to take this back. We are in the battle of our lifetime. We can't wait for somebody to save us. We have to save ourselves."

Mitchell said it will take time to get

the job done, calling it a sprint, not a marathon. "This will not happen overnight. Progress and reform take time," he said.

With that, Mitchell, Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian, and members of nine union locals currently in bargaining, led participants in a 27-block march through downtown Portland, stopping at U.S. Bank (chanting: "The banks got bailed out, we got sold out!") and the Hilton Hotel, before re-gathering at Terry Schunk Plaza for more speeches and chants.

More than 65 organizations co-sponsored the event.



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