



“Purple and green look good together,” said Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Ken Allen, referring to the colors of his union (green) and SEIU’s trademark purple at a May 20 rally at the Oregon state Capitol. “We’re here today to say the message that purple and green are staying together.”

## Agencies near and dear to labor mostly spared cuts by Legislature

SALEM — Oregon legislators are getting down to the nitty-gritty of the state’s next two-year budget. They have until the end of June to pass the budget for a fiscal year that begins July 1. The economy is better than it was two years ago, but federal stimulus funds have been used up, and it’s a lean, hard season for most state agencies.

Among agencies of special concern to organized labor, the scenario is belt-tightening, but no disabling cuts.

The Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) stood to lose eight positions in the governor’s budget, but a Joint Ways and Means subcommittee restored four of them. Going forward as of press time, it appeared that the agency will shrink from its current full-time-equivalent of 107.3 staff to 101. The cuts would include one fewer wage and hour compliance specialist, and one fewer civil rights investigator. The agency was to have lost two employees in the apprenticeship division, but those were restored by the subcommittee, with an additional apprenticeship position added for heavy highway construction.

University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) doesn’t appear to be under any special threat, though it could have its budget trimmed if higher education budget overall gets chopped 7 percent.

The State of Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB) — which runs elections, mediates disputes, and adjudicates labor law violations for state and local government employees in Oregon — is fully funded for year one with 13 full-time equivalent staff. But it’s on track to lose about a quarter of its budget in year two unless a committee can come up with new funding ideas.

Unlike the National Labor Relations Board, which administers labor law for private-sector unions, ERB’s budget

comes mostly from user fees, including a per-capita fee paid by state agencies.

A budget work group composed of union and employer representatives agreed that ERB could increase filing and mediation fees: The cost to file and respond to an unfair labor practice charge will rise to \$300 from the current \$250. Mediation (which cost nothing until 1995) currently costs a flat \$1,000 fee; under the proposal passed by a Joint Ways and Means subcommittee, mediation after June 30 will cost \$1,000 for the first two days, \$500 for the third day, \$750 for the fourth, and \$1,000 a day after that. [Costs of mediation are split between union and employer.] The one-quarter of ERB’s budget that is in the air is the \$900,000 it gets from the state general fund for administering the Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act for local governments. ERB Board Chair Paul Gamson said a reform workgroup will discuss alternative sources of funding for the second year — which could force

some pretty basic questions to be asked about public sector collective bargaining.

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## ...A Better Way

(From Page 1)

out between agency directors and the Joint Ways and Means committee.)

• The Oregon Department of Revenue, says Local 503 political organizer Melissa Unger, has acted on a number of Local 503 member suggestions to improve tax collection.

• A proposal to have state agencies scrutinize service and supply contracts is emerging in the form of a budget line item; it would require state purchasing agents to seek 6.5 percent cost savings from vendors.

• And a proposal to save state agencies an estimated \$15 million by purchasing pharmaceuticals through the Oregon Prescription Drug Program was moving forward as of press time as Senate Bill 962.

“We haven’t been ignored,” says Local 503 spokesperson Ed Hershey.

But SEIU and AFSCME have had more mixed success with proposals to take a close look at tax giveaways — subsidies embedded in the state tax code as credits and deductions.

The unions called attention to inefficiency in the way the state manages its film tax credit; that led to a bill giving the state film commission the discretion to give subsidies directly, cutting out the investor middle-men who currently put money into film projects and then col-

lect it back as tax credits.

But a blanket proposal to rate tax breaks according to whether they benefit mostly the wealthy appears unlikely to pass. Unger chalked that up to the 30-30 Republican-Democrat split in the Oregon House.

That logjam seemed to irk Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Ken Allen.

“The people in this building need to wake up,” Allen declared at the rally. “It’s time to end the giveaways. It’s beyond time to tax the rich.”

Organizers estimated from 3,000 to 4,000 people took part, including nearly a thousand who came from around Oregon on 22 buses. Participants were bused from Albany, Beaverton, Bend, Clackamas, Coos Bay, Corvallis, The Dalles, Eugene/Springfield, Grants Pass, Hermiston, Hillsboro, Hood River, Klamath Falls, La Grande, Medford, Pendleton, Portland, and Roseburg, and car pools embarked from Astoria, Lincoln City, Newport, and Tillamook.

On the way to Salem, some buses made stops at corporate storefronts of Verizon, Bank of America, and US Bank to protest those profitable companies for not paying federal corporate income tax.

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