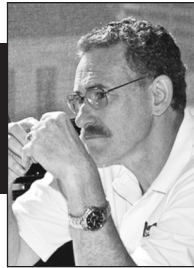


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



President Obama's Sept. 8 speech on job creation laid out a concrete plan to put millions of Americans back to work and push our economy into high gear.

As we enter the 2012 election cycle, every candidate — everyone even toying with the notion of running for office — agrees that America must create jobs, and create them as soon as possible. But often, that is where the agreement stops and the rhetoric begins. And rhetoric rarely translates into a solid plan that is strategic and achievable.

So consider this a message to any candidate seeking a union endorsement on why rhetoric won't cut it, and why union members will be asking for achievable job-creation plans in 2012.

While Oregon is a state that prides itself on creating jobs in an emerging green economy, green energy has not surpassed manufacturing as our jobs base. Oregon is still a manufacturing state, in a region that is known for making things — from streetcars to trucks, medical equipment to microchips, solar panels, aviation parts and more.

Candidates must not only recognize the importance of those industries to our economy, but they must understand that the bulk of our manufactured goods are exported through our ports and airport. Those facilities

are the conduit that connects products from across the Northwest to markets around the world. For our economy to grow, our ports and airport must keep up.

Now let's be very clear: A good job is a good job, whether in the private or public sector. All too often we hear that cutting government will create jobs. Cutting government usually means cutting jobs. Public sector jobs infuse millions of dollars into our economy. These are jobs that support local business, who pay taxes that fund our state's essential services, and build roads and bridges which create jobs in the private sector. When we cut public sector jobs we increase demand for unemployment, food and health care subsidies, and other services that low wage earners and the unemployed need.

As candidates increase their jobs rhetoric they must remember the importance of a plan, because it does something rhetoric does not: It sets the path to create jobs. And a good-paying job with benefits is the answer to most of what ails us.

A job is the answer to the low income housing shortage; it is the path to quality education; a job decreases the crime rate, and increases revenue so that we can afford to provide vital services. We cannot answer Oregon's, or this country's problems until we increase employment.

Candidates must be ready to fight for federal and state funding to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. This alone will put thousands of Oregonians back to work. And they must be willing to develop a jobs strategy that attracts new business and maintains and expands existing companies, all while maintaining a healthy environment.

Achieving rapid job creation is the responsibility of every level of government, the private sector and yes, unions. We must elect candidates who understand that they can't shirk their responsibility to create jobs, and who are committed to the resurgence of a strong middle class.

With unemployment still over 9 percent, and in fact over 18 percent when you factor in those who have given up looking or who are working part time when they need full time work, I challenge candidates to quit the rhetoric and follow President Obama's lead. Show us a plan. Show us you're on our side.

And I challenge union leaders and members to listen to those seeking your endorsement very carefully. If creating jobs is not their number one priority, whose side are they really on?

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Workers rights go local: Seattle passes paid sick leave

Seattle businesses with at least five employees will be required to offer paid sick leave under an ordinance approved Sept. 12 by Seattle City Council.

Public health was the rationale for the measure. Workers without sick leave lose wages when they call in sick, so they're more likely to go to work sick, exposing co-workers and customers. Children are more likely to be sent to school sick if their parents must lose wages to care for them. Under the new ordinance, workers will be allowed to use the sick leave to care for themselves or immediate family members.

The measure was proposed in May by a coalition of 70 labor and community groups. It was strongly opposed by the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. But it enjoyed wide public support in Seattle. A late August poll of likely voters by Grove Insight opinion research found that 69 percent supported the measure, while only 22 percent opposed it.

In the days leading up to the vote, union members and other supporters of the measure flooded City Council with phone calls, postcards and e-mails. City Council members received over 1,000 e-mails. Supporters also rallied and filled council chambers the day of the vote. The vote was 8 to 1 in favor.

The measure requires established companies with 5 to 49 employees to provide at least five days a year of paid sick leave. Companies with 50-249 employees would provide at least seven days, and those over 250 at least nine.

The ordinance will take effect Sept. 1, 2012. Employees start earning the time off after six months on the job. Businesses less than two years old would be exempt from the requirement.

The Economic Opportunity Institute, an independent public policy research center, estimated that 190,000 of Seattle's 500,000 workers don't currently have paid sick leave, but would

get it under the ordinance. That includes nearly 30,000 in accommodation and food service, 20,000 in retail, and close to 20,000 in health services. Seattle is home to about half a million jobs.

San Francisco and Washington D.C. passed similar ordinances in 2008. Milwaukee voters approved a sick leave initiative in 2008, but that measure was nullified this year by the Republican majority in the Wisconsin state legislature. And the Philadelphia city council passed a sick leave ordinance in June 2011 that was vetoed by its mayor.

Connecticut became the first state to pass such a requirement in June 2011. The Connecticut law requires five days a year of paid sick leave, and applies to hourly workers in service sector businesses of 50 or more employees.

As to whether Portland would consider such an ordinance, a spokesperson said Portland Mayor Sam Adams's office would have to look into it.

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NW Oregon CLC to recommend Witt

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council will recommend that the Oregon AFL-CIO endorse State Rep. Brad Witt in the special Democratic primary election Nov. 8 in Oregon's 1st Congressional District.

Witt is a union representative of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.

Several Democrats — including Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian and State Sen. Suzanne Bonamici — are vying for the seat, with the winner taking on the Republican primary nominee in a special election Jan. 31 to succeed David Wu, who resigned mid-term.

Under AFL-CIO policy, central labor council's don't endorse in federal races. Rather, they make recommendations to the state body for action. The Oregon AFL-CIO will take up the matter at its convention in Eugene later this month.

NOLC's vote to recommend Witt was held at a delegates' meeting Sept. 12.

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