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## Oregon AFL-CIO holds 52nd convention in Eugene

*At a time when labor is under attack, delegates put aside differences to declare 'We are one'*

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

EUGENE — “We are One” was the rallying cry for an embattled labor movement as 214 union delegates came together Sept. 26-28 from all across Oregon for the biennial convention of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Meeting at the Eugene Hilton Hotel and Conference Center, delegates re-elected the top leadership, increased contributions to the union federation’s political fund, and voted to support full marriage equality.

Three Democratic candidates for Oregon’s 1st Congressional District vied in an hour-long debate for Oregon AFL-CIO support, after which delegates debated too, but made no endorsement in the end. Delegates did approve a wide variety of policy-resolutions, heard messages of solidarity from top labor and political figures, and singled out several individuals and organizations for special honors.

### A QUESTION OF ENDORSEMENT

The convention’s most consequential debate was whether to make an endorsement in the primary for Oregon’s 1st Congressional District. Oregon AFL-CIO’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) recommended that delegates take up the question themselves.



**Delegates applaud as Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain closes the labor federation’s biennial convention with a message of unity. There are spirited debates in the firehouse, said Chamberlain, a former Portland firefighter. But when the alarm rings, they all head out to work as one.**

Nearly all the convention delegates knew one candidate — Brad Witt — as one of labor’s own. For 14 years, Witt was the Oregon AFL-CIO’s number two officer. Now he’s a state representative for Clatskanie, and a union rep at United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555. Local 555 isn’t an affiliate of the Oregon AFL-CIO, but Witt is also a member of the Machinists, which is an affiliate.

But Witt is running in a three-way primary against two better-funded candidates who also have strong labor records. Brad Avakian is Oregon’s current commissioner of labor, in charge of enforcing wage and hour, civil rights,

apprenticeship and prevailing wage laws. Suzanne Bonamici, while not as directly tied to the union movement, nonetheless has a solid pro-labor voting record in the Oregon Legislature.

A long line of delegates argued for an endorsement of Witt out of recognition for his 30-year-record of service to labor, and to show that labor stands by its own. But Oregon AFL-CIO rules, in the interest of labor unity, require any endorsement to be supported by at least two-thirds. Several motions were made, but no proposal achieved that supermajority. [See Top Dems debate on Page 4 for fuller coverage of the candidates and internal debate.]

### SETTING POLICY AND STRENGTHENING THE WARCHEST

Conventions are also where the Oregon AFL-CIO sets its policies, and some union delegations came to the convention honor-bound to pursue resolutions passed within their own organizations. Most of these won delegate approval, including resolutions:

- Demanding that prison-made baked goods not be served to Oregon school children, and encouraging all union members to contact Bakers Local 114 (503-256-1177) if they see prison-made bread (delivered under the label “First Choice”) in schools;

- Calling upon the Oregon Legislature to prohibit the export of paper waste collected from Oregon citizens, businesses and government agencies;

- Urging affiliates, endorsed campaigns and partners in the community to have a union label on all professionally printed materials distributed for the community;

- Supporting the Columbia River Crossing project; and

- Proclaiming solidarity with the indigenous peoples who were the original occupants of the Americas, and calling on the national AFL-CIO to form a constituency group for Native American trade unionists.

Also passed was a “marriage equality” resolution, which declares that equal rights for gay, lesbian and transgender people is “the civil rights struggle of our time.” Under the resolution, sponsored by Oregon AFSCME, the Oregon AFL-CIO pledges to support

legislation and/or ballot measures that confer full marriage equality to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and to oppose legislation that bans marriage rights based on sexual orientation. The resolution also declares agreement with President Obama’s decision not to defend in court the Defense of Marriage Act, a 1996 law which allows states not to recognize same-sex marriages in other states. No delegate spoke against the marriage equality resolution during the floor discussion, and it passed on a voice vote with only one delegate voting in opposition.

Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain lauded the resolution’s passage, saying it likely wouldn’t have passed a few years ago. The gay civil rights organization Basic Rights Oregon will decide in the next two months whether to pursue a freedom-to-marry measure on the 2012 ballot.

A separate resolution authored by AFSCME Green Caucus was the subject of extended debate. It would have committed the Oregon AFL-CIO to oppose privatization of water resources in Oregon, and specifically a Nestlé water-bottling facility in Cascade Locks. But building trades union delegates and others objected, citing the need for jobs. The resolution failed in a “roll call” vote based on affiliated membership numbers. A separate resolution of support for the “Renew America’s Water” campaign did pass, however. That labor-environmental effort calls for \$30 billion in federal infrastructure investment to

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## Boeing Machinists taking a stand for all workers

*Machinists, who have a history of militant action since 1935, are engaged in another struggle that has consequences for all workers*

By BARB KUCERA

EVERETT, Wash. — Dan Swank knows Machinists are making history as they stand up to Boeing Co. to maintain a standard of living that took decades to build.

Growing up, his family often talked about the fact they are related to John Looney, one of the activists killed in the “Everett Massacre,” the bloodiest battle in the state’s labor history. Looney and several others were shot dead as they arrived by boat to organize a demonstration by the Industrial Workers of the World, “the Wobblies,” on Nov. 5, 1916.

His grandfather, Gaynor Looney, was “a staunch labor man” who made fiberboard at a Tacoma plant, and his father, Russell Swank, built B-52 bombers for the U.S. Air Force and was

active in the Machinists union at Boeing.

Swank, who has worked at the giant airplane manufacturer since 1996, would like his children and grandchildren to have the opportunity to work at good, unionized jobs. But he and 27,000 other Machinists face a challenge to that future as Boeing seeks to transfer production of its new 787 “Dreamliner” to South Carolina to retaliate against the workers for their union activism.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has taken up their

cause, charging the company with violating the workers’ rights. At a news conference Sept. 23, the union released documents that clearly show Boeing’s decision was motivated by a desire to shed its unionized workforce.

### HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

While Washington is perhaps better known as the home of new technology companies like Microsoft, it is a manufacturing company from an older era that in many ways defines the Puget Sound area and provides thousands of jobs that support families, local busi-

nesses and communities.

Boeing boasts that its assembly plant, located 25 miles north of Seattle in Everett, is the world’s largest building by volume. The first 747 jumbo jet rolled off the line in 1969. The plant still makes 747s, as well as the 767, 777 and the new 787s, the first of which was delivered to All Nippon Airways last month.

Planes are lined up nose to tail on the production lines, each marked with its destination — Qatar Airlines, Korean Air, Delta Airlines. Workers cross

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