

Jobs will again top labor's agenda at Oregon Legislature

SALEM — Jobs — both private and public sector — will again top the union agenda in the one-month session of the Oregon Legislature that began Feb. 1.

Three bills this session aim to stop jobs from heading overseas. A bill sponsored by State Rep. Arnie Roblan (D-Coos Bay), HB 4142, would require the State of Oregon to favor Oregon paper mills when it's purchasing recycled paper. A "Buy American" bill sponsored by State Sen. Laurie Monnes-Anderson (D-Gresham), SB 1556, would let transit agencies give preference to vehicles with over 60 percent U.S.-made components — when spending federal funds. And State Sen. Chip Shields (D-Portland) planned to introduce a non-binding referendum calling on Congress to pass the TRADE Act, legislation that would put a stop to further NAFTA-style trade agreements until existing agreements are evaluated.

Other bills could put building trades members to work. The Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council will support a bill (HB 4020) by State Rep. Mike Schaufler (D-Happy Valley) to increase lottery bonding authority by \$10 million to fund competitive grants for air, marine, and rail transportation infrastructure projects. Building Trades Executive Secretary John Mohlis said the group will



also back a proposal for \$60 million in bonding authority to assist construction of the Oregon Sustainability Center in downtown Portland, billed as the world's first "net-zero" high-rise office building because it would generate its own energy, collect its own water, and emit zero carbon in operation. The trades will also support Oregon Treasurer Ted Wheeler's proposed Oregon Investment Act, HB 4040.

Lastly, Mohlis said building trades unions will join with Oregon AFSCME to support a campaign by State Rep. Val Hoyle (D-Junction City) to build a second state mental hospital in Junction City.

Oregon AFSCME is also backing a bill (HB 4033) to withhold the names of Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) retirees from public disclosure.

The proposal is in reaction to a recent court decision.

The Legislature will need to rebalance the state's two-year budget. That discussion will start Feb. 8 when the state economist issues an updated revenue forecast. To make that easier, State Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland) has introduced a bill (HB 4132) to reduce tax breaks by the same proportion that state agency budgets are reduced. And State Rep. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) has a bill (HB 4131) to thin management ranks at state agencies — a year earlier than a bill that was passed last year. Dembrow's bill speeds implementation of the goal of an 11-to-1 staff to management ratio at larger state agencies.

"We need to take advantage of retirements that are happening now,"

Dembrow explained, "so agencies can reduce administration now rather than laying people off later."

Dembrow is also sponsoring a bill (HB 4141) to better coordinate state-funded workforce training efforts with state economic development efforts to attract and grow businesses.

Noticing discrimination against the long-term unemployed, State Sen. Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland) will push a bill (SB 1548) to ban help wanted ads that limit applicants to persons who are currently employed.

And a union-supported campaign to divest from big Wall Street banks may get an echo in a bill (HB 4139) by State Rep. Margaret Doherty (D-Tigard) to deposit state funds in community banks to the extent practicable.

The session is scheduled to run 29

days. Oregon moved permanently to annual legislative sessions in 2010, when voters approved a constitutional change that mandates that the Legislature meet for up to 160 calendar days in odd-numbered years and up to 35 days in even-numbered years.

Don't expect major workers rights legislation this session, says Oregon AFL-CIO spokesperson Elana Guiney. "Concepts that didn't make it through last [five-month-long] session probably won't make it this session," Guiney said, "because it's the same people, with less time."

While Democrats have a 16-14 majority in the Oregon Senate, the Oregon House is split 30-30 between Democrats and Republicans.

Under the rules for the short session, bills had to be filed before the session began in order to be considered. Bills have less than a week to be scheduled for action in a committee, or they're effectively dead. And bills that have not been passed by their original committee by February 14 won't move forward.

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