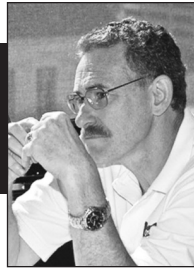


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Many, including myself, will look back on the compromises made to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), including a provision that makes it more difficult for a worker to join a union, as another example of the old idiom: "Democrats love unions at election time but are more than willing to throw workers under the bus between elections." Time after time, some Democrats have been quick to ignore workers and the unions that represent them. The failure of the U.S. Congressional Democrats to prioritize the Employee Free Choice Act in 2010 is the perfect example.

While many Democrats are, at best, passive on our issues, the alternatives can be far worse. If you disagree, you haven't been watching the 2012 Republican presidential debates. The candidates all seem to be running on platforms that would decimate unions as we know them, reminiscent of the anti-union legislation that has been passed or introduced in state after state.

Given the choice between backing out of the political process and letting these candidates destroy the middle class, I'll take the passive supporters.

But there is another option.

Truth be told, I don't care about political party. I only care whether or not a candidate supports workers, believes that workers have an unfettered right to choose to join a union,

and understands that the wealth imbalance between the 1% and the 99ers is destroying the middle class and pushing the poor to the brink.

There are politicians who care. U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) is one of them. When he served in the Oregon Legislature he not only supported workers, he was a champion. As speaker of the Oregon House in 2007, he ushered through the most progressive workers' agenda in the nation. As a U.S. senator, Merkley has become an even stronger advocate for workers, and he and his staff regularly communicate with workers in Oregon.

I cannot think of a major issue that impacts workers — whether it is trade, implementing or removing tariffs, or the recent FAA budget, where I haven't received a call from Sen. Merkley or his staff asking for our input in his decision making process. Congressmen Earl Blumenthauer, Peter DeFazio and Kurt Schrader maintain similar relationships with Oregon workers.

Sen. Merkley's honesty and respect for Oregon workers is clear. What he tells you in Oregon is reflected in his positions and votes in Washington, D.C. When he voted against the FAA budget because it degraded workers' rights, he went against U.S. Senate Democratic leadership. He went against Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and stood up for workers' rights. His po-

sition took courage and a deep-seated belief that workers aren't bargaining chips in a high stakes political poker game.

To elect more Jeff Merkleys, we cannot afford to endorse candidates based solely on a political party. We must look at candidates' history and their positions. When candidates refuse to state, on the record, their position on workers' issues, they do not deserve our endorsements.

Last November I was reading questionnaires from candidates in House District 36. One candidate answered the bulk of the questions with "yes" or "no" responses. While her responses weren't anti-worker, they lacked commitment. Her opponent, Jennifer Williamson, wrote elaborate answers and committed to sponsor key bills. Williamson's commitment to workers was evident.

As union members, our endorsements and our political campaigns are often the margin of victory in close races. We must support pro-worker candidates and hold elected officials accountable, not just for their votes, but for the relationships they build with Oregon workers.

The candidates who will be on our side will be ready to make the extra effort.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Washington State Labor Council backs Rep. Inslee for governor

The early endorsement comes as Republican McKenna leads in the polls

OLYMPIA — The Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, has endorsed Democrats Jay Inslee for Washington governor, Bob Ferguson for attorney general, and Maria Cantwell for re-election as U.S. senator.

The decision to endorse was ratified by delegates to a Feb. 9 legislative conference in Olympia, and comes quite early in the election calendar: Candidates won't officially file for office until May 14, and the primary is not until August. Washington has an open "top-two" primary, in which the top two vote-getters, regardless of party, advance to the November general election ballot.

Early action was taken because the stakes are high for statewide races, said WSLC spokesperson David

Groves, and because it's clear who the candidates are.

State Attorney General Rob McKenna is the only well-known Republican to have announced for governor, and several polls have shown him to be ahead of Inslee.

Inslee, a seven-term congressman representing the First District (North of Seattle), has a lifetime COPE (Committee on Political Education) rating of 89 percent from the national AFL-CIO. [One area of disagreement: Inslee, like all of Washington's Congressional delegation, is a free trader. He voted for NAFTA in 1993 and all but two NAFTA-style trade treaties since then.] He ran for Washington governor once before, in 1996, and came in fifth in the Democratic primary.

Chris Gregoire, Washington's current governor, is not running for a third term. Gregoire is a Democrat.

The race for Washington attorney general will be a match between two members of the King County Coun-

cil: Ferguson, a Democrat; and Reagan Dunn, a Republican. Dunn, son of former Washington Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn, is named for then-California governor Ronald Reagan.

Groves said the labor movement hasn't always considered the attorney general's office as a priority, but McKenna's two-term tenure has shown what a labor opponent can do in that office: He joined a multi-state lawsuit seeking to overturn health care reform legislation signed into law in 2010 by President Obama and tried to block an automatic minimum wage increase that voters approved.

Cantwell is not expected to have a tough time against her opponent, a one-term Republican state representative from Eastern Washington.

Groves said no Republican candidates accepted WSLC's invitation to speak to delegates or returned WSLC's candidate questionnaire.

WSLC will decide further political endorsements at a convention in May.

Free work-themed comedy show in Portland Feb. 19

In coordination with the new Work Connects Us All media campaign, the Oregon AFL-CIO is sponsoring a free comedy show Sunday, Feb. 19, at Helium Comedy Club, 1510 SE 9th Ave., Portland. The show starts at 7 p.m.

The national touring company Laughing Liberally and some of Portland's own local talent will joke about work, politics (and other topics that

usually make you groan).

Laughing Liberally features comedians from Comedy Central (Negin Farsad), Showtime (Lee Camp), and MSNBC (Katie Halper).

Admission is free, but you must be 21 or over to get in. Food and drinks will be available for purchase.

For more information, call 503-232-1195.

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COLLECTOR, cash paid for old fishing tackle, wood plugs, reels, creels, salmon fishing photos, etc 503-775-4166

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