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## ATU rejects contract proposal at TriMet Lift

In a contract vote held March 9, a second unit of TriMet Lift drivers has authorized the union to call a strike.

TriMet Lift is a federally-funded van service that transports senior and disabled people who can't use regular mass transit in the TriMet service area. TriMet has several contracts with First Transit — a division of the UK-headquartered multinational First Group — to provide the service. First Transit, in turn, has several collective bargaining agreements with employees who are members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757.

One such agreement covers employees dispatched from the Nela yard (2800 NW Nela Street, Portland). Another covers workers dispatched from the Merlo yard (Southwest 158th and Merlo, Beaverton.) Workers at a third location are non-union.

The Nela group voted last year to re-



At a Merlo Garage conference room in Beaverton, TriMet Lift driver Pamela Sells (left) holds up a union contract ballot. To her right are Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 President Jon Hunt and fellow TriMet Lift driver Joy LaRochelle, a union liaison officer, holding up a summary of the final offer from their employer, First Transit. The drivers voted 83 to 8 to reject the contract proposal.

ject the contract offer and authorize strike; the Merlo group did the same March 9, voting 83 to 8 to reject First Transit's contract offer. The union negotiating committee recommended rejection.

Local 757 president Jon Hunt says First Transit's revenue, under its con-

tracts with TriMet, is increasing 4 to 5 percent a year. But its offer to employees is a wage increase that totals 15 percent over five years. And that increase would be more than eaten up by First Transit's proposal that workers pay more for health insurance. First Transit

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## Handful of labor-backed bills pass in Oregon's first annual legislative session

SALEM — Overcoming potential partisan deadlock with an evenly divided House, the Oregon Legislature passed a handful of bills in its short 2012 session that had the support of organized labor. Lawmakers delivered no real jobs program — in a state where the official unemployment rate stands at 8.8 percent — nor did they approve major new infrastructure investments. But neither did they make draconian state budget cuts, or give away the store with new tax cuts.

Several bills passed which were identified as priorities by Gov. John Kitzhaber and will affect union members indirectly.

One of those codifies more details about the Oregon Health Insurance Exchange. The exchange is being set up to comply with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, the health insurance legislation passed by Congress. Under that law, states are supposed to set up insurance exchanges through which individuals and small businesses would purchase

health insurance plans. Adults who aren't eligible for Medicare and who don't have insurance through an employer will be required to buy it on the exchange, but lower-income purchasers will get some subsidy and tax credits to offset the cost. The exchanges will open for business in 2014. The Oregon one will include a web site, a telephone hotline, and field offices.

Kitzhaber also pushed to pass several education reform bills, including one that requires schools to sign an "achievement compact" stating what they provide for the state money they receive. Another extends and reorganizes an "Early Learning Council" that advises Head Start.

Here's a run-down of what they did and didn't do — on issues of concern to working people:

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

U.S. trade policy is set by Congress,

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## Three Washington lawmakers make inquiry

# Concerns raised over use of foreign workers at Port

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

When construction cranes popped up last year on the waterfront just west of downtown Vancouver, Painters Local 10 President Roben White wanted to know who was doing the work.

White, a Vancouver resident and member of the executive board of Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, hadn't heard about local union members getting work on the project, and wanted to see for himself. He headed down to the site, Port of Vancouver Terminal 2, and found a parking lot full of out-of-state license plates. At shift change, White says, he followed a van full of workers to the Staybridge Suites hotel in Northeast Vancouver. White said he was unable to communicate with the workers, who were Spanish speakers, but their need

for a hotel strongly suggested they weren't local. And that rubbed White the wrong way.

The project they were working on — an \$80 million expansion of the United Grain export terminal — is on public land, leased long-term from the Port of Vancouver. The Port of Vancouver, created by Clark County taxpayers in 1912, is a tax-supported public agency with a mission of economic development.

"This land was intended to benefit the community as a whole, not just a business or the port as an entity," White told the Labor Press.

Moreover, as White points out, the project benefits from several kinds of public assistance.

• **A tax break.** In Washington, businesses pay a 6.5 percent sales tax when they build a new facility. But develop-

ers of large warehouses and grain elevators get a pass: They pay the tax, then fill out an application to have it re-

bated in full.

• **Rail improvements.** The Port of Vancouver is half-way through its 10-



United Grain is constructing an \$80 million expansion to its export terminal at the Port of Vancouver.

year \$150 million West Vancouver Freight Access project. One component of the project — estimated at \$8 million — is a set of track improvements to serve the United Grain terminal. The improvements will double the number of rail cars that can be unloaded at one time, from 11 cars to 22. Under its lease agreement with the Port of Vancouver, United Grain will pay \$10 each for the first 30,000 rail cars a year (or \$300,000 a year) toward that cost.

• **Channel deepening.** The publicly funded 20-year effort to deepen the Columbia River shipping channel — from 40 to 43 feet — means that approximately 7,200 tons of additional grain can be loaded onto each vessel calling at the Port of Vancouver.

Meanwhile, White searched online,

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