

...Oregon Legislature wraps up session in 34 days

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not the states, but the Oregon Senate weighed in this year, saying “enough is enough”: A non-binding resolution calls on Congress to pass a law known as the TRADE Act, which would mandate that NAFTA, WTO, and all similar trade agreements be reviewed and renegotiated to add labor and environmental standards, food and product safety protections, language preserving federalism, and rules penalizing currency manipulation. State Sen. Chip Shields (D-Portland) allied with State Sen. Brian Boquist (R-Dallas) as sponsors of the measure, which failed in the 2011 session. This time, it passed 21 to 6, with six Republicans and 15 Democrats voting in favor.

Lawmakers passed unanimously a bill sponsored by State Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham) that expands “Buy America” provisions when transit agencies purchase vehicles with federal funds. The bill lets transit agencies purchase vehicles that have over 60 percent U.S.-made components, even if they’re not the lowest bid.

On the other hand, a measure requiring the state to favor Oregon-made — when buying recycled paper — died in the House Business and Labor committee. Oregon Working Families

Party, a union-backed third party, worked hard to assemble a bipartisan coalition for the bill, and may push it in a future legislative session. Unlike the transit vehicle bill, which had no opposition from business, the recycled paper bill was opposed by Georgia-Pacific, which owns paper mills both locally and overseas.

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

Oregon employers can still discriminate against the unemployed, but they can no longer say so in Help Wanted ads, under a new law sponsored by State Sen. Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland) and State Rep. Jefferson Smith (D-Portland.) The act, which passed unanimously, prohibits any print or online employment ad from precluding unemployed workers from applying.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

At the beginning of the session, the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council hoped lawmakers would fund Portland State University’s proposed Oregon Sustainability Center, non-road transportation infrastructure through a new round of a program called Connect Oregon, and a new state psychiatric hospital in Junction City. But those projects came up

empty.

Instead, the Legislature approved \$80.9 million in lottery-backed bonds for Oregon State University to build a new student center and dorm and renovate an existing building. That funding bill also included \$9.6 million to build and upgrade technical training facilities at 17 community colleges, including \$1 million for Portland Community College to remodel a surplus state facility at Portland’s Swan Island Industrial Park for use as a trades training center. And lawmakers approved \$4 million to aid rebuilding schools after the floods in Vernonia.

State Rep. Val Hoyle (D-Junction City), who has championed the psychiatric hospital project, said backers will try again in 2013 to secure \$29 million for the project’s next phase. In the meantime, \$20 million that was previously authorized will pay for site prep work this year. When complete in 2015, the hospital will house up to 172 patients, and provide upwards of 500 local jobs.

Building trades officials also praised passage of SB 1532, dubbed the “Facebook bill.” The legislation retains tax breaks for Facebook’s data center in Prineville, as well as other data centers built on property that is part of an enterprise zone agreement.

STATE BUDGETS

State revenue forecasts have dropped since the Legislature passed its two-year budget in mid-2011, so

lawmakers had to modify the budget. In the end, they did so in part by cutting state agency budgets 3.5 percent. But Oregon AFSCME helped beat back a proposal to close Santiam Correctional Institution for the budget savings. And labor was able to save a pilot program that will expand high school shop classes. That program, \$2 million in grants for career and technical education, had just received the grant applications, when there was talk of cutting it; in the end, it was cut 3.5 percent.

A bill sponsored by State Rep. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) delivered some budget savings by speeding up last year’s legislative mandate to slim down management at state agencies. That idea — in which large state agencies are mandated to aim for an 11-to-1 worker-to-manager ratio — came originally from members of Service Employees International Union Local 503. Under the new act it will take effect this year.

Several proposals opposed by labor were defeated:

- A bill sponsored by State Rep. Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer) requiring state agencies to screen new hires using the federal government’s E-Verify system didn’t get a hearing. E-Verify checks to see if an employee is legally allowed to work in the United States, but the national AFL-CIO has said it opposes its use unless part of a comprehensive immigration reform.

- An attempt to roll back an anti-privatization law passed in 2009 was nixed behind the scenes. The law says the state can’t contract out work unless doing so saves money, and the money saved can’t be because the workers have lower pay or benefits. It applies to all contracts valued at over \$250,000, but in some late-session horse trading over bills, some legislators sought to change that threshold to \$1 million.

And as always, some union-backed proposals in the 34-day session didn’t make it, including:

- A bill sponsored by State Rep. Mary Nolan (D-Portland) to make local producers and “high road” Oregon employers a little more competitive in bids for state contracts. [Formulas for calculating the lowest bid would favor bidders that provide pension and health benefits and higher wages, and disfavor bidders that would have to ship goods long distances from elsewhere.]

- A bill sponsored by State Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland) to crack down on the practice of workers leaving state employment only to return at higher pay as consultants. [Workers leaving a state agency would have to wait at least a year before working for a contractor doing work for that agency.]

- A bill to protect the names of Public Employee Retirement System retirees from public disclosure.

See nwlaborpress.org for links to the bills.



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