

...Labor at Oregon Legislature

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gives an example of why the legislation is needed: Last year, when University of Oregon faculty turned in union authorization cards, the administration hired a high-priced California attorney who specializes in union-avoidance; that reaction would have been a no-no under the proposed legislation.

Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council (OSBCTC) will be promoting several large public works projects that could result in employment for union members. The biggest is the proposed Columbia River Crossing project, which includes a replacement to the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River. Oregon would contribute \$450 million, with Washington matching that amount, and the federal government kicking in the rest. The funds could come from bonds backed by increases in gas taxes and license and vehicle registration fees. Also up for consideration is a \$60 million fifth phase of a multi-modal transportation investment program known as Connect Oregon. Connect Oregon pays for improvements to non-highway transportation infrastructure, including ports, airports, and railroads.

Another bill to be backed by the building trades would make it easier to

site utility-scale solar development in Eastern Oregon. Current land-use rules prohibit solar arrays larger than 100 acres on land zoned for farm use, but John Mohlis, executive secretary of OSBCTC, says solar projects need to be at least 250 acres to pan out economically. Mohlis, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 280 Business Manager Tim Frew, and IBEW Local 48 Political Director Joe Esmonde served alongside solar developers and environmental groups on an interim legislative task force that looked into the issue.

OSBCTC will also push to expand the state's prevailing wage law to construction projects on state university land that are paid for with private money, to private construction projects that receive more than \$750,000 in tax credits, and to projects over \$5 million that qualify for Enterprise Zone property tax abatements.

Oregon AFSCME will pursue several changes to Oregon's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act. One bill would allow for binding arbitration after 60 days — for issues that arise outside of the normal collective bargaining timeline; it's designed to crack down on what the union sees as an abuse: public employers raising stand-alone issues after a contract is settled, and then imple-

menting their "expedited bargaining" proposals after a 90-day period, whether the union likes it or not. Another bill would put employees of the Oregon Department of Justice in the category of public employees who have binding arbitration instead of the right to strike; Baessler said attorneys can face ethics charges at the Oregon Bar if they strike.

Meanwhile, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 will have to contend with an attempt by TriMet to remove transit workers from that "non-striable" category. A bill to do that was filed pre-session by the House Transportation and Economic Development Committee.

Unions will also be paying attention as the state finalizes the workings of the new insurance exchange. In state "exchanges" — a key part of the national health insurance reform law known as Obamacare — individuals and small businesses will go to purchase insurance and receive federal subsidies. The exchanges have to be up and running for open enrollment in October 2013, for insurance coverage that begins January 2014.

AFSCME's Baessler said earnings by some members at non-profit contractors are low enough to qualify for the subsidies. Plus, in Oregon, there's been talk of letting various government employers buy insurance on the exchange.

Democrats have majorities over Republicans in both chambers, by 16-14 in the Senate and 34-26 in the House.

The Oregon AFL-CIO will hold a legislative conference for union members on Saturday, Feb. 2, from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Sheet Metal Workers Local 16's union hall, 2379 NE 178th Ave., Portland. Participants will hear from union leaders and legislative leaders and will have a chance to talk directly with legislators in small group discussions.

For more information, call 503-412-3721

Local Motion

December 2012

A list of Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces deciding whether to be union-represented — as reported by the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

Voting in union elections

No unionization elections were held in December 2012 for Oregon or SW Washington.

Requesting a union election

Workplace (Location) Union	Number of workers in unit
Tuality Community Hospital Cath Lab RNs (Hillsboro) Oregon Nurses Association	5
Garda Cash Logistics (Portland) Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America	70
Teamsters Local 162 office and clerical (Portland) CWA Local 7901	3

...ATU-TriMet conflict

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to be open to the public. TriMet disagreed, and wants observers limited to certain pre-approved media, with all bargaining participants screened by security guards. Oregon law makes pretty plain that either side can choose to open public employee union negotiations to the public, but TriMet is seeking a court ruling that the law doesn't apply in this instance. Its legal argument to Multnomah County Circuit Court is that the bargaining isn't subject to Oregon's public meetings law because TriMet's bargaining team has no authority to reach agreement. But if that's true, the union says, then TriMet is in violation of its duty to bargain in good faith under Oregon's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act. TriMet can't have it both ways.

Though Local 757 made clear it would not negotiate in secret, TriMet sought repeatedly to embarrass Local 757, calling out the union as a "no-

show" when it failed to attend bargaining sessions — sessions which were scheduled before the open meetings dispute erupted.

Those salvos were just the latest in a year-long public relations campaign TriMet has waged against its own employees and their union. In its press releases, the tax-supported public agency, its board appointed by the governor, has publicly declared union leaders unreasonable and labeled the benefits its workers have had for decades "unsustainable."

Now TriMet says it wants to bring benefits in line with "the market." And in its framing, it seeks to pit the public against its workers. Riders "face a future of continued service cuts in order for us to pay for these unsustainable health care benefits," said TriMet labor relations director Randy Stedman in a Jan. 2 press release, adding that "additional service cuts ... would be necessary to pay for these benefits for both active employees and retirees."

For their part, Local 757 leaders say if bargaining is brought into the daylight, their arguments will be vindicated, and the public will be witness to TriMet management's high-handed attitude and aggressive posture.

"The public needs to have a clearer picture of all the ways TriMet funds are spent," Local 757 President Bruce Hansen wrote in a Dec. 18 letter to Stedman. "This transparency is key to achieving fairness for the workforce as well as the sustainable public transportation system that the citizens of our region deserve."

"For far too long," Hansen wrote, "the labor agreement and the workforce have been made the scapegoats for TriMet's financial difficulties."



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