

# Pacific Northwest senators hold powerful committee seats

U.S. senators from Oregon and Washington hold powerful committee seats in the 113th Congress.

With Democratic control of the Senate, Oregon's senior senator Ron Wyden will chair the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and serve on the Finance Committee, the Select Committee on Intelligence, the Budget Committee, and the Special Committee on Aging.

Patty Murray, the senior-most senator from the Pacific Northwest, will chair the Budget Committee. She also will serve on the Appropriations Committee, Rules Committee, Veterans Affairs Committee, and the Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee.

Joining her on the Budget Committee are Wyden and first-term Sen. Jeff

Merkley of Oregon. The Budget Committee sets annual priorities and targets for federal spending.

Merkley also will serve with Murray on the powerful Appropriations Committee, which crafts the annual funding bills for all federal discretionary programs.

Additionally, Merkley has been assigned to the influential Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over Wall Street regulation and oversight, and to the Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee.

Maria Cantwell of Washington will chair the Indian Affairs Committee, and hold seats on the Commerce Committee, Energy Committee, Small Business Committee, and the coveted Finance Committee, which deals with

Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, tax policy, and trade agreements.

Each of the senators is considered "labor friendly." Merkley, who was elected to his first term in 2008, has a 100 percent COPE (Committee on Political Education) voting record as

tracked by the national AFL-CIO. Wyden, Cantwell, and Murray come in at 90, 90, and 91 percent, respectively. Wyden, Cantwell, and Murray have a history of voting in favor of free trade agreements, which unions adamantly oppose.

Murray is serving her fourth term in the Senate, having first been elected in 1992; Wyden has served since 1996; and Cantwell was re-elected to a third term last November. She was first elected in 2000.

## ...PIRG fundraisers strike

(From Page 8)

worker for any reason or no reason at all.

"Their position is that 'at-will' is a firm position," Elder said. "We said it's a non-starter for us."

The Fund says it's against just cause because it wants to retain "flexibility," Elder said. But the Fund hasn't demonstrated any of that flexibility, workers say: In June, the Fund fired nine-year employee Cortina Robinson, one of its most successful fundraisers, for being \$47 under her fundraising quota. Robinson was on the union bargaining team.

The Fund has also said no to a clause known as "union security." That's a stance that puts the progressive non-profit group in the same league as advocates of so-called "right-to-work" laws. A "union security" agreement, standard in union contracts, requires

that all represented workers pay dues or their equivalent. But in 24 states, "right-to-work" laws prohibit union security clauses in union contracts. Without union security, dues are voluntary. Some workers pay. Others freeload: They benefit from any improvements the union negotiates, and the union is required by law to represent them in disciplinary hearings, but they pay nothing. The point of right-to-work is to deprive unions of resources; its advocates claim to be concerned about the right of workers to work without paying union dues, but tellingly show no concern for any other workplace right.

In sum, the Fund wants to remain an at-will and "right-to-work" employer, and is eliminating core union supporters one by one.

The next bargaining session is scheduled to take place Feb. 12 to 14.

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