

2013 shaping up to be an active legislative session for labor

SALEM — Oregon's House of Representatives passed a bill April 25 outlawing public sector union-busting. One of dozens of bills labor unions are following in the State Capitol this year, **HB 3342** prohibits public employers from using public funds to deter (or assist) union organizing, or from using public property to hold meetings whose purpose is to deter (or assist) union organizing. The bill, sponsored by State Rep. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) passed 34-26 along party lines, and now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Since the 2013 legislative session began in February, three labor-backed bills have passed:

- **HB 2800** — authorizing \$450 million for an I-5 replacement bridge over the Columbia River — was signed by the governor March 12.

- **HB 2787** — which lets students who graduate from Oregon high schools pay in-state tuition at public universities, regardless of legal residency status, was signed into law April 12.

- **SB 833** — which authorizes drivers licenses to Oregon residents regardless of legal status — passed the Senate 20-7 April 23 and the House 47-7 April 29.

Other labor-backed bills have made it through at least one chamber thus far:

- **HB 2657** — which makes it harder to rezone land that is set aside for industrial use — passed the House 31-24 April 29.

- **HB 2820** — making it easier to site utility-

scale solar development on non-arable land in Eastern Oregon — passed the House 43-12 April 29.

- **HB 2950** — which allows workers to take up to two weeks unpaid leave to deal with the death of family member, passed the House April 12 by 40-18. The bill is the long-time dream of Bakers Local 114 member Robin Zimmerman, whose wife died of cancer in May 2008.

- **HB 2646** — to require prevailing wage on all construction projects on public university land, even if it's donor-funded — is in the Senate Business and Transportation committee after passing the House March 21 by 47-10.

- **SJM 5** — a non-binding resolution urging the U.S. government to investigate Chinese subsidies to paper manufacturers — passed the Senate unanimously March 18 and is now in the House Business and Labor Committee.

Other bills of note to labor were still in committee as of press time, including **HB 3390**, which would mandate seven days of paid sick leave per year at employers with six or more employees.

Democrats occupy the governor's office and have a 16-14 majority in the Oregon Senate and 34-26 in the Oregon House. But that doesn't mean the session is a cakewalk for labor.

Unions opposed **SB 822** — a plan to trim cost-of-living increases for public employee retirees — but the bill passed the Senate April 11 by 16-13 and the House April 24 by 33-27, with Democrats

making up the yes votes in both cases, and Republicans saying the bill didn't go far enough in cutting the costs of the Oregon Public Employee Retirement System (PERS). It had not been signed by the governor as of press time, but it was his own proposal, so that seems assured. A coalition of public sector unions plans to challenge it in court the moment it is signed.

And Democrats were unable to come up with the three-fifths supermajority required to approve a new tax measure in the case of **HB 2456**, which would have raised \$150 million a year in additional revenue, mostly by raising taxes on the 2.4 percent highest-income Oregonians and on a small percentage of very large corporations. Instead, the House unanimously passed a watered down version of the bill on April 24, raising an estimated \$18 million a year by cracking down on corporations attributing income to operations in countries where they have little, if any, economic presence. The revenue raised is dedicated to the Mental Health Services Fund.

Two days later, the union-backed non-profit Our Oregon filed six initiative petitions aimed at the November 2014 ballot. With titles like "Large Corporations Should Pay Their Fair Share" and "If Corporations Are People, Let's Tax Them Like It," the prospective ballot initiatives would be available for signature gathering once official ballot titles are approved.

Meanwhile, the Oregon AFL-CIO took a stand against a symbolic bill, **SJM 7**, that tells the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) not to use its strongest sanction, known as the "hot goods" provision, when farm employers violate the Fair Labor Standards Act. DOL is cracking down nationwide on child farm labor and minimum wage law violations in the blueberry industry, both of which are often disguised by the use of workers who are not on the books. The resolution declares that using the hot goods provision was, "coercive and extortive." The measure passed the Senate April 2 by 26-3, with only Jackie Dingfelder, Diane Rosenbaum, and Elizabeth Steiner Hayward voting no. It's now in the House Business and Labor Committee, and the AFL-CIO says it's working with other groups to prevent it from reaching the governor's desk.

The Legislature is expected to wrap up the session by June 21, and self-imposed deadlines have ostensibly killed several bills. To be considered for further action, bills were supposed to have had at least one committee work session by April 18. Bills can be resurrected, however, either as amendments to other bills, or because the speaker of the House and the president of the Senate choose to move a bill through their chamber's Rules Committee.

A union-opposed bill requested by TriMet — to restore transit workers' right to strike (and thus get rid of their right to binding arbitration) — was one that died without a hearing.

TriMet Pensions: A Question of Fairness

It's fashionable these days to call frontline workers and retired frontline workers "greedy." That's what TriMet management wants you to think about us. Yet, over the years, we took less in wages partly so we could supplement our social security benefits. That is how we saved for retirement. Many of us have small TriMet pensions. Sometimes they are completely gobbled up by medical costs. When the numbers are viewed side-by-side, it is clear TriMet management places a higher value on themselves than they do on the front line employees—those who have the most demanding jobs in the organization.

Pension Class Comparison

	TriMet Union	TriMet Non-Manager Non-Union	TriMet Managers	TriMet Former General Manager
Average Monthly Pension Benefit	\$1,581	\$1,956	\$3,786	\$16,000
Years Worked to Qualify	10	3-5	3-5	7
Minimum Age for Eligibility	58	55	Unknown	Unknown
Paid Life Insurance	\$25,000	\$150,000	\$500,000+	\$800,000 (current Gen. Mgr.)

Note, TriMet pensions are NOT part of the state's Public Employee Retirement System Plan (PERS). Unknown = Information requested but not received.

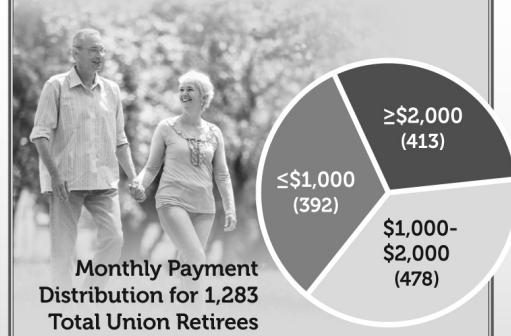
What we are talking about is economic justice. Corporate America is excessive when it comes to executive compensation. Should our public agencies follow suit? What happens when top management receives compensation far in excess of that received by most of their employees? Does that gap in overall compensation create a sense of superiority or inflated self-worth? Does it taint their relationship with the agency's workers, customers and the community? We think it does. We believe TriMet has strayed from its mission. We are working with the community to put it back on course – providing the safe, affordable, reliable and sustainable public transportation our community deserves.

Sincerely, Your Transit Workers

Not So Golden Years: Retiree Profiles

John: "I drove a bus for 26 years. I often worked 16-hour days due to driver shortages. I seldom got breaks and had to eat on the run. The stress of tight schedules, city traffic and no breaks caused chronic health problems. I've had a triple by-pass and live with diabetes. My TriMet pension is \$1,454 per month. So far this year, I've paid almost \$1,400 toward my health care."

Betty: "I am a fifteen-year TriMet employee. Faulty operator seats crushed three of my vertebrae, and I had to have surgery. The constant use of my right leg on the bus pedals ruined my knee, so I've had to have it replaced. My pension from TriMet is \$748 per month."



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