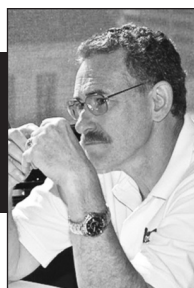


# Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



This September the national AFL-CIO will hold its every-four-year convention. Convention delegates will elect officers and debate issues. This convention is different, though. The delegates will determine the future of our union movement. This year, the national AFL-CIO will be proposing major changes to the fate and direction of state labor federations like the Oregon AFL-CIO, and central labor councils and local labor bodies.

State federations and central labor bodies are central to the success of the American labor movement. These local bodies are the delivery system for our movement. But many of them are facing problems, and our current delivery system has been in place since 1955, when the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) merged.

This model was designed when 35 percent of workers belonged to unions. Rural Oregon's timber industry created union jobs in every corner of the state. This was a time before the technological explosion that brought computers, Internet, the Tea Party and a 24-hour news cycle into our lives. In short, the current system designed to focus primarily on politics and legislation is ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st Century, and falls short of meeting the needs of our unions and members.

For over two years, the AFL-CIO, affiliated unions, and the national State Federation and Central Labor Council Advisory Commit-

tee have been assessing and evaluating our delivery system.

Before the September convention, committees will develop resolutions that will redirect and streamline our movement.

State federations and central labor councils in many places are evolving. The Northwest Oregon Labor Council, the labor council in Los Angeles, and others, have made economic development central to their mission. For example, ensuring that "labor peace language" is part of bidding requirements for new development is a big step in ensuring that workers are treated with dignity and respect, and paid a true living wage.

The Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board has established high expectations for our state's federation. We've pushed it into areas that are not traditional state-fed roles. For example, the development of a communications program that provides public relations advice and support for our affiliates on press and messaging, and a graphic designer who develops all manner of material for our affiliates, saving them tens of thousands of dollars. The development of the Oregon AFL-CIO organizing program establishes our federation as the cornerstone to the future of union organizing in Oregon. The ability of affiliated unions to access shared lead organizers, Working America canvassers, graphic design support, and political strength will increase all of our power. And the establishment and advancement of a pro-

worker agenda through state legislation and local ordinances increases success for AFL-CIO-affiliated unions and all Oregon workers.

If we are going to successfully redirect our movement, the national AFL-CIO must begin by looking at what is occurring as membership shrinks nationally. Unions are being asked to maintain service levels with shrinking resources and revenue. A formula of "do more with less" equates to loss of capacity. By pooling resources and understanding that state federation staff can augment dwindling union staff, affiliates will come to realize that there are some services that can more easily and cost effectively be provided by the state federation, freeing other resources to answer the challenges of the 21st Century union movement.

Whatever changes are adopted, it may take months or even a year or two before the effects are noticeable for you and your fellow union members.

I encourage the committees developing resolutions to think big, and I encourage Oregon central labor councils to lead the way in reforming our movement for the future. We all must be on the side of success for the next generation's sake.

*Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.*

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