

Member of Bakers Union helps change Oregon law

SALEM — Gov. John Kitzhaber signed House Bill 2950 into law on June 13. The new law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2014, adds bereavement leave to the Oregon Family Leave Act.

The new law is the result of years of work by Robin Zimmerman, a 33-year rank-and-file member of Bakers Local 114 who works at Bimbo Oroweat in Beaverton.

Zimmerman became politically active in 2008, following the death of his wife to cancer. Her death impacted him and their young daughter deeply. Zimmerman was fortunate to have strong support from his employer, his union, and from co-workers, but it opened his eyes to the fact that the standard leave for mourning among employers is just three days.

From his experience, Zimmerman realized three days away from work just wasn't enough. The initial shock can leave families unable to function with their daily lives.

As reported in the Labor Press in February 2011, Zimmerman remembered reading an article about an expansion of the Oregon Family Leave Act. "Why couldn't bereavement be included in that law?" he asked himself. Zimmerman consulted with the head of the Bakers Union, Terry Lansing, about how to get a bill in the Legislature. He did some research on the Oregon Family Leave Act, then called his state senator.

Zimmerman told the Labor Press many people he talked to were unaware that bereavement leave wasn't covered under the act — state or federal.

His first attempt to change the law fell short in the 2011 Legislature, passing in the Senate, but failing to get a hearing in the House. But defeat wasn't an option. He returned this session with a new bill, carried by Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer (D-Portland) in the House, and by Sen. Fred Girod (R-Stayton) in the Senate. It passed the House 40-18 and won in the Senate 22-6.

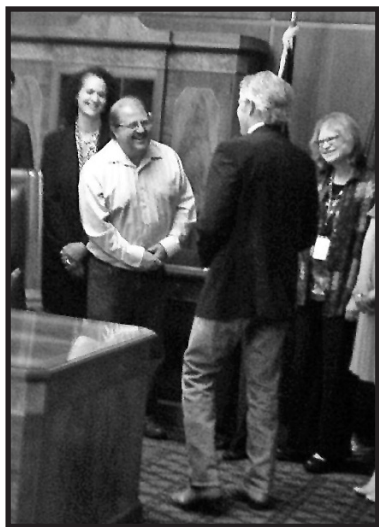
Free screening of 'Harvest of Empire' documentary July 19 at Labor Center

A free screening of "Harvest of Empire: The Untold Story of Latinos in America" will be held Friday, July 19, at 5:30 p.m. at the Oregon Labor Center, 3645 SE 32nd Ave., Portland.

The feature-length documentary takes an unflinching look at the role that U.S. economic and military interests played in triggering an unprecedented wave of migration that is transforming the nation's cultural and economic landscape.

The free screening is sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and Causa. Food and beverages will be provided.

For more information, contact Jess at jess@orafclcio.org or call Reyna at 503-409-2473.



Gov. John Kitzhaber greets Bakers Local 114 member Robin Zimmerman after signing HB 2950 into law. The new law, which adds bereavement leave to the Oregon Family Medical Leave Act, is the result of years of work by Zimmerman.

The new law amends the Oregon Family Leave Act to allow a worker in a firm with 25 or more employees to take up to two weeks of unpaid leave to deal with the death of a family member. This includes attending the funeral (or alternative) of a family member; making arrangements necessitated by the death of a family member; or grieving the death of the family member.

From Media Matters in America:

AP's Hostess comeback story ignores context about company's expiration

The Associated Press (AP) ignored significant context about the role of organized labor in its report on the comeback of Hostess brands and the iconic Twinkies snack. The article privileged attacks from executives claiming unions were to blame for the company's demise while ignoring a history of union concessions, executive pay raises, and financial mismanagement that paint a different picture about the Twinkies temporary expiration.

The AP reported June 23 that Hostess Brands LLC, a trimmed-down version of the defunct Hostess Brands Inc., is aiming to have Twinkies and other well-known Hostess brand products back on store shelves by July 15. The story noted that Hostess went bankrupt "after an acrimonious fight with its unionized workers" and described in he-said-she-said fashion how the company ultimately failed:

"Hostess Brands Inc. was struggling for years before it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization in early 2012. Workers blamed the troubles on years of mismanagement, as well as a failure of executives to invest in brands to keep up with changing tastes. The company said it was weighed down by higher pension and medical costs than its competitors, whose employees weren't unionized.

"To steer it through its bankruptcy reorganization, Hostess hired restructuring expert Greg Rayburn as its CEO. But Rayburn ultimately failed to reach a contract agreement with its second largest union. In November, he blamed striking workers for crippling the company's ability to maintain normal production and announced that Hostess would liquidate.

"... The trimmed-down Hostess Brands LLC has a far less costly operating structure than the predecessor company. Some of the previous workers were hired back, but they're no longer unionized."

The article's depiction of the company's fall omits crucial context and leaves readers with the impression that the act of discarding union workers is what allowed the "trimmed-down" company to re-emerge. The AP did not tell readers that, just three years prior to Mr. Rayburn's negotiations with labor, union workers made "substantial concessions" to aid the company's financial health, or that Hostess stopped contributing to workers' pensions and cut wages and benefits "by 27 to 32 percent."

Nor did the AP story mention the dramatic pay raises Hostess provided its executives during its financial struggles. For example, Brian Driscoll —

Hostess CEO in March 2011 — received a salary increase from \$750,000 to \$2.25 million, according to The Wall Street Journal.

And while the AP story claims that "workers" are blaming the company's woes on mismanagement and a failure to adapt to evolving consumer tastes, this has actually been the opinion of informed and objective third parties. The AP itself noted in 2012 that "Hostess' snacks don't neatly fit into the U.S. trend toward a healthier lifestyle." The Washington Post wrote that Hostess had been "rife" with problems beyond labor issues, including "management's failure to freshen up a stale product line." And The New York Times discovered that the company did not "have much of a finance department."

The Twinkies return to the American diet may ultimately be perceived as a comeback story. But with myths about the company's demise rampant in 2012 media reports, today's media should be careful not to rewrite history.

(Editor's Note: This article is by Media Matters for America, a not-for-profit, progressive research and information center that monitors, analyzes, and corrects misinformation in the U.S. media.)

Newhouse paper threatens to close in New Jersey

NEWARK, N.J. — Advance Publications, the New Jersey-based Newhouse family company that owns the Oregonian newspaper, is threatening to close New Jersey's largest circulation newspaper — The Star-Ledger — by the end of the year if its production unions don't make steep concessions in new collective bargaining agreements.

The contracts for nearly 300 drivers, pressmen, warehouse, and inventory employees expire in July. Management sent a letter to the Council of Star-Ledger Unions June 26 saying the newspaper will shut down if those workers don't accept wage and benefit cuts by Sept. 27.

'Brotherhood Outdoors' 5th season airs July 7

The Union Sportsmen's Alliance's TV series, "Brotherhood Outdoors," returns to the Sportsman Channel on Sunday, July 7 for its fifth season of taking everyday sportsmen on extraordinary adventures. New episodes will air on Sundays at 8 a.m., with encore airings on Tuesdays at noon and Thursdays at 3:30 p.m.

The show is presented by Bank of Labor, and sponsored by several international unions. For more, go online to www.unionsportsmen.org.

Ed Shown, president of the Council of Star-Ledger Unions and Teamsters Local 8N, said in a press release the newspaper is demanding a 55 percent cut in the entire wage package.

Shown called the threats "another sad and pathetic attempt to pound all of our union brothers and sisters into a state of submission."

The newspaper threatened a similar closure in 2008, but the publisher and unions were able to come to terms on a deal a few months later.

Shown said in December 2012, the company gave the unions a 90-day deadline to meet their demands of a combined \$9 million in cuts — an amount company officials said they would save by outsourcing.

"Our unions have done exhaustive studies of advertising revenues. The disparity between the company's numbers and our findings is compelling, to say the least," Shown said. "The company will not contest our figures, but still demands \$9 million in cuts from its unionized workforce."

Shown said all of the unions are "more than willing to negotiate a fair contract and do whatever we have to so that the Star-Ledger may remain a thriving newspaper in these challenging economic times."

The 100-year-old newspaper has 771 employees, including 140 in the newsroom, which is not unionized.

A closure would not impact the newspaper's website, NJ.com, which is

owned by a separate company.

Last month, the Newhouse-owned Oregonian announced plans to reduce its print edition to four days a week. It also fired nearly 100 people — about half from the newsroom.

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