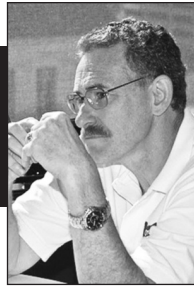


Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



Last month, I read two news articles that may not appear related at first, but that together tell an important story about the problems our country faces.

The first discussed the five-year effort to pass a farm bill in the U.S. House. The original House version of the bill would have cut \$21 billion over the next decade from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (food stamps). That version failed. Progressives thought the cut was too deep. Tea Party conservatives thought it didn't go far enough.

On July 12, the House passed a new version of the bill that cut funding for SNAP altogether.

That same day, I learned that as of January 2013, Portland had approximately 16,000 homeless people — up 5 percent over the last two years. Almost 1,900 of Portland's homeless population live in cars, abandoned buildings or outside. About 4,832 receive some kind of housing support. The others are lucky enough to have friends or family whose couches they can temporarily crash on.

These homeless Portlanders are not just the individuals you see on the street. More and more families are homeless, too.

According to a November 2012 Oregonian article, over 20,000 Oregon students are homeless. We know that a hungry child is think-

ing about food — not learning — when they're sitting in a classroom.

Thousands of Oregonians have not recovered from the recession and are either unemployed or underemployed. The recovery has been strongest in low-paying industries, bringing down Oregon's already-low median wage and leaving more families in need of assistance.

That brings us back to the farm bill and SNAP.

Over 800,000 Oregonians — 22 percent of our population — relied on this program in 2012. This is an increase of 8 percent.

SNAP funding has long been part of the farm bill for many reasons, including the support farmers receive when the poor are encouraged to buy fresh foods at full price. But it also creates a careful political balance, where leaders from both sides of the aisle can come together and support our farmers and the struggling families in their districts.

Unfortunately, in the age of "grand bargains" that use our lives as chips, this balance created a perfect place for anti-worker elitists to use the poor in our country as bargaining chips once again.

The most recent farm bill won't pass in the Senate, which means there will be another vote on the bill. As you might predict, four of Oregon's five members of Congress voted "no" on the version that cut

out SNAP completely. But on the earlier \$21 billion cut, only three of our U.S. representatives voted for Oregonians needing food assistance.

Before they vote again, Oregon's Congressional delegation needs to walk the streets of our state and see the poor and disenfranchised, spend more time in Oregon schools and understand the impact of hunger on a student's ability to learn, and spend a shift at an Oregon Food Bank. They need to understand the impact of their vote.

It is too easy for our congressmen and women to take political votes in support of bad bills, hoping their votes won't lead to bad policy because the Senate will fix it or the president will veto it. But we send these Oregonians to Washington, D.C., to stand up for our state — to stand on our side.

When the farm bill has its next vote, we hope to see at least four, and ideally all five, of Oregon's members of Congress standing for Oregonians, and not counting on the Senate to fix a bad bill or justifying a bad vote by calling it "good enough."

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Labor history comes alive at Clark County Historical Museum exhibit

VANCOUVER — Local labor history gets a closeup in a new exhibit at Clark County Historical Museum. The "Labor: A working history" exhibit launched July 11 with major help from more than two dozen local unions. It runs through the end of 2014.

The exhibit tells labor's story, from the 1830s, when Hawaiian workers were employed by the Hudson's Bay Company outside Fort Vancouver, to the rise of Northwest labor unions in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Bringing history to life are tools, artifacts, and early photographs of trade union members — decked out in uniform or walking strike picket lines. And at several listening stations, visitors can hear oral history interviews with labor figures.

Donated union labor also gave the museum a remodeled event and exhibit space. The museum, its mission to preserve local history and serve as a community center, is run by a private non-profit with funding from Clark County, in a building owned and maintained by the City of Vancouver.

Admission is free for museum members and military veterans and active duty personnel, and otherwise is \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors and students, \$2 for children, and \$10 for families. The museum is located at 1511 Main Street, Vancouver. Hours are 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

(TOP) IBEW Local 48 Business Manager Gary Young (right) and retired Local 48 business manager Ed Barnes cut ribbon to open a new labor history exhibit on display at the Clark County Historical Museum.



... Oregon Legislature

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and possibly defeating a fourth one:

- **Citizens United.** HJM 6 calls on Congress to overturn the 2010 Supreme Court case *Citizens United v. FEC* by beginning the process of passing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The *Citizens United* case lifted restrictions on corporate political spending, and led to a massive infusion of money into 2012 election campaigns.

- **Save the Postal Service.** HJM 7 urges Congress to pass the Postal Service Protection Act of 2013, which would end the unique requirement to pre-pay retiree health care costs, a requirement that is bleeding USPS of funds and leading to near-insolvency and widespread post office closures.

- **Investigate Chinese paper subsidies.** SJM 5, filed at the request of the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers and the Carpenters Industrial

Council, urges the Commerce secretary to investigate Chinese paper subsidies, whether they violate rules of the World Trade Organization, and the impact they have on United States paper manufacturers. Over 100,000 U.S. jobs have been lost in the pulp and paper industry, at the same time that imports of Chinese paper to the United States have surged.

- **No more tough sanctions during farm labor stings.** SJM 7 would have told the president and Congress that the Department of Labor, in effect, shouldn't use its strongest sanctions when farm employers violate the minimum wage law. Last summer, DOL used its "hot goods" sanction in a crackdown on Oregon blueberry growers that were accused of using "ghost workers," workers not on the books, who are usually not paid minimum wage. SJM 7 passed the Senate, but opposed by labor groups, failed to get a vote in the House.

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