

Washington AFL-CIO convention: 'Labor can't do it alone'

Resolution calls for continuation of fight for funding to build new I-5 bridge with light rail

VANCOUVER, Wash. — Labor can't do it alone. That was the number one message of the July 25-27 convention of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC), which stressed "building bridges" to like-minded groups and individuals, including nonunion workers and the immigrant rights and environmental movements.

"If we are to give real voice to working people, then we must build true bridges with our strategic community partners," said WSLC president Jeff Johnson.

WSLC, a state-level body of the AFL-CIO union federation, has local affiliated unions that represent around 400,000 union members in total. The three-day convention, held at the Vancouver Hilton Hotel and Convention Center, drew 400 delegates and 100 alternates.

One convention highlight was a set of hour-long "listening sessions" led by trained facilitators. The national AFL-CIO is conducting the sessions around the country in preparation for its quadrennial convention Sept. 8-11 in Los Angeles. In essence, participants were asked for ideas about what the labor movement can do differently — an acknowledgement that what organ-

ized labor is doing now isn't working. Union ranks are shrinking, and workers are falling behind.

Several elected leaders addressed the convention for public sessions or closed discussions, including Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, state Sen. Nathan Schlicher, and Congressman Denny Heck. Delegates also heard from the Vermont

AFL-CIO about efforts to bring about universal health care in that state via a public single-payer health insurance system starting in 2017. And they heard from a national AFL-CIO trade policy expert that union opposition is firming up to the soon-to-be-completed Trans-Pacific Partnership — a NAFTA-style trade agreement covering a dozen Pacific Rim nations.

Convention delegates also approved resolutions setting policy and direction for the coming year. That included a unanimous resolution calling for a continued fight for funding of a new I-5 bridge over the Columbia River that would include light rail. Delegates also endorsed the national AFL-CIO's call for comprehensive immigration reform.

2013 wasn't a good year for labor in Olympia

The Washington State Labor Council distributed its legislative report at its July 25-27 convention, and to summarize, 2013 wasn't a good year for labor in Olympia. Democrats Rodney Tom of Medina and Tim Sheldon of Potlatch defected last December and handed Senate leadership over to Republicans. From that point on, Washingtonians got a bitterly partisan Legislature and a near-shutdown of state government. It took the regular session plus two special legislative sessions for lawmakers to agree on a budget, and major works of legislation — including a \$10 billion transportation funding bill — were left unfinished, with Senate Republicans refusing to vote on them.

Under its Republican leadership, the Senate voted seven times to cut workers' compensation benefits, but those bills went nowhere in the Democratic-led House. Neither did a Senate-passed bill to undermine Seattle's paid sick leave ordinance by exempting employers not headquartered

in Seattle. Other Senate-passed bills that died in the House would have created a "good faith" defense for employers that violate minimum wage and overtime laws; made it easier to fire teachers; created a punitive letter system for grading schools; eliminated health insurance benefits for part-time state employees and college faculty; replaced state employee pensions with 401(k)-style defined contribution plans; expanded payday loans; weakened a state prevailing wage law; and repealed a paid family leave law that has yet to be implemented.

Meanwhile, modest labor-backed bills passed by the House got nowhere in the Senate, including proposals to add a labor representative to community college boards, expand apprenticeship and vocational rehab programs, and give interpreters the right to unionize.

All those votes produced stark divides in legislative rankings. WSLC ranked Washington's 49 state senators on 12 votes they took. Seventeen

senators, all of them Democrats, voted in accord with WSLC 100 percent of the time. But 22 senators voted against the WSLC 100 percent of the time — 20 Republicans, plus turncoat Democrats Tom and Sheldon.

WSLC then ranked Washington's 98 state representatives on 10 House votes; 48, all of them Democrats, voted the WSLC recommendation 100 percent of the time. No state representatives voted against the WSLC recommendation 100 percent of the time, but 12 House Republicans came away with 10 percent rankings.

Southwest Washington lawmakers voted along the lines of their party majorities. Republican Sens. Don Benton and Ann Rivers were ranked at 0 percent, while Democrat Annette Cleveland had 100 percent. In the House, Democrats Jim Moeller and Sharon Wylie had 100 percent, Democrat Monica Stonier had 80 percent, and Republicans Paul Harris, Liz Pike, and Brandon Vick had 20, 10, and 10 percent respectively.



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