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Oregon AFL-CIO seeks to build coalition

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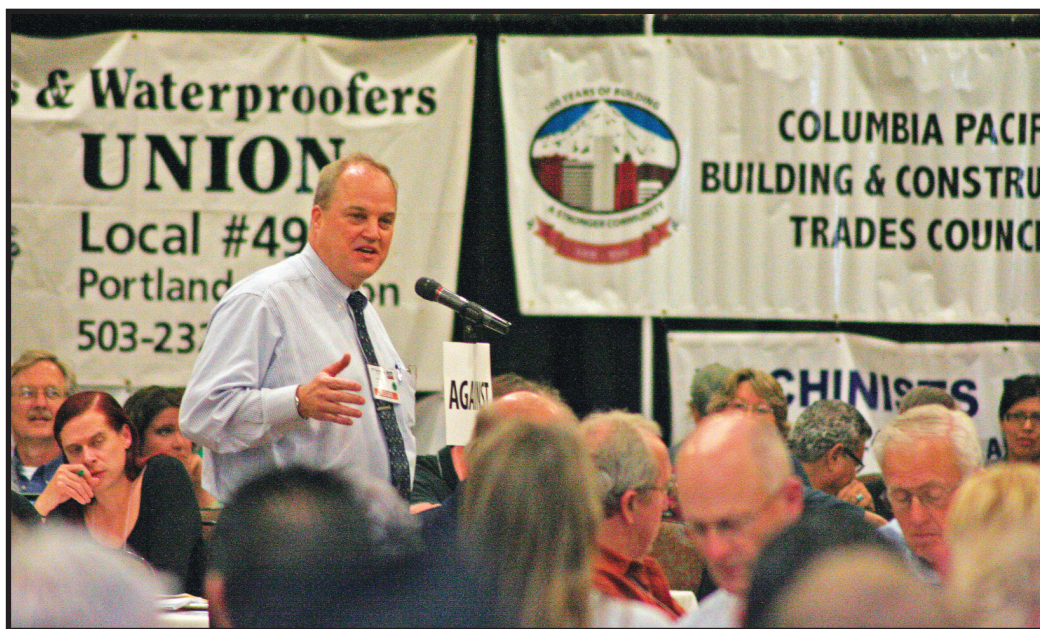
BEND — The 53rd Oregon AFL-CIO Convention, Sept. 27-29 in Bend, echoed the national AFL-CIO convention in Los Angeles two weeks before. Both placed great emphasis on outside alliances. At the national convention Sept. 8-11, the AFL-CIO committed to form an enduring alliance with community groups. At the Oregon convention — its official theme “The New Face of Labor” — delegates endorsed a state-wide experiment in long-term coalition-building with community, immigrant, and civil rights groups, and gave “constituency groups” a seat on the Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board.

The AFL-CIO, founded in 1955 with the merger of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), is the premier coordinating body of the American labor movement. Local, state, and national AFL-CIO bodies pool union political resources for maximum impact, and provide a forum for unions to resolve conflicts and maintain unity.

But the U.S. labor movement is in dire decline, owing to political assaults, economic and cultural changes, and organizational inertia. If current trend lines continue, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain told convention delegates, there will be no U.S. labor movement in 30 years.

“Playing it safe at this moment in our history is a formula for disaster,” Chamberlain said. For unions to focus only on the wages and working conditions of their members isn’t going to work, Chamberlain said. Instead, labor must speak for all workers, and ally with community groups fighting for justice.

Delegates endorsed that vision with the passage of several resolutions and constitutional changes. The



American Federation of Teachers-Oregon President David Rives takes the mic at the Oregon AFL-CIO convention. AFT is now the most numerous national union within the Oregon AFL-CIO, with 41,000 of the federation’s 111,000 members. (Photo by Russell Sanders, courtesy of Oregon AFL-CIO.)

Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board will now have one member selected to represent officially-chartered AFL-CIO constituency groups — cross-union organizations of young workers, retired workers, gay workers, black workers, and others. And delegates resolved to continue Oregon Strong Voice, an experiment in long-term coalition-building with local civil rights and other groups, several of which sent representatives to the convention.

Organizers said it was the best-attended conven-

tion in recent years, with 212 delegates and 138 honorary delegates and guests, 350 attendees in all.

The Oregon AFL-CIO rotates conventions around the state, but there are no unionized meeting facilities outside of Portland. This one took place at non-union Riverhouse Hotel and Convention Center in Bend; convention sergeants-at-arms took up a collection and raised \$689 to thank convention center workers.

Delegates approved more agenda-setting policy
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Carpenters Food Bank will close

The Carpenters Food Bank will hand out its last food box Oct. 18, ending a 30-year run serving needy families in the Portland metropolitan area.

“It’s a hard thing to do, but there’s no way I can afford to keep it running,” said Mike Fahey, who, along with his late wife Sandy, have operated the food bank out of the basement of the Carpenters Union building on the corner of North Lombard Street and Brandon Avenue in Portland since 1983.

Sandy Fahey, his wife of 40 years, died in July following complications from Legionnaires disease, and a sale is pending on the building.

“The Carpenters Union has taken care of us for the last 30 years, donating all the space and paying all the utilities,” said Fahey, a retired executive secretary-treasurer of the Portland Metal Trades Council and member of Pile Drivers, Divers and Shipwrights Local 2416. Fahey left the trades to start his own mortgage company, but he and Sandy never gave up the food bank. “Sandy was a big, big part of this, too,” he said.

The Faheys helped start the food bank to assist out-of-work and striking union members from the Carpenters and Steelworkers unions. At the time, work at the Portland shipyards was slow, and some 400 Steelworkers were on strike at Oregon Steel Mills.

To help weather the storm, the Carpenters and Steelworkers made arrangements to combine the food assistance programs that each was operating out of the same building on North Lombard.

“It got us through some tough times,” Ted Totten, a member of Steelworkers Local 3010 who was on strike at the time, told the Labor Press in a November 2008 story celebrating the Food Bank’s 25th anniversary. “The Faheys took it over and it’s been going strong since.”

Through the years it built a reputation for putting together one of the best food boxes in the city. Not restricted to union members, people would start lining up at 5 a.m. on the third Friday each month for boxes that often would con-

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Oregon University System strike averted

Tentative deal includes modest raises for 4,300 support workers

Oregon University System (OUS) and the union representing 4,332 support workers at seven state university campuses reached agreement at 2:30 a.m. Sept. 26 — averting a strike that was set to begin Sept. 30. The tentative agreement, reached after administrators dropped one provocative demand, will be voted on by members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503.

Bargaining had previously stalled over management’s demand to double (to 18 years) the time it takes workers to go from starting salary to the top of the pay scale. Under the tentative agreement, workers who haven’t reached the top of the scale will receive their full “step” increases of 4.75 percent on June 30, 2014, and June 30, 2015 — and earlier than that if the university system receives additional funding from the February 2014 session of the Oregon Legislature.

Local 503 negotiators agreed to accept what they called “very modest” cost-of-living adjustments — 1.5 percent on Dec. 1 2013, and 2 percent on Dec. 1, 2014 — the same raises most state workers got in the recently ratified “DAS” contract. Local 503 had earlier

proposed a 2.5 percent increase retroactive to July 1, 2013, when the previous two-year contract expired, and 2.5 percent a year later.

In a statement announcing the agreement to members, Local 503 called it “the best agreement that we could reach given financial realities of some OUS campuses.”

Local 503 had been all set to strike on the opening day of classes, and had collected commitments of support from students, professors, and graduate student employees.

Several union proposals will have to wait until next time, including one that would draw the line on “administrative bloat.” Local 503 had proposed that OUS return over the next two years to the student-to-administrator ratio it had

in the 2007-2008 academic year. But OUS administrators said they were not willing to bargain over that proposal.

Local 503 had also proposed a “wage floor” so that no worker would be paid less than \$2,498 a month — the dollar threshold at which a family of four becomes eligible for food stamps. Local 503 spokesperson Jill Bakken said almost 30 percent of the bargaining unit members earn below that amount. OUS at one point agreed to get halfway there during the two-year term of the contract, but later backtracked from that in bargaining.

Local 503 pledged to continue its campaign for living wages and adequate university funding, and against administrative bloat.