

...Oregon AFL-CIO bolsters organizing assistance program

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resolutions than in previous years, and nearly all passed unanimously. [See "Resolved" on Page 8, for details.] Only one resolution — endorsing plans for a union-built liquified natural gas export facility in Coos Bay — encountered significant opposition. It passed 83-29 after it was amended to call on the project developer to take extra steps for environmental remediation.

At the convention's close, Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council Executive Director John Mohlis credited AFSCME Local 3135 President Jeff Klatke for reaching out six months before the convention to avoid "messy floor fights."

"We're not always going to agree," Mohlis said. "But if we're willing to sit down and listen to each other, and talk and be respectful of each other, it's worth a try. It's what our members expect us to do."

Another sign of unity was Oregon's AFL-CIO stepped-up organizing assistance program, which federation leaders credited with victories ranging from unionizing 1,900 University of Oregon faculty to forming a union-affiliated taxi co-op to securing a neutrality agreement with Hyatt that could make it easier for future workers to unionize if a convention center hotel is built in Portland. The Oregon AFL-CIO has

been trying a new approach to organizing, in which affiliated unions pool their staff organizers for all-out blitzes. Delegates endorsed that approach, approving an organizing resolution that hikes — by 5 cents per member per month — the dues that affiliated unions pay to the Oregon AFL-CIO. The increase, dedicated to organizing, will raise over \$60,000 a year to pay for Oregon AFL-CIO organizing staff. The organizing resolution also sets a goal of 3 percent net growth in union membership, and it codifies the organizing program's principles. To get help with organizing, unions must commit to a playbook for successful campaigns, which includes visits to every worker, meetings to involve workers, formation of a worker committee, and a commitment not to file for a union election unless it's clear there is at least two-thirds support in a workplace.

Over two days and a night, delegates also heard from politicians, labor leaders, and allies, including Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten.

Kitzhaber's appearance put public employee unions in an uncomfortable position — two days before a special legislative session that he called in order to further trim retiree benefits in the Public Employee Retirement System (PERS). Oregon AFL-CIO affiliates



Leaving the Oregon AFL-CIO convention, Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber — along with his girlfriend Cylvia Hayes and her Rhodesian ridgeback — see a last-ditch appeal from a handful of union delegates: "Hands off PERS." (Photo by David Young.)

like AFSCME, AFT-Oregon, and Oregon School Employees Union objected strongly to Kitzhaber's PERS cuts proposal, and pledged to challenge it in court. But they're also counting on help from the governor to defeat a proposed anti-union "right-to-work" ballot initiative that would weaken public employee unions by barring any requirement that workers pay for union representation. Kitzhaber pledged at a Labor Day picnic to campaign against the measure.

In caucus meetings the morning of Kitzhaber's visit, public employee union leaders asked delegates to be courteous. In the end, some public sector delegates stayed seated and withheld applause during his address, one

delegate held a protest sign as Kitzhaber entered the convention, and a handful held signs outside as he left.

Kitzhaber told convention delegates he doesn't have all the answers on how to rebuild the middle class, but said the proposed anti-union ballot measure is certainly not the answer: "We are not going to let that take root in Oregon, not now, not ever."

At the conclusion of his remarks, Kitzhaber took part in a ceremonial signing of a bill passed earlier this year that requires managers to stay neutral when public sector employees consider whether to unionize.

After his convention address, Kitzhaber told the Labor Press he hopes his opposition to the anti-union

initiative and support for basic union rights will be seen as the real litmus test of his support for unionism — not his PERS proposal.

"These are benefits that were earned. I understand people who disagree with me about this," he said.

Kitzhaber said he would seek no further cuts to PERS. He also confirmed that he's working behind the scenes to keep both the anti-union initiative — and a set of tax initiatives proposed by the union-backed group Our Oregon — off the ballot. Kitzhaber said the measures would be counterproductive to his goal of developing a labor-business coalition that could reach agreement on public finance.

Merkley, taking the stage several hours after Kitzhaber, also took a shot at the proposed anti-union ballot initiative: "The 1 percent have a strategy," Merkley said. "It's easier to squeeze profits out of working people if they're disorganized than if they're organized."

Merkley, who has voted 100 percent in accord with the recommendations of the national AFL-CIO, talked about trade, infrastructure, and his campaign to end abuse of the filibuster, which he said is used by "the 1 percent" "as a veto on legislation that would benefit working people." Beijing has gone from bicycles to bullet trains in 10 years, Merkley said, because China spends 10 percent of its budget on infrastructure. The United States, by contrast, spends 2 percent — "not enough to maintain the infrastructure our parents built."

As for future NAFTA-style trade

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