

\$15 SeaTac, Wash. minimum wage challenged in court

In a local campaign that's being closely watched nationally, voters in tiny SeaTac, Washington, narrowly passed an initiative giving workers in large transportation and hospitality businesses in and around SeaTac International Airport the nation's highest minimum wage — \$15 an hour — and a host of other rights.

The campaign was the fruit of a multi-year campaign by local unions and community groups, dating back as far as the 2005 decision by Alaska Airlines to contract out baggage handling and other services at its biggest hub, slashing wages in half. Efforts to re-unionize those workers were stymied by a federal labor law which was interpreted to say that groups of contracted workers in far-flung airports had to be in the same unit, even though they had no contact with one another. This year, inspired by the \$15-an-hour demands of a growing strike movement by fast food workers, a coalition got to work in SeaTac, population 27,000, and gathered 1,541 signatures to take an audacious question to voters.

The ordinance would mandate a \$15-an-hour minimum wage for airport workers, and workers at hotels, shuttle services, car rental agencies, and institutional food service operations.

If \$15 an hour seems shockingly high, it's only because expectations have been lowered by decades of offshoring, outsourcing, downsizing, and union-busting. If the federal minimum wage had kept pace with inflation and productivity increases since its 1968 peak, it would today be \$18.67 an hour.

SeaTac's ordinance guarantees other rights as well: 6.5 days a year of paid sick leave for full-time employees; a ban on managers or owners taking workers' tips; a requirement to offer additional hours to part-time employees before hiring from the outside; and the opportunity for employees of contractors to keep their jobs when the contract changes hands.

Alaska Airlines and other big corporations employed legal maneuvers to keep the initiative off the ballot, but lost in a state appeals court. Then Alaska

Airlines, the National Restaurant Association, the American Car Rental Association spent heavily to convince voters to oppose it.

But supporters also got out the vote. The coalition included Working Washington, a community organizing project of the Service Employees International Union; SEIU Healthcare 775NW; United Food and Commercial Workers Local 21; UNITE HERE; Teamsters; the community group Puget Sound SAGE; and faith coalitions including the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the Faith Action Network, and Abu Bakr Islamic Center of Washington. The campaign also had public endorsements from U.S. Congressman Adam Smith, King County Executive Dow Constantine, and King County Council member Julia Patterson.

The end result, certified Nov. 26 by King County elections officials, was 3,040 to 2,963 in favor: The measure won by 77 votes. Opponents paid to have a hand recount conducted, but the

tally, announced Dec. 9, was exactly the same.

The measure is supposed to take effect Jan. 1, giving sizable raises to an estimated 6,500 workers, including jet fuelers, baggage handlers, hotel housekeepers, and rental car employees.

But opponents are again in court to challenge it, on multiple grounds. King County Superior Court Judge Andrea Darvas heard both sides Dec. 13 and said she'll rule on it by Jan. 1.

Meanwhile, supporters of the ordinance are ready for it to spread. Both candidates in the Seattle mayor's race said they backed a city-wide \$15-an-hour minimum wage, and the winning candidate, Ed Murray, pledged to bring it about in his first term. On Dec. 5, the coalition that ran the SeaTac campaign staged a day-long march from SeaTac to Seattle City Hall to demand a \$15 an hour minimum wage, with no delay.

UA #290 contractor comes to aid of injured war veteran

Tualatin-based Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 and signatory contractor D&F Plumbing helped out a disabled veteran with a clogged kitchen sink just before the crunch of the holiday season.

Derek Bitte, 32, was at wit's end after trying everything possible to unclog the kitchen sink at his Milwaukie home. The father of five poured vinegar down the drain, then "snaked it" with a piece of wire, but to no avail.

"Financially, I couldn't afford to call a plumber," said Bitte, an 8-year Army veteran injured during a tour in Iraq and currently unemployed.

So Bitte reached out to a veteran's representative in Clackamas County. The rep in turn contacted the Oregon

Military Support Network. One of the volunteers at the Support Network is Glenn Shuck, a retired executive director of Labor's Community Service Agency. Shuck put out a call for assistance to construction trades unions in the area.

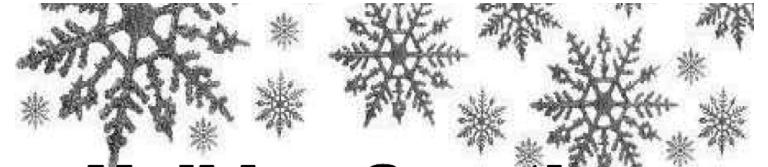
Shuck told the Labor Press that the very next day after he sent an email requesting assistance, Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 Business Manager Al Shropshire notified him that it would be taken care of. Shropshire told the Labor Press that he notified his staff of the situation and that organizer Todd Templeton contacted D&F Plumbing, a minority-owned shop in North Portland.

"D&F said they would be happy to

help out," Templeton told the Labor Press.

Within the week, they did.

"They came out and in 45 minutes everything was working fine," Bitte said. "And everything was comped. I was very appreciative."



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