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2013: LABOR IN REVIEW

As reported in the pages of the Northwest Labor Press, 2013 was a year of legislative gains for organized labor, mostly — and a year that saw greater labor unity and a spirit of fight-back among working people. But there were also a number of tough contract fights, and some defeats.

PORTLAND CITY HALL

It's hard to overstate the importance of the new sick leave ordinance passed unanimously by Portland City Council in March. About a quarter of a million workers, nearly all non-union, gained an important human right in the workplace as of Jan. 1, 2014. That's almost as many workers as all the union members in Oregon. The measure was sponsored by City Commissioner Amanda Fritz after a campaign by Family Forward Oregon, Causa, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the Oregon Working Families Party, and Working America, among other groups.

OREGON CAPITOL

The Oregon Legislature banned the expenditure of public funds to keep employees from unionizing; gave workers the right to take up to two weeks unpaid bereavement leave; and expanded the prevailing wage law to cover public projects constructed with donor money. But lawmakers also trimmed public



Sick pay advocate Andrea Paluso of Family Forward Oregon, pictured above with her children outside Portland City Hall, put together a union-community coalition that won an ordinance extending earned sick days to a quarter of a million Portland workers who didn't have it.

employee retirement benefits, and gave away over \$500 million in new tax breaks to business owners.

CONGRESS

A patient campaign by U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) to reform the filibuster bore fruit in 2013. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) at length concluded that too few presidential nominees would ever get a vote if minority GOP senators could fili-

buster their confirmation votes. Reid held a vote on a change to Senate rules, and a majority of senators voted to eliminate the filibuster on presidential nominations (except for U.S. Supreme Court nominations). The result is a fully functioning National Labor Relations Board for the first time since Obama was elected — and a new Labor Secretary who has already moved several long-overdue regulations: an OSHA rule protecting workers from



silica dust, and a federal regulation extending minimum wage and overtime to home care workers.

City of Portland employees represented by the multi-union coalition known as DCTU rallied outside City Hall Aug. 14 to demand a "fair contract now" — with a fair cost of living increase and no concessions on job security. But at year's end, they still didn't have it.

Oregon AFL-CIO takes more political action for '14

At a Dec. 18 meeting of its Executive Board and political committee, the Oregon AFL-CIO made three political endorsements: Brad Avakian for re-election as Oregon labor commissioner, Oregon Nurses Association staff representative Rob Nosse for state representative in House District 42, and a "yes" vote on a "driver's card" referendum that will appear on the November 2014 ballot. The state labor federation endorsed U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's re-election at its biennial convention last September.

Republican state Reps. Kim Thatcher and Sal Esquivel oppose a law passed in the 2013 legislative session that requires Oregon to issue resident driver's cards without requiring that applicants prove legal presence in the United States. So they led a signature gathering effort to refer the law to voters. The driver's card, which requires passing a drivers test to obtain, allows holders to drive legally in Oregon for three years. Unlike the driver's license, which is good for five years, the driver's card is not accepted by federal or state governments as a form of identification when

applying for services that require citizenship or legal residency.

Oregon Legislative and Communications Director Elana Guiney said it's not just foreign-born residents who have trouble getting a regular driver's license: some senior citizens, and homeless and indigent individuals who don't have an address or place to store records, also have had difficulty.

A "yes" vote on the referendum is a vote to uphold the law as passed by the Legislature.

In other business, the Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board authorized the establishment of a yet-to-be-named non-profit, a type of organization known under the federal tax code as a 501(c)3. Other state labor federations have set up such groups, which conduct policy research, public education and issue advocacy, but aren't allowed to get involved in politics. Those roles could supplement the Oregon AFL-CIO's other work, and unlike labor organizations, 501(c)3s are allowed to accept foundation grants and tax-deductible contributions. The group would have a board that is

independent from the Oregon AFL-CIO.

The Oregon AFL-CIO E-Board swore in two new members: Jim Falvey and Lisa Gourley.

Falvey, president of Portland-based National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82, replaced Kevin Card after Card took a job with the national union in Washington, D.C. Gourley, a board member of Oregon School Employees Association and president of the Linn-Benton-Lincoln Central Labor Council, replaces Stacey Chamberlain of AFSCME Council 75.

The Board also dealt with leftover business from the September convention. With amendments, the Board passed Resolution 12, which puts the state labor federation on record supporting a requirement that political campaigns disclose their donors. And the Board voted to table Resolution 13, which called on the Oregon AFL-CIO to organize a large public rally in defense of Social Security and Medicare. Instead, the state labor federation will coordinate with the national AFL-CIO, which is planning a campaign on the issue later this year.