

A mixed bag for labor at Oregon's short legislative session

Organized labor had a mixed bag of results at the recently completed 33-day "short session" of the Oregon Legislature.

"Top priority" bills for the building trades, firefighters, and grocery workers were successful. Other priorities, such as funding for the Columbia River Crossing, were not.

Lawmakers passed **SB 5703** to provide public bonding for a variety of construction projects, including \$198 million for Oregon Health and Sciences University's (OHSU) cancer center.

Nike founder Phil Knight offered OHSU a \$500 million donation to establish a world class treatment and research facility if the university could

Anti-high-capacity transit measure passes in Tigard

A labor-opposed ballot measure in Tigard that will stifle high-capacity transit projects in the city narrowly passed in a special election March 11.

Ballot Measure 34-210 passed by 220 votes in a special election that drew less than 37 percent of Tigard's 26,972 registered voters. The vote was 5,066 to 4,846.

With passage, the City of Tigard has to amend its city charter to officially oppose high-capacity transit. The city will also have to obtain voter approval before it can change its comprehensive plan to site light-rail or bus-rapid-transit projects.

Additionally, the city is required to send a letter to the governor, the Oregon Department of Transportation, TriMet, Metro, Washington County and the Federal Transit Administration annually notifying the agencies of its opposition to high-capacity transit.

The ballot measure was sponsored by tea partiers and the conservative Oregon Transformation Project.

In addition to labor, the measure was opposed by the Tigard City Council, the Tigard Chamber of Commerce, and various environmental and pro-transit groups.

match it. OHSU turned to the Legislature for help reaching that goal.

The bill includes requirements that workers be paid prevailing wage, and that its contractors meet apprenticeship targets. OHSU will have goals for contracting with minority and women-owned businesses, and include provisions for contracting with businesses based throughout Oregon.

Other projects slated for bonding in the bill include urgent health and safety projects at Oregon universities, and investments to support the expansion of higher education in central Oregon. Those projects — ranging from \$2 million to \$21 million — include the University of Oregon, Oregon State University Cascade Campus, Southern Oregon University, Oregon Institute of Technology, Western Oregon University, and Central Oregon Community College.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 received strong support for its bill to ease penalties for grocery clerks who unknowingly or inadvertently sell alcohol to a minor for the first time. **SB 1546** changes the penalty for first-time offenders from a misdemeanor to a Class A violation.

The Oregon State Fire Fighters Council won passage of **SB 1518**, which allows frontline managers that do not have the authority to hire, discharge or impose economic discipline to join the union. The Fire Fighters Union was unsuccessful getting the bill through the longer legislative session

last year.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 passed a Corrections "gun bill." **HB 4035** allows Oregon state correctional officers the ability to bring firearms onto Department of Corrections property and keep them locked in their cars. AFSCME said it's a personal safety issue for Corrections members, who travel long distances to and from work at Oregon's many rural prisons.

AFSCME also got through a workers' compensation bill that protects public employees at Oregon State Hospital and at state-operated group homes, where employees are frequently injured on-the-job by clients. **HB 4104** mandates expedited pre-authorization of workers' comp claims when there's a disagreement between agencies and insurance companies. Union officials said injured workers were not getting prompt and appropriate medical care and treatment through the workers' comp system, leading more and more employees to bypass the system and use their own health care provider. This resulted in skewed under-reporting of on-the-job injuries.

Among other bills that passed with labor support:

- **SB 1542** will enable private individuals to purchase in-home care services from the Home Care Commission through the Home Care Registry, which employs union-represented care providers; and
- A budget bill, **HB 5201**, adds \$2 million to a program of grants to help

school districts start career and technical education programs.

HB 4122 will require third-party oversight on all outsourced information technology (IT) projects that cost more than \$5 million (such as Cover Oregon), and certain projects that cost more than \$1 million.

The Oregon AFL-CIO was successful passing one of its four priority bills. **HB 4058** adds registered apprenticeship training programs to the state's 40-40-20 education goals.

Three other bills lobbied by the state labor federation were not successful. The biggest disappointment by far was failure to move ahead on the Interstate-5 replacement bridge over the Columbia River, which would have created thousands of construction jobs.

Last year, the Oregon Legislature approved \$450 million toward the bridge project, but the GOP-led Washington Senate refused to allow a vote on a bill that would have matched that contribution. Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber responded with an Oregon-led plan, which was strongly supported by the AFL-CIO and Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council.

HB 4113 had majority support in the Oregon House, but not in the Senate. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) began shutting down the project after the Legislature adjourned. I-5 replacement bridge planning has been ongoing for more than 15 years, at a cost of more than \$195 million. ODOT said all of the work will be

archived before the project shuts down completely May 31.

Also failing to win passage:

- **SB 1543**, to make it illegal for an employer to cut workers hours in order to avoid obligations under the federal health insurance legislation commonly referred to as Obamacare. The federal legislation levies a fine of \$2,000 per year on enterprises with over 50 full-time employees that don't provide health care, but some employers are turning full-time workers into part-time in order to evade the sanction.

- A tweak (**HB 4054**) to the ballot title of a referendum that seeks to overturn a law passed last year allowing undocumented residents to get state-issued "driver cards" instead of full-fledged drivers licenses.

- **HB 4118**, which would have required non-profits that employ individuals with disabilities to pay state minimum wage and comply with state labor and occupational health and safety laws.

- **HB 4036**, to mandate certain violent assaults against staff and other clients at the Oregon State Hospital to be prosecuted as felonies.

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