

Oregon AFL-CIO issues endorsements for May primary

The Oregon AFL-CIO announced March 10 the list of candidates it's backing in advance of the May 2014 primary.

Members of the Oregon AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) voted the last endorsements at a Feb. 28 meeting, but the state labor federation held off until after the close of the Oregon Legislature's 2014 short session to publicly release the picks. The list also includes endorsements made last December and at the Oregon AFL-CIO convention in September.

In Congressional races, the Oregon AFL-CIO is backing Democrat Jeff Merkley for reelection to the U.S. Senate, and four of Oregon's Democratic incumbents in the U.S. House: Suzanne Bonamici, Earl Blumenauer, Peter DeFazio and Kurt Schrader.

The endorsement of Blumenauer is considered "conditional," pending the return of a questionnaire. All candidates seeking endorsement from the Oregon AFL-CIO must fill out an eight-page, 22-question survey of where they stand on issues important to AFL-CIO-affiliated unions.

Merkley and Schrader both face token opposition in the May primary.

Merkley, Schrader and DeFazio are all expected to be in competitive races against Republican challengers in the general election.

The Oregon AFL-CIO also endorsed Brad Avakian for reelection as Oregon labor commissioner, a non-partisan seat. He's running unopposed, as no other candidate filed for the office.

The state labor federation has not taken any action in the governor's race, where incumbent De-

mocrat John Kitzhaber picked up a last-minute primary opponent.

Four candidates for state Senate received Oregon AFL-CIO endorsements: Incumbent Democrats Sara Gelser, Lee Beyer, Rod Monroe, and Michael Dembrow.

Organized labor's agenda has tended to enjoy broad support in the state House in recent years, but often runs into trouble in the state Senate. Of the four endorsed state Senate candidates, Beyer, Monroe and Dembrow, a former president of the American Federation of Teachers (Dembrow was appointed to fill the Senate seat vacated by Jackie Dingfelder), are incumbents noted for consistent leadership on labor issues. The fourth, Gelser, is a Corvallis state representative who is challenging incumbent Republican state Sen. Betsy Close. Close was appointed in 2012 to fill the unexpired senate term of Republican Frank Morse.

Dembrow and Monroe don't have any opposition in the May primary or in the general election. Beyer will face a Republican challenger in November.

Democrats currently hold 16 of the 30 Oregon Senate seats.

The Oregon AFL-CIO is endorsing 16 Democrats for the House, including 11 incumbents seeking reelection: Jeff Barker (HD 28, Aloha); Margaret Doherty (HD 35, Tigard); Shemia Fagan (HD 51, Clackamas); Joe Gallegos (HD 30, Hillsboro); Chris Gorsek (HD 49, Troutdale); Val Hoyle (HD 14, West Eugene); Tina Kotek (HD 44, N/NE Portland); Ann Lininger (HD 38, Lake Oswego); Jessica Vega Pederson (HD 47, East Portland);

Jennifer Williamson (HD 36, West Portland); and Brad Witt (HD 31, Clatskanie). Only Kotek has a primary opponent.

Fagan, Gorsek, and Gallegos may be in competitive races come November, as they are running in House districts that were held by a Republican prior to 2012.

The Oregon AFL-CIO also endorsed Democratic incumbent Ben Unger (HD 29, Hillsboro), but he dropped out of the race on the very day of the filing deadline (March 11), and tipped off a chosen successor. Oregon AFL-CIO Legislative and Communications Director Elana Guiney said that nullifies the endorsement; it doesn't transfer.

The other five House candidates to win Oregon AFL-CIO endorsement are Democrats:

- Barbara Smith Warner (HD 45, NE Portland), former labor liaison for U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and a former staff person at the National Association of Letter Carriers, running for reelection after being appointed in December by Multnomah County commissioners to fill Michael Dembrow's seat;

- Rob Nosse, a union representative at the Oregon Nurses Association, running in a six-way primary for an open seat vacated by Jules Bailey in House District 42, SE Portland;

- Dan Rayfield, a plaintiffs attorney, running for the open seat vacated by Sara Gelser in House District 16, Corvallis;

- Scott Mills, a member of Sign Painters and Paint Makers Local 1094 and a Democratic Party activist, is running in House District 18, Silverton. Mills also is a delegate to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council; and

- Paul Evans, a union firefighter and former Monmouth mayor, vying for an open seat vacated by Republican Vicki Berger in House District 20, Salem.

The endorsements of Barker, Hoyle, Mills, and Vega Pederson are all "conditional," pending return of the questionnaire.

Democrats currently hold 34 of the 60 Oregon House seats.

Most incumbents in the state Legislature, including incumbent Democrats, did *not* get the Oregon AFL-CIO's primary endorsement. Were there some surprises?

"I think there are probably half a dozen or so legislators who are going to feel like they're very good on AFL-CIO bills and for one or two of our affiliates, so why didn't they get our endorsement?" Guiney said. "And I would say to them to think about the makeup of our board as a whole, and if there are places where maybe I could work with them on some education about our other affiliates issues."

The AFL-CIO includes unions from different sectors with differing concerns, like public sector, building trades, and manufacturing. Some candidates seeking endorsement had good records on some unions' issues, but not others.

An endorsement vote requires a two-thirds majority of COPE.

Candidates who didn't get the endorsement before the primary can still garner AFL-CIO support in the general election in November, Guiney said. A final round of endorsements will be made in June.

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