

...Oregon building trades support minimum wage hike

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ating several thousand jobs.

North America's Building Trades Unions recently opened an office in Houston, where \$245 billion in construction projects are on the books along the Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida. In the next two to five years, he said, there will be a need for 100,000 to 150,000 skilled construction workers to meet the demand.

"We're trying to get a piece of that pie," he said.

Following the Great Recession of 2008-09, which resulted in unemployment in the union construction industry as high as 60 percent for some crafts, this spate of growth is music to the ears of unionists.

According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, construction union trades gained 100,000 members last year.

"I think that 100,000 is just the tip of the iceberg," Booker said.

Booker believes union contractors are well positioned to get a lot of the upcoming work. "We're selling the safest, most highly skilled and trained workforce in the world — and that's an easy sell," he said. "We're labor unions, but we're also vendors/suppliers."

Construction union contractors contribute collectively over \$1 billion a year into training. "That's not federal money, that's not federally assisted, that's not grants to community colleges. That's money that we have collectively negotiated with our contractors; that's money that could have been in our members' pockets, but they chose to invest back into themselves."

Another strength, he said, is "our outreach in communities where we work. There's no other group that provides for in their agreements opportunities into apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for minorities, for veterans, for women, for other under-



Brent Booker, secretary-treasurer of North America's Building Trades Unions (formerly the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO), speaks at the Oregon Building Trades Convention in Bend.

served communities like we do."

Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley asked the building trades for help in his bid for re-election to a second term. He is being challenged by Republican Monica Wehby. A newcomer to politics, Wehby is a surgeon who is supported by the out-of-state billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch. An organization funded by the Koch brothers recently purchased \$3.6 million in television advertising attacking Merkley.

"I'm sure you've seen them (the ads) already," Merkley said. "Those Koch brothers, they know what they're doing. They've tested their ads. They're going to make them as ugly and misleading as they possibly can. I wouldn't want to vote for myself after seeing these ads. So I know they're effective."

Merkley pointed to his blue collar roots. His father was a union machinist whose family grew up in the David Douglas School District. Merkley still lives in the district and his children at-

tend the same high school.

Merkley said Wehby supports the Koch brothers' entire agenda — from the Romney tax plan that would make it cheaper to ship jobs overseas, to opposing the Bring Jobs Home Act, Equal Pay for Women, the Rebuild America Act, and the creation of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

"There's a clear choice between us," he said. "We have to make sure that the billionaire Koch brothers, who do not share anything in terms of values for working America, don't succeed in buying up the U.S. Senate."

In addition to Merkley, several elected officials addressed the convention, including Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian; Oregon House Majority Leader Val Hoyle (D-Eugene); House Minority Leader Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte); Speaker of the House Tina Kotek (D-Portland); and state Sen. Tim Knopp (R-Bend).

Rep. Hoyle predicted a right-to-work initiative petition will return to the state. In March, sponsors of the anti-union right-to-work initiative agreed to withdraw their petition in a deal brokered by Gov. John Kitzhaber. In exchange, a labor-backed coalition that sponsored pro-union counter-measures agreed to drop their petitions. The right-to-work petition was aimed at public-sector unions and had been certified and was collecting signatures.

"If Oregon becomes a right-to-work state, we lose every single thing that you've fought for, and we cannot afford to do that," Hoyle said.

Avakian announced the formation of a Commissioner's Scholarship Fund for the Oregon Labor Candidate School. The school was created in 2012 by eight unions to help train union members interested in running for elected office. Since its inception, 34 union members

from 12 different unions have graduated from the program. Six graduates currently hold elected office.

Avakian donated \$7,500 from his campaign fund to start the scholarship program. He will contribute \$2,500 a year for as long as he holds the office, and will pass on the tradition to whomever succeeds him.

The money will be used to help recruit union members and help participants with travel expenses, child care expenses, and other financial barriers that might prevent them from attending the full program.

"We need the voice of labor in elected office," Avakian said. "By creating more access to attend the full program, we will have better representation of the middle class in our public offices around the state."

Sara Ryan, director of the Oregon Labor Candidate School, told the Labor Press its board of directors will establish criteria for using the scholarship fund that both supports the school and adds to the successful experience of the participant. The funds are available to anyone who has been accepted into the school for the 2014-15 program year.

Several executive directors from union contractor associations in Oregon made presentations at the convention. They included Tim Gauthier of the National Electrical Contractors Association; Frank Wall of the Plumbing and Mechanical Contractors Association; Jerry Henderson of Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association; and John Killin of Associated Wall and Ceiling Contractors. Killin recently succeeded longtime director Ed Charles, who retired. Killin spent the last 11 years as executive director of the nonunion Associated Building Contractors (ABC).

The 62 registered delegates passed resolutions supporting an increase in Oregon's minimum wage; approving the Strategic Investment Program agreement for Intel; for reauthorizing \$100

million to fund the 2015-16 Connect Oregon program; and backing the West Coast Infrastructure Exchange, contingent that the bill includes prevailing wage protections.

Delegates passed another resolution that opposed "wood first" style legislation, or any other attempts to promote wood products over other construction materials. In the same resolution they supported efforts to increase markets for all of Oregon's industries, including wood, steel, cement, iron, aggregates and other products.

In political action, the council endorsed the Oregon Equal Rights for Women Ballot Measure 89. The measure is a constitutional amendment barring discrimination based on gender.

Delegates opposed the Open Primary Ballot Measure 90. The measure, if approved, would create a top-two system of general election voting where the primary ballot allows voters to choose one candidate from all candidates, regardless of political party. The top two candidates, regardless of political party, would then be voted upon in the general election.

Both measures are on the Nov. 4, ballot.

The Building Trades Council gave \$1,000 scholarships to Mary Ann Ellis of Williams, Oregon, and Daniel Ricker of Scappoose.

Mary Ann is the daughter of Lennie Ellis, a member of IBEW Local 659. She plans to attend George Fox University in Newberg to study biology and business.

Daniel is the son of Nathanael Ricker, a member of Cement Masons Local 555. He will attend Linn Benton Community College to study construction and forestry.

The scholarships are funded by Ferguson and Wellman Capital Management and Quest Investment. Recipients are selected by Duke Shepard, a policy adviser to Gov. John Kitzhaber, based on an application and short essay.

Inside the Koch Bros.' secret billionaire summit

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Lauren Windsor, creative director for American Family Voices, and executive producer of The Undercurrent on The Young Turks Network, talked to sources at the Koch brothers' summer seminar held the weekend of June 14-15 at the luxurious St. Regis Monarch Bay Resort in Dana Point, California, where she uncovered the following information:

- According to one source, 300 individuals — worth at least \$1 billion each — are trying to raise \$500 million to take control of the Senate, and another \$500 million to make sure Hillary Clinton never becomes president.

- This year's seminar featured a Who's Who of Republican political elites, including: U.S. Reps. Tom Cotton (Arkansas), Cory Gardner (California), Jim Jordan (Ohio), as well as Senators Mitch McConnell (Kentucky) and Marco Rubio (Florida).

- McConnell spoke in a discussion titled "Free Speech: Defending First Amendment Rights," presumably in

reference to his defense of deregulating campaign finance. McConnell, who is leading the fight in the Senate against campaign finance reform, and attending a political strategy summit where very wealthy donors are also actively fighting campaign finance reform, illustrates the power and access of the wealthy elites versus everyday Americans.

- Michael Lomax, president of the United Negro College Fund, participated in the Kochs' political strategy sessions — raising questions as to what is required of him in return for the Kochs' recent \$25 million donation to the UNCF.

- Security was tight, featuring checkpoints at every entrance to the resort beginning at noon on Saturday, June 14. If the ideas of the Koch brothers and their network are beneficial to the American public, why the need for such extreme secrecy and security measures?

(Editor's Note: For the full story and draft agenda, go to The Nation online at: <http://thenat.in/1smf9fz>.)

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