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Labor-backed alliance to push bold agenda in Salem

2015 could be a breakthrough year for pro-worker legislation

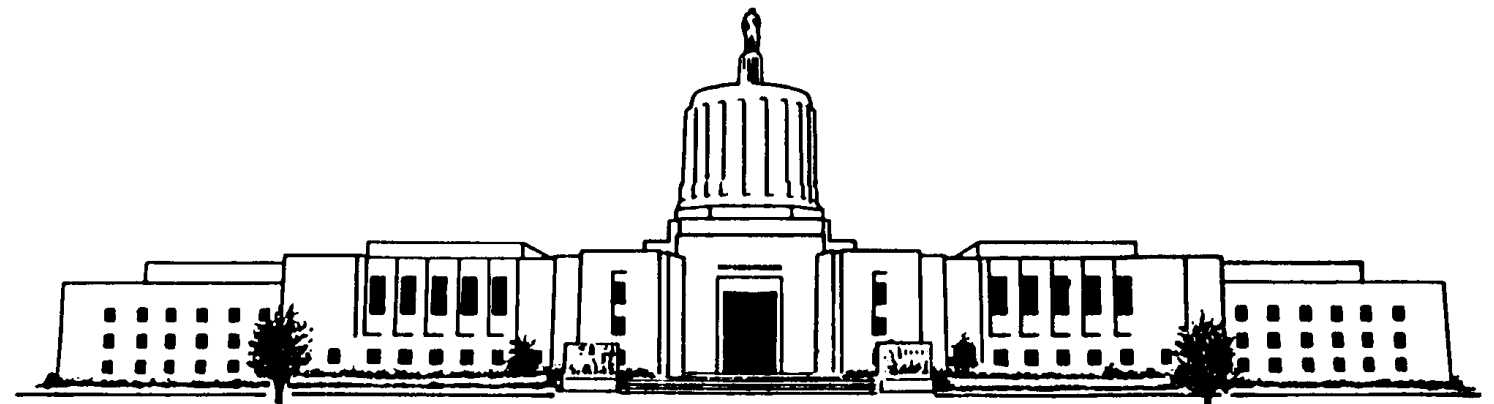
By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Oregon's five biggest labor organizations have united with civil rights and community groups in a new formal coalition to back a bold agenda in this year's session of the Oregon Legislature. The coalition, known as Fair Shot for All, will campaign for a big minimum wage increase, a paid sick leave law, "ban the box" and racial profiling laws, and legislation to create a publicly-sponsored retirement plan for workers.

The package is an attempt to make the most of November 2014 electoral gains: Democrats now have 18 of 30 seats in the state senate and 35 of 60 in the state house, so they're in a position to do something about worsening economic inequality.

The groups in Fair Shot for All laid out their agenda publicly at a press conference Jan. 10, the same day University of Oregon released a report that shows a rapid increase in the number of low-wage jobs in Oregon. The report, "The High Cost of Low Wages in Oregon," found that one fourth of Oregon's workforce — 412,000 workers — are in "low-wage" occupations with a median annual income of under \$12 an hour. The report also found that 197,000 working adults were receiving food stamps as of January 2014.

The Fair Shot for All coalition consists of Ore-



gon AFL-CIO, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (Oregon AF-SCME), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555, Oregon Education Association, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), PCUN, Urban League of Portland, Family Forward Oregon, Center for Intercultural Organizing, CAUSA, Basic Rights Oregon, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, Oregon Action, and the Rural Organizing Project. And each member of the coalition is committing to helping pass all parts of a package of five proposals that are intended to counter growing inequality:

MINIMUM WAGE. Oregon AFL-CIO is playing the role of lead convener in efforts to get a big raise for low-wage Oregonians. Lawmakers

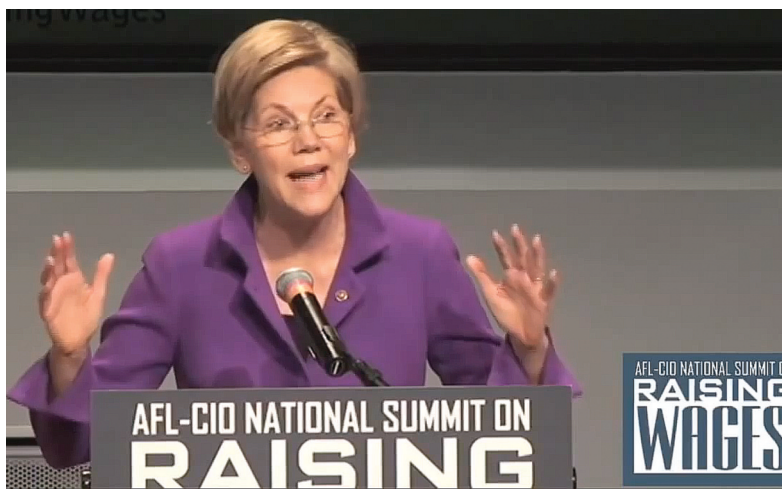
may consider at least two proposals to increase Oregon's minimum wage, which is currently \$9.25 an hour. One would raise it to \$15 over three years. Another would raise it to around \$12. Either way, it would represent a big increase for more than a quarter of Oregon workers. Advocates also want to repeal a state law that prevents local jurisdictions from setting a minimum wage higher than the statewide minimum. To show support for the campaign, the group 15 Now is organizing a rally at the Capitol Jan. 24 at noon, co-sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO and over a dozen unions. The rally will be followed by a statewide gathering of minimum wage advocates.

PAID SICK DAYS. Family Forward Oregon will spearhead a campaign for a statewide paid sick days law. As introduced, the proposal would

go farther than the ordinances passed in Portland and Eugene in that it would apply to all employers, and would allow workers to take up to seven paid sick days per year. Workers would accrue the paid sick leave at the rate of one hour for every 30 hours worked, and could use it to recover at home from a contagious illness, for a doctor's appointment, or care for a sick child. Union construction firms would be exempt from the mandate, because they employ workers through a hiring hall for typically short periods, and because their paid leave benefits are administered by a labor-management trust, not by the employers themselves.

RETIREMENT SAVINGS. Employer-provided pensions are in steep decline, and around the country SEIU is taking the lead on a proposal

(Turn to Page 2)



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U.S. Sen. Warren tells union crowd: 'The game is rigged' against workers

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) told a large union audience that despite working harder than ever, U.S. workers aren't seeing the fruits of their labor.

"I see evidence everywhere of the pounding working people are taking," said Warren, the keynote speaker at the national AFL-CIO's Raising Wages Summit Jan. 7 in Washington, D.C. "These families are working harder than ever, but they can't get ahead. Many feel that the game is rigged against them, and they are right. The game is rigged against them."

Warren blamed supply side — or trickle down — economics for the downside of the American middle class.

"When all the varnish is removed, trickle-down just means helping the biggest corporations and the richest people in this country, and claiming that those big corporations and rich people could be counted to create an economy that would work for everyone else," Warren said.

That didn't happen.

Warren said that over the last 32 years, literally 100 percent of the growth in the U.S. Gross Domestic Product has gone to the top 10 percent. "All of it," she said.

Prior to that — from 1935 to 1980 — 90 percent of all workers — middle class, working class, the poor — shared 70 percent of all the new income growth, while the other 30 percent went

to the wealthiest 10 percent.

"Overall, as the economic pie got bigger, pretty much everyone was getting a little more," Warren said. "As our economy got richer, our families got richer, and as our families got richer, our country got richer. That is how we built a great middle class in America."

But by the early 1980s, wages had flattened out, while expenses kept going up. The squeeze was terrible, she said. By the early 2000s, families were spending twice as much, adjusted for inflation, on mortgages than they had a generation earlier. They were spending more on health insurance, more to send their kids to college, and both parents had to work, creating new expenses.

(Turn to Page 7)