

# Common Sense Economics introduced at Labor Law Conference

The program illustrates why today's economy isn't working for working people, and what steps workers can take to help create an economy that benefits everyone

By Michael Gutwig  
Editor-Manager

A capacity crowd at the annual Labor Law Conference in Portland Jan. 30 was introduced to the AFL-CIO's latest program — Common Sense Economics.

With America witnessing the largest redistribution of wealth in its history, the CSE program will bring workers together to talk about how it happened.

"With this information — and knowing how we got to this economy 'of, by and for the 1 percent,' we can then move people to action to build a powerful enough social movement that can actually do something about it," said Bob Bussel, director of the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon.

LERC is working with the Oregon AFL-CIO to help disseminate the course to workers, unions, and community organizations throughout the state.

The national AFL-CIO has a goal to reach 1 million people.

Bussel told Labor Law Conference attendees that lots of people believe the Great Recession was accidental — the natural byproduct of a free market society. "But this winner-take-all politics and this winner-take-all economy came about because of conscious political



(Photo left) Bob Bussel of LERC gives a presentation of the Common Sense Economics program. (Above) Britt Cornman of Machinists District W24 looks through material at Labor Law Conference



Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian (lower right) waits to speak at Labor Law Conference held Jan. 30 at the IBEW Local 48 union hall in Northeast Portland. Avakian was the keynote luncheon speaker.

choices," he said.

Bussel pointed to the industrial billionaire Koch brothers (Charles and David), who intend to raise a staggering \$889 million from their billionaire buddies to spend in the 2016 election cycle (more than double what they spent in 2012).

That's about as much money

as each political party raises on its own, Bussel said, which makes the conservative Koch brothers a third political party.

"And what is the Koch brothers' agenda?" he asked. "It's an agenda to maintain an economy that is of, by and for the 1 percent."

CSE's goal is to help put workers in the driver's seat so they can start changing the direction of the economy so that it is an economy that works for all workers.

Bussel said union reps from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the Oregon Nurses Association, LERC and the Oregon AFL-

CIO have been trained and are ready to present the course. There is a three-hour program, one- or two-hour versions, even 20 minutes, if need be.

For more information, or to arrange for a presentation, contact Russell Sanders at the Oregon AFL-CIO, [russell@orafl-cio.org](mailto:russell@orafl-cio.org).

The Labor Law Conference was founded in 1996 by Norm Malbin, who retired last year as general counsel for IBEW Local 48. It is co-sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO, Center for Worker Rights, Northwest Oregon Labor Council, LERC, and the Columbia Pacific and Oregon State

Building and Construction Trades councils. Each year it sells out, attracting nearly 300 union officers, staffers, stewards and others who participate in workshops, listen to experts, and learn new ways to better represent their members.

Among the plenary speakers this year were Ronald Hooks, regional director of the National Labor Relations Board, management attorney Rick Liebman, labor attorney John Bishop, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, and Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian.

Avakian reported on several bills the Bureau of Labor and Industries supports this legislative session. There's a bill to provide funding for three new investigators in the Wage and Hour Division. Avakian said he will create a team to travel the state spot checking prevailed projects, and businesses with a history of cheating workers. Two other bills would give BOLI cease and desist authority while investigating a wage and hour complaint, and garnishment authority when an employer is found to have cheated their employees out of wages and/or benefits.

Avakian also supports a bill that would give BOLI the authority to enforce an Oregon statute that bans professional strikebreakers.

"There's a statute in Oregon that says it's illegal to be a professional strikebreaker, but there's nobody in charge of enforcing the statute," Avakian said. "A bill this session would give BOLI the ability to step in the middle of professional strikebreakers, find the businesses hiring them, find the strikebreakers that are going to cross your picket lines, and kick them out of our state."

Avakian also supports a raise in the state minimum wage, as well as a series of bills that would eliminate wage disparity among workers.



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## NW labor history mini conference March 14

Astoria's vibrant and sometimes volatile labor history will be revisited March 14 at a day-long mini-conference at the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association (PNLHA).

"Several of our Oregon mem-

bers identified Astoria as playing an important role in the labor history of the Beaver State, and they wanted to know more about it," said Ron Verzuh of the PNLHA. The Finnish community of radical trade unionists is part of the city's heritage, as are the histories of other ethnic communities, Verzuh said. The celebrated Astoria Labor Temple also speaks to the richness of the region's labor history.

Labor educator Marcus Widenor will moderate a labor history panel, and labor educator Bob Bussel will moderate a low-wage panel. At the end of the day, Pacific Northwest historian and labor educator Norm Diamond will lead a discussion about the future of labor history in the region.

For more information, contact Verzuh at 541-852-5540, or email him at [rverzuh@shaw.ca](mailto:rverzuh@shaw.ca).