

# Oregon's new governor, Kate Brown

With John Kitzhaber's resignation, Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown becomes governor. Like her predecessor, she has a decades-long working relationship with organized labor.

"I've known her since the first day she went to the Legislature," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. Chamberlain was a lobbyist for the Fire Fighters Union when Brown entered the Oregon House as a state representative for Southeast Portland in 1991. She moved to the Senate in 1997 and served as Senate Majority Leader in the 2005 and 2007 sessions. She was elected secretary of state in 2008 and 2012.

In 2007, Brown helped pass



laws allowing public employees to unionize by majority sign-up, granting state recognition to domestic partnership, and banning discrimination based on sexual

orientation. She also helped pass laws giving nursing mothers the right to unpaid breaks for expressing milk; banning golden parachutes for top school officials; making safety a mandatory subject of bargaining for firefighters; and extending unemployment benefits to workers locked out in labor disputes. As secretary of state, she cracked down on initiative petitioner abuses, and touted the benefits elsewhere of Oregon's vote-by-mail system.

"When we've needed her, she's always been there," Chamberlain said. "I believe she's got a passion for poor folks falling through the cracks."

## NATIONAL

### Illinois new GOP governor declares war on unions

Last fall, private equity investor Bruce Rauner spent \$27.3 million of his own money and won the race for Illinois governor. Now he's going after unions. Rauner issued an executive or-

der blocking the collection of "fair share" dues by public employee unions, and filed suit in federal court seeking to have his order declared legal. He's also encouraging cities and counties in Illinois to create local "right-to-work" zones —

passing ordinances that would prohibit union contracts from requiring all workers covered to share the costs of representation. It's a legally untested idea that appears to run afoul of the National Labor Relations Act.



## Health Care for All rally brings hundreds to Salem

A coalition of more than 100 organizations — including many labor unions — rallied at the State Capitol Feb. 11 where they called on Oregon lawmakers to create a single-payer health insurance system. Bills have been introduced in previous sessions but have gone nowhere. State Sen. Mike Dembrow (D-Portland), a member of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, is leading the charge. Last session, lawmakers did authorize a study on how such a system could be set up in Oregon. The study was to be funded with private money, and supporters so far have raised about \$50,000 of the \$200,000 needed. Rallygoers on Feb. 11 called on lawmakers to extend the deadline for the study, and have the state match the amount of private dollars raised. Dembrow also re-introduced a bill to implement a single-payer system. SB 631, which has 27 co-sponsors, will get a hearing in March, but it's not expected to pass. "Thank you for sticking with this for so many years," Dembrow told rallygoers. "We have so much work to be done, and it's going to be done in our neighborhoods, churches and organizations, one on one. We have to explain to people that we are talking about a simple system here, so that people do not fall through the cracks and are not denied coverage." Also speaking at the rally were Portland Democratic state representatives Barbara Smith Warner and Jennifer Williamson.

# ... Kitzhaber legacy

From Page 3

work initiative in exchange for withdrawal by the union-backed group Our Oregon of a set of initiatives to raise taxes on the wealthy and corporations.

Kitzhaber campaigned hard for the ill-fated Columbia River Crossing, even calling a special legislative session in an unsuccessful attempt to get Oregon-only funding of the I-5 replacement bridge after the Washington Legislature failed to pony up matching funds. He also was involved in numerous successful efforts to win infrastructure funding that put Oregonians to work, particularly in the building trades.

John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, called Kitzhaber a longtime friend and advocate for building trades unions, and a collaborator and bridge-builder in efforts to get funding for infrastructure jobs.

"This is an incredibly sad way for him to leave public life after a career where I think he did a lot of good," Mohlis said.

"John Kitzhaber will ultimately

enjoy an excellent historical legacy," predicted Oregon AFSCME in a Feb. 13 statement. "Oregon AFSCME applauds his career, and we applaud him for making this difficult — but correct — decision for Oregon right now."

"Despite recent news and developments out of the governor's office, Kitzhaber's historic terms of service and legacy of healthcare reform and workers' rights advocacy have helped thousands across the state," said leaders of Service Employees Locals 49 and 503 in a joint statement.

State Sen. Michael Dembrow, a longtime leader in AFT-Oregon, said in an email to constituents that Kitzhaber made the right decision.

"His decision to step down really does help us to move on ... my preference would have been to allow the Ethics Commission investigation to play itself out in a thorough, objective manner between now and its March 13 deadline. But events clearly raced ahead of us and compelled quicker action. By the time the governor announced his final decision on Friday morning, it came as a relief — sad, but a relief nonetheless."



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