

Clark County residents blast proposed R-T-W resolution

By Michael Gutwig
Editor & Manager

VANCOUVER, Wash.— Union members in Clark County, Washington, packed a hearing room at the Board of County Councilors meeting April 7 to oppose a pair of proposed anti-union resolutions. One resolution would make it policy “to advocate against requiring county employees to join a union as a condition of employment.” The other would open collective bargaining negotiations to the general public.

The resolutions are nearly identical to right-to-work resolutions, ordinances, and propositions that have been introduced in other municipalities nationwide—the sole purpose of which is to weaken labor unions. They are the product of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate-funded anti-union organization. In Washington, the Freedom Foundation, an Olympia-based conservative group with close ties to ALEC, also is involved.

Neither resolution has been formally introduced in Clark County, but union leaders want to get ahead of the game. Citizens have packed three councilor meetings since they first got wind of the proposals. At each meeting they have used the public comment period to urge the three Republican councilors who make up the board to drop the resolutions.

“These resolutions are of no value to this community. They serve no purpose other than to be destructive to a current workforce that works very hard and has been very successful,” said Vancouver resident Mike Richards, executive secretary of Office and Professional Employees Local 11. Local 11 represents some Clark County employees.

Union Carpenter Ron Robbins of Camas said right-to-work isn’t about rights and it isn’t about work.

“Right-to-work, let’s not kid ourselves about it—lowers wages. There’s not a state in this union where that experiment’s been tried that it hasn’t. So it’s complete B.S. to say that isn’t what it is. It’s about lowering the wages of the working man,” he said.

Robbins pointed to Idaho, a right-to-work state since the mid-’80s. “They have the lowest personal income of any state in the union. They passed up Mississippi last year ... congratulations.” Idaho’s number one export, he said, “is their young people. They have to get out of there, or they can’t survive.”

Beatrice Jenkins, a 20-year member of Operating Engineers Local 701 who lives in Woodland, said “people who think we don’t need unions any more are wrong.”

She told councilors how difficult it is

for women working in the construction industry, especially nonunion. You can’t speak out if a job is unsafe, for fear of being fired, she said. And pay isn’t always equal. “If you take away the union, you take away the voice that women have out there,” she said.

IBEW Local 48 member Kevin Lux of Vancouver told councilors that he is from a conservative Republican family—all of whom are or were union members. Lux then read pro-union quotes from Presidents Eisenhower and Lincoln. “So, if you can’t believe us as Democrats or labor people, look to those Republicans from the past—the stances they took, and the elections they won.”

Retired Laborers Union official Dave Letinich of Vancouver reminded councilors that union members make up a large portion of the “citizens” of Clark County. He said he was offended by a councilor’s remark at a previous meeting complaining that they (councilors) hadn’t heard much from regular citizens.

“You look at the hundreds of us here that are opposed to these resolutions—we are the citizens. Just because we’re in the union ...”



Mike Richards, executive secretary of Office and Professional Employees Local 11, gives public testimony opposing anti-union resolutions being considered in Clark County, Wash, by Councilors Dave Madore and Tom Mielke.



Chris Montgomery and Beatrice Jenkins of Operating Engineers Local 701 make a protest sign before a Clark County Commission meeting.



Union members and their allies wearing “Union YES” buttons packed the Clark County Board of Councilors meeting April 7 to protest a pair of proposed anti-union resolutions. There are about 1,120 union employees at Clark County, represented by 14 unions.

Vancouver resident Sid Clark, a member of Teamsters Local 117, said councilors opened a Pandora’s box. “The people of Clark County, we’re Republicans, we’re Democrats, and we’re independents, but when we come together for a common cause ... we’re going to stand up,” he said.

“You guys keep bringing up things that cause dissension in the community. It’s not healthy. It’s not necessary,” added

Ed Barnes, a 60-year member of IBEW Local 48 and a former county councilor.

Several citizens who came to the meeting to discuss other issues made a point to tell councilors that they, too, opposed the anti-union resolutions.

After nearly two hours of public comment, Chair David Madore said most of the accusations he’d heard weren’t true. The multimillionaire business owner serving in his first term said he respects union members, and that they shouldn’t assume to be adversaries.

“Don’t lose hope. We respect you. We will continue to learn. We’ll listen,” he said. “But, please don’t listen to some of this stuff that’s been told, because it’s not true.”

Madore said he wasn’t “compelled” by the number of people in the room talking against the resolutions.

“A packed hearing room does not an election make,” he said. “What it really is, more than anything else, it’s a measure of how well people can organize—and you’re pretty well organized.”

Madore continued: “What I’m looking for is people that share compelling reasons to somehow help us know what we don’t know. Because we don’t know everything. We don’t know what we don’t know.”

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