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Oregon Working Families Party Minor party strives to be a major player in Oregon

Founded in 2006, the Oregon Working Families Party has had major impact — for a minor party that had 11,421 registrants as of August. Labor-friendly candidates seek the party's cross-endorsement, while elects who stymie pro-worker legislation know they may face re-election challenges — like Mike Schaufler, a longtime incumbent state House Democrat who lost re-election in 2012.

With support from local unions and from the better-established Working Families Party of New York, the Oregon party employs a full-time staff of four, plus a permanent canvass that works to support its legislative and electoral efforts.

Its canvassers are represented by Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901, with a contract that puts them on track to earn to \$15 an hour. And this fall, they're working to register more voters in the party.

At the Oregon Legislature, the party brings distinctive issues. It was an important part of this year's successful push to pass a statewide paid sick leave law. Other bills failed this year, but could come back later.



Oregon Working Families executive director Karly Edwards — a former union organizer with UNITE HERE — moderates an Aug. 25 panel discussion. Also pictured are, from left: party co-founder Barbara Dudley; national party chair Dan Cantor, and Portland State University economist Mary King.

- Inclusionary zoning** Housing is fast becoming unaffordable for working people in places like Portland and Bend, but a pre-emption passed by a Republican majority in 1999 bars cities from addressing that with "inclusionary zoning," in which they require developers to make a certain percentage of new units affordable. A bill to undo the pre-emption passed the House 34-25, but failed in the Senate.
- Pay it forward** The national media were so excited in 2013 when the Oregon Legislature passed a bill for a program of free public college tuition in return for students paying a certain percentage of their income after they leave. But the program would have required a funding pool to start the program. Voters last year rejected a complicated, thinly-supported constitutional change ballot referral that

would have allowed a bond-financed revolving fund to be set up for that purpose. And this year, lawmakers not only balked at the start-up price tag, but questioned whether students who do well should have to pay more, and whether students who do poorly should get off so easily.

Fusion voting The holy grail for the Oregon Working Families Party is full-fledged fusion voting, a system where parties can cross-endorse candidates but keep their own ballot line. Operating in New York and Connecticut, it creates conditions for third parties to thrive. But in Oregon, a bill directing the Secretary of State to study it couldn't get anywhere this year.

WHO'S ON BOARD?

Nine labor organizations contribute to the Oregon Working Families Party and have representation on its leadership board:

- UFCW Local 555
- Teamsters Local 206
- CWA Local 7901
- Operating Engineers Local 701
- ILWU Oregon Area District Council
- Laborers Local 483
- Laborers District Council
- IBEW Local 48
- UNITE HERE Local 8

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