

# A call for labor action on climate change

By Don McIntosh  
Associate Editor

Joe Uehlein — a nationally prominent advocate of a labor-environmental alliance — will speak in Portland Oct. 10. The event — hosted at the Oregon Labor Center by the group Climate Jobs PDX — is billed as an evening of music and dialogue with labor activists on climate and jobs crises. Uehlein is the director of the Washington, D.C.-based Labor Network for Sustainability, and a board member at the group Voices for a Sustainable Future (alongside Oregon AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Byrd). He's also a former secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department and director of the AFL-CIO Center for Strategic Campaigns. By night he's a musician in a Washington, D.C., roots-rock band, and a member of American Federation of Musicians — hence the music at the event. The Labor Press had some questions for Uehlein, which he answered by email.



Joe Uehlein

## What needs to happen in order to slow down and stop human-caused climate change?

We call for a World War II style mobilization. It will take a national program of unprecedented scope and scale to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a manner consistent with the best science-based targets and timelines, and in a way that addresses our income inequality crisis at the same time. We've done it before — winning World War II, building the U.S. highway system, going to the moon. And we can afford it: We found a trillion dollars in 2008 to bail out the very financial institutions that caused the market crash. What we can't afford is to not do it, because the economic impact of climate change will be devastating.

**To what extent is organized labor working to combat climate change?** Organized labor has recognized the science and the severity of the problem, and the short timeline we have to deal with it. But we have been very slow to take the necessary action.

**So often it seems that unionists and environmentalists butt heads — about whether to build a new pipeline, the size of a new bridge, or the right balance of industrial land and natural reserves. Do you see a way out of those fights?** These tensions have always existed. They have increased lately because our shrinking labor movement still has density in the fossil fuel industries, so anything that challenges those industries is not received well within the house of labor. That said, fossil fuels are a major part of the problem, and we must reduce consumption of them. The corporate-fueled “jobs vs. environment” frame is a major reason that we've not developed a common vision, yet we have far more in common with our environmental allies than with the corporations. We need a common vision and we have to get serious about developing that common vision. We believe that it is through honest differences of opinion that we arrive at sound conclusions and correct judgements. Both sides

have to work harder at this.

**What are the prospects for a truce, or even of the two forming a broad and enduring alliance? What do you think the two movements could win united that they would lose divided?** Both movements are failing at achieving their goals. Together we could start winning. The environmental movement needs to work much harder at not just recognizing labor's need for jobs, but at truly understanding the primacy of work in people's lives. And labor needs to more fully understand that climate protection represents a new kind of human solidarity, and that our future as a labor movement will be more secure if we find a way to become a central player in the movement to build a sustainable future for the planet and its people.

**On the other side, how sympathetic do you think the leaders of prominent environmental groups are to labor's agenda of living-wage jobs?** I think they are very sympathetic, and the work of LNS, the Blue-Green Alliance, and others has

helped increase this level of sympathy. But we need much more than sympathy. Just like we say that labor needs a climate plan of its own (If Not Now When?), we say that environmentalists need a jobs plan of their own. They need to go way beyond sympathy and understanding and begin to fight for worker rights, and good family-supporting jobs. This is in their self-interest just like becoming a climate protection movement is on our self interest as a labor movement.

## EVENT DETAILS

- **Time:** Saturday Oct. 10, 6:30 p.m.
- **Place:** Oregon Labor Center, 3645 SE 32nd, Portland.
- **More info:** 503-286-5850 or [climatejobspdx.weebly.com](http://climatejobspdx.weebly.com).

## ONLINE EXTRA

See a fuller version of this Q&A at <http://bit.ly/1QyllrF>. For a detailed outline of what a labor-led climate change effort could look like, visit <http://bit.ly/1VaVYyq>.

## LOCAL MOTION → AUG/SEPT 2015

The following are Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces where workers have voted on whether to be represented by a union. The thumbs-up symbol means workers will be union-represented. Thumbs-down means they'll be on their own. Decert means a decertification election, where union-represented workers vote whether to remain union. The information comes from the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Election Results

Employer (Location) Union	Yes-No	
Providence Portland (Portland) Oregon Nurses Association	10-3	👍
Recology Western Oregon (McMinnville) Teamsters Local 324	18-5	👍
Con-Way Freight, Inc. (Clackamas) Teamsters Local 162	5-9	👎
Oregon Fruit Products (Salem) Teamsters Local 670	36-31	👍
Sunshine Dairy (Portland) Teamsters Local 305	3-1	👍
Waste Management (Klamath Falls) Teamsters Local 962	5-15	👎

Mike  
**SELVAGGIO**  
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## Novick's Uber rollout hits Union Cab hard

On Oct. 7, Portland City Council will hear a report from Commissioner Steve Novick's aide Brian Hockaday about the City's six-month experiment with taxi deregulation. But the immigrant drivers at Communications Workers of America-affiliated Union Cab say they're already seeing the impact — and their American dream of a driver-owned taxi co-op is growing more unsustainable by the day.

Playing by the previous rules, 50 drivers waited two years for the City to issue their permits, and then invested their life savings to form Union Cab in April 2013. That was when Portland, like most cities, put a cap on the number of taxis allowed to operate. The cap wasn't about creating a cartel. It was a solution to the taxi industry's basic supply and demand problem: How to make sure there are enough cabs for those who want them, but not so many that drivers can't survive. The system had its merits, but also its limits, particularly during peak times like weekend bar closing hours.

But the free-market regime begun after Novick was put in



"To continue to make \$1,300 a month] I now have to work 14 hours a day to survive... I'm taking time from my family."

— Union Cab driver and board member  
Bekele Jimma



"Our income is going down... But I would never drive for Uber... It's not a fair business."

— Union Cab driver Semaineh Belaye, whose earnings support his wife and two small children

charge of City tax regulation has destabilized the industry. Since April, over 2,500 drivers have applied for permits to drive for Uber and Lyft, with fewer requirements than taxi companies. For example, the City requires taxi companies to purchase handicapped-accessible vehicles. Two of them sit unused in

the parking lot outside Union Cab's Southeast Stark office, because they can't find drivers for them. Nor has Union Cab found drivers to take advantage of the 50 new permits the City issued in the Spring. With the market and the rules in such flux, who'd want to invest \$30,000 purchasing and outfitting a cab?