

## Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



### Why I'm skeptical of the new TPP deal

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was finalized Oct. 5. Just like we saw this past spring when he came to Oregon, President Obama and his administration are working hard to paint the TPP as a shot-in-the-arm to our economy; a deal that has strong protections for workers. Our president's promises about this new deal are hard to believe, since negotiations have been held in secrecy and the text of the agreement has yet to be released to the American people. If we stand to benefit so greatly, why have we been kept in the dark?

Nothing that we know about the TPP provides any assurance our jobs will stay in this country and that worker protections will have any sort of actual enforcement mechanism. We know from firsthand experience that rules and protections are absolutely worthless unless they have real enforcement.

And it's not just worker protections that could suffer if this massive free trade deal passes Congress. Anything that corporations deem as a threat to profit could be a target for corporate courts, where taxpayers will foot the bill for 'lost profits.' Environmental

laws? Consumer protections? Buy American provisions? All could be fair game for lawsuits if the TPP passes.

These concerns are what pushed us to action last spring, when over one thousand workers across our state mobilized to speak out against Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority for the TPP. We knew then, as we know now, that working people in Oregon simply cannot afford another short-sighted free trade agreement. All it takes is a look at our state's recent history. Since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Oregonian wages have decreased by an average of \$3,000 per year. Paper mills are closing down and companies like Freightliner have left the country. Since the passage of NAFTA, over 50,000 Oregon workers were certified by the Department of Labor as having lost their jobs due to trade. Trade agreements like NAFTA and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) are removing the middle-class of our economy, where manufacturing jobs once were prevalent. Ore-

gon has high rates of growth in both low- and high-wage jobs, but stagnation in the middle. That stratifies our economy. Without the tax revenue that is created with those middle-class jobs, we can't fully fund our schools. We can't fix our roads and bridges. President Obama and our leaders in Congress must understand that we simply cannot afford another trade deal that benefits multinational corporations, while middle-class jobs disappear from communities across Oregon.

That recent history is why I'm skeptical of this new trade deal. We have been promised that once negotiations conclude, the full text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership will be released for scrutiny. It's our right to know the details of this agreement and to see if it lives up to everything that President Obama has said that it will. I share the opinion of leaders like United Steelworker President Leo Gerard that this hastily concluded deal is going to continue an outdated and disastrous trade agenda that forces American workers to compete in a race-to-the-bottom global economy.

President Obama, it's time to put your cards on the table and let the American people see exactly what you've gotten us into.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, a 120,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.

### SEIU 503's new nursing home contract delivers \$1.07 raises

Service Employees International Union Local 503 is crediting its legislative mobilization for big wage increases in a set of new union contracts at nursing homes in Oregon. The union and employers joined forces at the State

Capitol, and lawmakers agreed to increase the Medicaid reimbursement formula. That made it easier for the employers to agree to a \$1.07 an hour raise, effective Oct. 1. Under the new contract with the Prestige Care chain for example, CNAs start at \$13.23 and top out at \$16.73 after 10

years, while housekeepers start at \$11.20 and rise to \$14.70. The same \$1.07 raise applied to similar wage scales at other Oregon nursing home employers: the Avamere chain, Laurelhurst Village, Pinnacle Healthcare, Dakavia Fernhill Estates, and at EmpRes Healthcare in Vancouver.

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