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Labor highlights from the November 3 general election

For working people and for organized labor, this year's low-turnout Nov. 3 election was a mixed bag of successes and setbacks.

Southwest Washington races

In races for Vancouver City Council, Southwest Washington Central Labor Council was 2-to-1. Labor-backed incumbent Bart Hansen captured nearly 82 percent of the vote, and Ty Stober won an open seat by 51 to 49 percent. But George Francisco lost his bid to unseat incumbent Bill Turlay by 62 to 38 percent.

In Clark County, endorsed Council candidates Mike Dale-sandra and Chuck Green were defeated. And labor-backed Candy Bonneville lost her bid for Battle Ground City Council 40 to 60 percent. Voter turnout in Clark County was 34 percent.

Tim Eyman anti-tax measure wins in Washington

Voters in the state of Washington have a problem: They want good transportation and public services, and they passed a measure to lower class sizes, but they've also repeatedly

passed proposals from conservative ballot measure activist Tim Eyman that require an unattainable supermajority for the Legislature to raise the revenue to do those things. The state Supreme Court has held those measures unconstitutional, and in Washington, voters can't change the state constitution by ballot measure; only the Legislature can do that, by referral to voters. So this year, Eyman got Initiative 1366 on the ballot—to force the Legislature to do that. The measure would decrease the sales tax rate from 6.5 to 5.5 percent next April 15 (a revenue cut of \$1.4 billion a year) unless the Legislature refers to voters a constitutional amendment requiring two-thirds legislative approval or voter approval to raise taxes. Defeating the measure was a top priority of the state AFL-CIO, but it passed by 53 percent (57 percent in Clark County).

Tacoma voters raise minimum wage to \$12, not \$15

In Tacoma, Washington, voters faced two questions: Whether to raise the minimum wage (59 percent said yes), and if so, how much and how quickly.

There were two choices: a citizen initiative to raise it to \$15 immediately for businesses with annual gross revenues over \$300,000; and a City Council referral to phase in a raise to \$12 over two years, for all employers. The \$12 increase won with 71 percent for \$15. As a result, the minimum wage will rise to \$10.35 on Feb. 1, 2016; \$11.15 on Jan. 1, 2017; and \$12 on Jan. 1, 2018.

Labor backed candidate loses in West Linn

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council was involved in only one race this election cycle, endorsing Mike Selvaggio in the non-partisan race for a vacant seat on the West Linn City Council. Selvaggio lost to Robert Martin in a three-person race.

Worker Bill of Rights goes down hard in Spokane

In Spokane, the group Envision Spokane gathered signatures to place a city charter amendment called The Worker Bill of Rights on the ballot. It would have required equal pay for equal work, a "family wage," at large employers (150 or more), and a right to be free

from wrongful termination. That last part would have eliminated "at-will" employment, instead requiring employers to show "just cause" in order to terminate a worker. The measure was endorsed by 11 local unions, the central labor council and building trades council, but it was outspent nine-to-one and got support from just 36 percent of voters.

GOP wins high-stakes race for Washington state house seat

Labor-backed Democratic Washington state rep Carol Gregory lost a hard-fought special election to retain her seat in Federal Way. Gregory was appointed when the previous representative died of cancer. But big corporations, including Walmart and Georgia-Pacific (Koch Industries) created a PAC called "Enterprise Washington" to back Republican challenger Teri Hickel and get rid of Gregory. By the end, \$1.8 million was spent on the race, including a combined \$670,000 by the candidates, and another \$1.1 million by outside groups. Hickel's victory reduces the Democrats' majority in the House to 50-48.

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