

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



The minimum will rise

2015 was a year of victories and defeats for Oregon's working people. The 2014 election cycle proved to be a big win nationally for the conservative right. Oregon, however, bucked this trend and increased pro-worker majorities in both the Oregon House and Senate. What was significant about the 2014 election was the emergence of a coalition of unions, community groups, non-profits and immigrants' rights groups called the Fair Shot for All Coalition. Fair Shot focused on advocating a workers' agenda, including raising the minimum wage, paid sick days, retirement security, banning "the box," and working toward ending racial profiling.

This agenda became the focus of Oregon's 2014 election, with candidates earning endorsements from member groups of Fair Shot based on their support of Fair Shot's agenda.

We were successful during the 2015 legislative session in passing four out of five of Fair Shot's priorities. But the Legislature failed to give low-wage Oregonians a much-needed raise to the minimum wage. Whether it is done during the upcoming February 2016 legislative session, or through the ballot initiative process, working people can rest assured that we will increase Oregon's minimum wage next year.

Our Legislature also failed to pass a crucial transportation package that would have created thousands of jobs by expanding and improving Oregon's aging infrastructure to relieve congestion and increase the state's competitiveness in world markets by making sure Oregon goods can move expediently from our region.

The first six months of 2015 witnessed working people across America mount an unprecedented fight against giving President Obama Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority for sweeping free trade agreements, in particular the Trans-Pacific Partner-

ship (TPP). We ran a comprehensive campaign in Oregon, utilizing radio, television and print ads, social media, door-to-door canvassing, lobbying members of Congress by workers, and massive mobilization of activists across the state.

We won a victory of sorts by delaying Congress's vote for months, which led to President Obama flying to Oregon to shore up support for the TPP. At the end of the day, Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader, Earl Blumenauer, Greg Walden and Suzanne Bonamici voted to give Fast Track authority to the president.

Sen. Jeff Merkley and Congressman Peter DeFazio stood with the majority of Oregonians who have had enough of corporate-driven free trade agreements, which lower workers' wages and ship jobs overseas.

Some members of Congress voted for Fast Track, but promised they wouldn't vote for a bad trade agreement, which means we must continue our fight in 2016 as the TPP heads to Congress for ratification.

In 2015, the national AFL-CIO began a new program to consolidate and restructure state federations and central labor councils, with the goal of putting more staff on the ground to increase worker power and push back against attacks on workers' rights. Oregon was one of five states to go through this restructuring in the first half of 2015, and was the first state to complete the process. While this process was difficult, today we have staff in Medford, Eugene and Bend to assist unions and our community coalitions in not only advocating for an agenda that advances prosperity for working people, but also prepares for struggles including anti-worker ballot measures and electing pro-worker candidates.

We have many challenges to face in 2016. But as long as we fight together there is hope.

PEOPLE

Oregon Fair Trade Campaign hires new director

Oregon Fair Trade Campaign — the union-backed coalition that fights trade policies that lead to overseas offshoring — has hired Michael Shannon as its new director. Shannon replaces Elizabeth Swager, who now works in

Portland for the national Citizens Trade Campaign. Shannon has a master's degree in Social Work from Portland State University and has worked as a union organizer for Service Employees International Union Local 503 since 2006. Prior to that, he worked for gay rights organizations in Oregon and Florida.



Michael Shannon

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820 SW Second Ave, Ste. 200
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