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— Washington Governor
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SW Washington union officials meet with Gov. Inslee

VANCOUVER — In an hour-long meeting Jan. 13 with Southwest Washington union officials, Gov. Jay Inslee said he supports an initiative to raise the minimum wage, he supports paid sick leave for workers, and he will continue to work to find consensus for an I-5 replacement bridge.

The meeting was arranged by the Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington. Chairman Ed Barnes said it is the first time in 18 years that a sitting governor has met with labor leaders in Southwest Washington.

Inslee, a first-term Democrat from Seattle, said despite the country's growing economy, working people simply aren't benefitting.

"Frankly, it's going to the higher echelon in the corporations," he said. "In 1965, the difference between the average workers' wage to that of the CEO was 20 to 1. Today it's 300 to 1."

According to Inslee, Washingtonians are producing more products and services per hour than at any time in the state's history. "Yet, the real wages for many, many working people are not keeping pace with inflation. They're less than they were 10 years ago in real dollar terms for a variety of segments of our population," he said. "So it's my view that we have to work on some policies that will make sure that this economy works for everyone."

Inslee said the U.S. Supreme Court could further hurt the middle class if it rules in favor of *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. In this case, the court could impose a right-to-work standard for all public employees. Workers earn less in right-to-work states, and research indicates the middle-class share of income has declined as union membership has declined.

"I believe that when people have benefits from organizational representation, it's not unfair to ask them to participate in the costs of the association that gave them those benefits," he said.

"If it goes the wrong way, against working people,



we're going to have to do some hard thinking here," he continued. "We cannot allow this continued diminution of the middle class in this country."

Inslee said a multibillion dollar transportation package passed by the Legislature last year was the largest in the history of the state and will create 200,000 jobs.

Asked about the failure to include an I-5 replacement bridge between Vancouver and Portland, Oregon, Inslee blamed Southwest Washington legislators. "I want to make it really clear what happened here: The state was ready to move on this. I was ready to move on this. We had the 'go' button. We had the money. The local legislators killed it," he said.

Inslee said that if he is re-elected in November he will do everything he can to help jump-start the project. "I will try to be as positive as I can to come up with a unified plan that can have unified support," he said. "But you've got to have a real financing plan, okay? And that's going to be a challenge. It's a very expensive project now that the federal money has probably disappeared."

Asked about the controversial Vancouver Energy Project at the Port of Vancouver, which if approved

would be built all union under a project labor agreement, Inslee said: "I have to be extremely judicious on my comments on this subject because I serve in a quasi-judicial position. So, I literally can't say anything about it. I can share with you this right now: I do not have any pre-determined view on the subject right now. I have an open mind about this subject."

The governor has final say over the \$210 million project proposed by Tesoro Corp. in a joint venture with logistics firm Savage Cos. The energy infrastructure project has been endorsed by the Washington Building and Construction Trades Council and the Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

Asked about proposed carbon taxes or caps and the impact on industrial and high tech jobs, Inslee said there are two proposals being floated. One is a citizen's initiative (I-732) that is a tax on carbon. The other is a plan being drafted by the state that would set limits on some of the largest emitters in the state.

"What we are doing ... it is not a tax, it doesn't have a direct revenue application. It is a permitting system that over time would reduce emission of carbon dioxide," Inslee said.

"I'll tell you this, I'm not going to do something that's going to woefully injure the economy of the state of Washington — I'm not going to do that."

Inslee said he has looked at other states and counties that have implemented similar policies "and we have not seen economic dislocation associated with their programs."

On other topics, Inslee said he fought hard to get modest raises for teachers, and that he will continue to fight in this legislative session to create a framework to fully fund the state's public education system.

"Washington is short 7,000 teachers in the classroom," he said. "We hire new teachers, and they leave in five years because they aren't being paid adequately. We have