

Tumbles in Wisconsin**Union membership slips in Oregon, grows in Washington**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The ranks of union membership in Oregon dropped by 8,000 members in 2015, a new report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows. Density and numbers both dropped — from 243,000 unionists (15.6 percent) in 2014, to 235,000 last year (14.8 percent).

In the State of Washington, a half-million residents belonged to labor unions in 2015, up 9,000 members from a year prior. Washington has the fifth-highest union density of any state, with 16.8 percent of the workforce being union members. Only New York (24.7 percent), Hawaii (20 percent), Alaska (19.6 percent) and Connecticut (17 percent) are higher.

Wisconsin saw the largest decrease in membership, by far, as Republican Gov. Scott Walker's anti-union program fully kicked in. His 2011 agenda stripped public unions of bargaining rights, and he later pushed through a right-to-work law. Wisconsin lost 83,000 union members in one year, dropping to 223,000. Density dropped from 12.6 percent to 8.3 percent.

BLS calculated that, nationwide, unions had 14.795 million members last year, up 219,000 from 2014. Union density was unchanged at 11.1 percent.

Public workers are still five times more

likely to be unionized (35.2 percent) than private-sector workers (6.7 percent), with teachers and public safety workers leading the way. Public and private densities changed little from 2014. The public sector added 23,000 union members, to 7.241 million last year. That's slightly fewer than the 7.554 million private-sector union members.

According to the BLS report, median weekly earnings of full-time union workers (\$975) were more than 25 percent higher than those of nonunion workers (\$776) in 2015.

"That's not pocket change — it comes to more than \$10,000 per year," U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez said in a press statement. "That goes a long way toward writing the mortgage check, paying down the car loan, or even just keeping the kids in snow boots. And, that doesn't even account for the superior benefits, safer workplaces and other advantages that come with union representation."

The annual survey follows another federal report — The National Compensation Survey — that showed union members are far more likely to have employer-provided retirement and health care benefits than their nonunion counterparts.

The report found:

- 95 percent of union workers had the option of an employer-sponsored health care plan, compared to 69 percent of nonunion workers;
- 94 percent of union workers had the option of an employer-sponsored retirement plan, compared to 65 percent of nonunion workers; and
- 93 percent of union workers had the option of an employee-sponsored prescription drug insurance, compared to 67 percent of nonunion workers.

In addition, the quality of the benefits provided to union workers typically was better, the data showed. For example, workers were expected to contribute 19 percent toward the cost of the family's health care under union-negotiated benefits plans, while nonunion workers were forced to shell out 35 percent of the cost, which amounts to 84 percent more in out-of-pocket costs.

"With this report, we are reminded again that the labor movement continues to be one of the most powerful forces for strengthening the middle class and providing economic stability, for members and non-members alike," Perez said.

(Editor's Note: Press Associates Inc. and the Washington State Labor Council's The Stand contributed to this report.)

WSLC opposes Initiative 732 carbon tax

SEATTLE — The Executive Board of the Washington State Labor Council (WSLC) voted Jan. 28 to oppose Initiative 732, a statewide ballot measure that would create a new tax on carbon emissions while cutting other state taxes.

WSLC President Jeff Johnson said that although I-732 proponents intended the measure to be "revenue neutral," the state Department of Revenue now estimates it will cost the state \$914 million over the next four years.

"At a time our state is struggling to fund basic services — including public schools, mental health facilities, and many other essential services — I-732 would send Washington in the wrong direction and create more damaging austerity choices," Johnson said.

The WSLC is part of the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy, a coalition of labor, environmental, business, and community groups working on a comprehensive carbon policy that addresses I-732's shortcomings.



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