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OREGON



A \$3.25 TO \$5.50 MINIMUM WAGE RAISE BECOMES LAW: Oregon Gov. Kate Brown (seated at center) signs SB 1532 as union staff and officers look on. From left: Beth Cooke, Kevin Billman, Jeff Klatke, Berely Mack, Tom Chamberlain, Jeff Anderson, Jessica Giannettino-Villatoro, Jason McDaniel, Graham Trainor, Melissa Dronen, and Chris Hewitt.

Historic gains in 2016 Legislative session

Top issue was minimum wage, but Oregon lawmakers made progress on other fronts as well.

By Don McIntosh
Associate editor

The Oregon Legislature passed the largest set of minimum wage increases Oregon has ever seen last month, putting the state on track to have the highest minimum wage in the nation. Under the new law passed by the Democratic majority and signed March 2 by Gov. Kate Brown, the minimum wage will rise by 2022 to \$14.75 in the Portland area, \$13.50 in Northwest Oregon plus Jackson and Josephine counties, and \$12.50 in sparsely populated Eastern and Southern Oregon. At that point even Oregon's lowest rate — in areas comprising 10 percent of the state's population — will be higher than any other state's minimum wage. Oregon's highest rate will cover not just Portland but all 25 cities within the Metro urban growth boundary, totaling 38 percent of the state population.

The raises will have a big impact on Oregon workers. According to the Oregon Employment Department, a third of the Oregon workforce — 618,000 workers — currently earn less than \$13.50 an hour, and 100,000 workers earn exactly the state's current \$9.25 minimum wage. All of those workers

Minimum wage SB 1532 raises the wage over seven years to \$12.50, \$13.50 and \$14.75 in different regions.

Unemployment insurance HB 4086 extends benefits an additional six months for workers locked out by their employer in a labor dispute. SB 1544 extends UI benefits for workers in apprenticeship programs.

Wage theft SB 1587 adds three wage and hour investigators, makes certain prevailing wage violations a Class C felony, and requires employers to provide pay stubs and keep payroll records for three years.

Affordable housing HB 4143 prohibits

rent increases during the first year of month-to-month tenancies and requires 90-day notice for increases after one year. SB 1533 makes limited exceptions to a ban on inclusionary zoning and ends a state ban on construction excise taxes.

Construction Jobs HB 5203 approves \$30 million in bond funding for partial renovation of the Capitol building.

Global warming SB 1547 requires PGE and Pacific Power to end the use of coal to generate Oregon electricity by 2030, and get 50 percent of their electricity from wind and solar by 2040.

can expect raises. The first increase takes place July 1, followed by annual increases until 2022, after which the wage will rise based on the rate of inflation. By 2022, full-time Portland-area minimum wage workers will be earning \$11,440 a year more than they do today.

The minimum wage measure, Senate Bill 1532, passed 16-12 in the Senate and 32-26 in the House, but not a single Republican voted for it. The only Democrats to vote against it were state Sen. Betsy Johnson of Clatskanie and state Reps. John Lively of Springfield and Caddy McKeown of Coos Bay.

Increasing the minimum wage has always been broadly popular with the public, but the Oregon Legislature hadn't voted to increase the minimum wage since 1989. Instead it took

union-backed ballot measures — in 1996 and 2002 — to raise the wage. This year, the prospect of two more such measures aimed at the 2016 ballot were a big factor pushing the Legislature to act. One ballot measure proposed to raise the wage to \$15 within three years, and the other to \$13.50 — while lifting a pre-emption on local jurisdictions going higher than that.

In December, Gov. Brown brought stakeholders including business groups and the Oregon AFL-CIO together for private meetings to work out a compromise measure she would propose to the Legislature. Brown's proposal had two tiers. Lawmakers later amended it to create three tiers, but resisted other changes that would have wa-

UNION ORGANIZING

Union drive begins at DirecTV

Up to 400 technicians in Oregon and Washington could join IBEW

Beginning the first week of March, organizers for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) began contacting workers in Washington who install and repair satellite TV dishes for DirecTV. They'll launch a similar effort in Oregon in the coming weeks. Last year, nonunion DirecTV was acquired by AT&T, a heavily unionized company which has neutrality agreements with IBEW and Communications Workers of America (CWA). Under the agreements, AT&T

doesn't oppose union campaigns, and grants union recognition if a majority of workers in a unit sign cards within 60 days of the beginning of a union campaign.

IBEW represents other satellite TV workers in the Pacific Northwest, including subcontractors for DirecTV's competitor Dish Network. If IBEW signs up a majority of the roughly 400 Oregon and Washington DirecTV workers, they would begin bargaining a first contract and would eventually become members of IBEW Local 89, a telecommunications local headquartered just north of Everett, Washington.

Labor fights back against Freedom Foundation

A coalition of 19 labor and allied groups in Oregon and Washington is urging the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Freedom Foundation, an anti-union group operating in Washington and Oregon. Contributions to Freedom Foundation are tax-deductible because it's organized as a charitable/educational non-profit under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. But so-called 501(c)(3) groups aren't allowed to do explicitly political work.

Freedom Foundation took part in an April 2014 fundraiser for Vancouver Republican Lynda Wilson, who went on to defeat Democrat Monica Stonier

for state Senate. Freedom Foundation has also filed a series of anti-union lawsuits in Oregon and Washington, and its leaders have said on several occasions that the group's purpose is to drain union resources to weaken them politically. Needless to say, that's not a legitimate charitable purpose.

Labor leaders are also calling on Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum to perform an independent investigation to ensure that the group is operating for a charitable purpose in accordance with the state Charitable Trust and Corporation Act, and to determine if tax exemption under Oregon law is appropriate.

KGW-TV on trial for labor violation

In contract bargaining with IBEW Local 48, KGW-TV is proposing to end exclusive union jurisdiction — and let others do the work of union camera operators and technicians. Managers say they're proposing that in order to better compete with companies like Google and Amazon. But when Local 48 asked for detailed information

that would justify such a proposal, parent company Gannett (now Tegna) refused. The National Labor Relations Board thinks that refusal violated the law's requirement to bargain in good faith. A federal judge will decide the matter based on arguments from the two sides in a three-day hearing that took place March 8-10.