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...Historic wins in 2016 Oregon Legislative session

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tered it down, including proposals for a lower wage for farm workers, tipped workers, and young workers.

In the wake of the Legislature's passage of SB 1532, both of the ballot measure campaigns announced the suspension of further efforts to gather signatures. Raise the Wage (the coalition behind the \$13.50 measure) thanked the governor for leadership on the issue. 15 Now (the coalition behind the \$15 measure) was more critical, saying her motive was to undercut and eliminate the grassroots minimum wage movement. [You can see both statements at bit.ly/22fD6qT.] But both campaigns also acknowledged the historic significance of the increase.

The bill got national attention. Oregon is the first state to pass a law mandating different minimum wage rates for different parts of the state — an approach that takes into account different costs of living and different kinds of labor markets. Oregon AFL-CIO political director Graham Trainor says his counterparts in Washington and California have been calling to talk about out how they can pull

off something similar.

The 2016 legislative session will be remembered for its historic increase in the minimum wage, but lawmakers dealt with many other issues of interest to working people as well.

Affordable housing

If there's a shadow on the minimum wage increase, it's that much of the additional wages may go right back out of workers' pockets in the form of rent. The first raises, for example, amount to \$86 a month in Portland, but Portland-area rents have risen on average \$100 in the past year.

Rents are shooting up in all of Oregon's urban areas, and Portland rents are going up faster than anywhere else in the United States. But landlords and developers are used to getting their way in the Oregon Legislature. Back in 1999, they got lawmakers to ban "inclusionary zoning" — a tool used by cities in other states to create more affordable housing by mandating that developers make a certain percentage of new units affordable if they want approval to build. Affordable housing advocates, with support from some unions, last year pushed to re-

peal that ban, but the effort died in the Oregon Senate. They tried again this year, with a proposal to let cities require up to 30 percent of new units be affordable to those making at or below 60 percent of the median family income. What emerged instead was a heavily watered down version. Basically it keeps the ban in place, but creates a narrow exception: Cities may mandate that no more than 20 percent of units be affordable, and only in multi-family housing developments with 20 units or more. And the definition of "affordable" might surprise you — affordable to those making up to 80 percent of the median family income (\$58,800). That's not all: The mandate is only allowed if the city gives developers some incentive or payment, and developers can opt out of the mandate by paying a fee. The measure also allows cities to levy up a construction tax of up to 1 percent for affordable housing, but directs that 85 percent of that go toward incentives for developers. And the Metro regional government is barred from being able to levy that tax.

Housing advocates and unions did help pass another renter protection however: HB

4143, the Renter Protection Bill, bars rent increases in the first year of a month-to-month rental, and requires landlords to give 90 days notice of rent increases.

Wage theft

If cheating people out of wages is against the law, you might not think it would be so hard to get the Oregon Legislature to insist on robust enforcement. But efforts in recent years to crack down on wage theft have failed to win passage.

The good news is that this year, lawmakers are increasing the number of wage and hour investigators by 45 percent. The bad news is: That's only 3 individuals, bringing the total to 10 to enforce the law for all workers in Oregon. SB 1587 also makes prevailing wage violations a Class C felony, and allows the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to refer cases to district attorneys for prosecution. It also supposedly requires employers to provide pay stubs to workers which itemize pay rates, hours worked, payroll deductions and other standard information. But the law lays out no penalty when employers fail to do so.

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