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BERNIE SANDERS: “Nobody who works 40 hours a week should be living in poverty.”

Over 10,000 people turned up to Portland's Moda Center on two days notice March 25 to hear Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.

Much of what he outlined in the mid-Friday rally synched up with proposals that organized labor has made, like paid family and medical leave, universal single payer health care (aka Medicare for all), the creation of millions of decent-paying jobs in energy efficiency and sustainable energy, and comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship. Sanders also called for the largest banks to be

broken up, and for free tuition at public colleges, paid for by a tax on Wall Street speculation.

Sanders said he's not proposing to do all that alone, but with a political revolution in which ordinary people get involved. Real change comes from below, Sanders said, like the workers who came together a century ago to form unions and bargain collectively — or today's fast food workers who went on strike calling for \$15 an hour, which Sanders is proposing should be today's federal minimum wage.

Before Sanders took the stage,

Oregon Working Families Party field organizer Cole Richardson reminded rallygoers that Oregon voters must register as Democrats by April 26 to vote in the Democratic primary on May 17. The union-backed party has endorsed Sanders nationally.

Last month Sanders won Democratic caucuses and primaries in Washington, Idaho, Alaska, Hawaii, Utah, Colorado, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Michigan, Maine, and Vermont. He captured 73 percent of the vote in caucuses held in the state of Washington on March 26.

Supreme Court tie means reprieve for unions

Union win in Friedrichs case depended on Justice Scalia's death

Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association is dead. The U.S. Supreme Court, split 4-4 on the case, announced in a single-sentence order March 29 that a lower court ruling against plaintiff Friedrichs will stand. A 5-4 decision overturning the lower court was expected until conservative justice Antonin Scalia died Feb. 13.

The case was about Rebecca Friedrichs, a teacher who said it violated her free speech rights for her to have to pay “fair

share” fees covering the cost of bargaining and enforcing her union contract. A well-funded anti-union legal foundation picked her as the vehicle for a lawsuit specifically designed to give the Supreme Court the chance to reverse a 1977 Supreme Court decision, *Abood vs. Detroit Board of Education*. The *Abood* decision said that union-represented public employees couldn't be required to become union members, but could be required to share in the expense of representation. But in the court's 2014 *Harris vs. Quinn* decision, a 5-4 majority

called *Abood* into question: The court said home care workers couldn't be required to pay dues or the equivalent, but for technical reasons they stopped short of overturning *Abood*.

If *Abood* had been overturned, it would have created a “right-to-work” situation for all public employee unions in America: No union-represented public employee would have been required to pay the costs of union representation. That likely would have been a crippling blow to unions. The split court means that it will continue to be up to states whether to require public-sector union fees.

Latest TriMet provocation: ‘Paid union orientations are illegal’

If the 2014 vote approving a new union contract at TriMet was supposed to signal a new era of labor peace, it was short-lived. Leaders of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 say Oregon's largest public transit agency has returned to its previous pattern of anti-union provocations. The latest: TriMet management is ending its decades-old practice of letting new hires go to the union hall on paid time to attend union orientation, citing legal advice that doing so violates a new Oregon law and the Oregon Constitution.

That's news to Jeff Klatke, president of 25,000-member Oregon AFSCME. Klatke says AFSCME has plenty of public-sector contracts that allow new-member union orientation to take place on paid work time — including the contract that covers lawyers at the state attorney general's office.

“You should be concerned about the quality of legal counsel you have received,” Klatke told the TriMet board of directors at its March 23 meeting. Klatke was part of a delegation of ATU officers and allies that called on board members to intervene before the acrimony worsens. The current contract covering 3,200 current and former TriMet employees expires Nov. 30, 2016, and the two sides expect to begin negotiations this summer.

TriMet senior labor relations manager Christine Stevens explained the rationale for ending paid union orientation in a Feb. 5 memo to Local 757 President Shirley Block. Any TriMet employee may go to ATU's offices on their own time outside of their normal working hours, the memo says. But for TriMet to

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Are Oregon Democrats backtracking already on the minimum wage?

Less than two weeks after Oregon's minimum wage increase was signed into law, Democratic House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick told the Portland Business Alliance they'll propose changes to it next year, including lower wages for younger workers and trainees — according to a report in the *Oregonian*. Only, Kotek tells the *Northwest Labor Press*, that's not accurate.

Kotek says there are no plans to adjust the wage scale that was put in place over the next six years. But she said legislators are willing to have conversations about a lower wage for trainees and young workers — as a solution to the problem of youth unemployment.

“I can't even gauge what interest there would be in doing [a

training wage],” Kotek said, “but the business community kept bringing it up, and so we said ‘Okay, we'll talk about it, but we don't know where we would go with that.’”

State Sen. Michael Dembrow and State Rep. Paul Holvey — both chairs of labor committees — say they plan to discuss a training and/or youth wage, but they also say other solutions to youth unemployment might be as good or better — like targeted tax credits or additional state support for youth work programs.

“Our job as the Legislature is to continue to talk about all issues that people bring up,” Kotek said. “Whether or not we move forward on anything that adjusts wages for youth or training is really hard to tell at this point.”



Tina Kotek