

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



Some wins, some major disappointments in Legislature

The 2017 Oregon Legislature began with a simple math problem: Subtracting expenses from revenue equaled a \$1.8 billion deficit. After the defeat of Measure 97 last November, Oregon's business community promised to work with the governor and legislative leadership to find new revenue. Oregon already has one of the lowest overall tax rates on corporations in America: Yes, lower than Mississippi, Idaho, and Alabama. Corporations in Oregon are not paying their fair share.

The linchpins to these discussions were cuts to PERS benefits and a tightening of state spending. Public employee unions activated their members, explained the issue and challenges, and worked hard to find resolutions. At every turn, Oregon's business community refused to sit down and find a solution. In the end, there were no major cuts to PERS benefits, but also no new revenue or corporate tax increases.

While our Legislature did pass the **Oregon Healthcare Protections** bill, which provides coverage for 350,000 low-income Oregonians and reduces premiums for nearly 220,000 Oregonians (but is now under attack), they failed to pass additional meaningful revenue reform at a critical moment. This failure leaves hundreds of thousands of working Oregonians unsure about our state's ability to fund vital services — and with an ongoing need to restructure our tax system that still allows corporations to pay some of the lowest tax rates of any state.

Simultaneously, the Legislature prioritized and passed cost containment measures that stripped away public employee benefits. Despite these cuts, our state will still be in the position of scrambling to find revenue to fund vital services in the coming years.

Another loss was the failure to pass **HB 2004, Stable Homes for Oregon Families**. While this legislation passed the House, it failed to get any movement in the Senate. This is a major setback for besieged renters. Portland rents increased 13 percent in 2016, compared to a 4 percent bump for rents nationally.

Oregon workers did score some major victories:

SB 1040, The Rural Oregon Worker Protection Act: This legislation already signed by the governor prohibits local governments from implementing "Right to Work." This is the first legislation of its kind in the country.

SB 828, Fair Work Week: Creates protections for workers in retail, hospitality, and service jobs related to scheduling. Again, this groundbreaking legislation is the first statewide policy of its kind in the country.

HB 2017, Transportation Package: At \$5.3 billion invested over eight years in Oregon's infrastructure, this may be the largest transportation package in Oregon history.

HB 3170, Expands Collective Bargaining Rights for Public University Faculty: Expands collective bargaining rights for some supervisory faculty at public universities.

HB 3458, Overtime Protections for Manufacturing Workers.

The wins that workers achieved in the 2017 Oregon Legislature sets a national tone that the union movement can go on the offensive to improve the lives of workers. But the failure to hold corporations accountable and balancing budgets on the backs of public employees is unacceptable. For over 20 years, Oregon governors and legislatures have tried to restructure our tax system to generate revenue to match the needs of our people. Time and time again, those efforts have been stymied by an army of corporate lobbyists, forcing our budgets to be cobbled together in a patchwork of revenue increases, public service cuts, and reduced wages and benefits for public employees.

Oregon deserves better.

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, a 130,000-member-strong federation of labor unions.



INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE A delegation of labor officials from eight countries visited Portland the first week of July, as part of a tour organized by the U.S. State Department. On July 3, they met with Northwest Labor Press Associate Editor Don McIntosh and Portland Jobs with Justice Executive Director Will Layng at the offices of the World Affairs Council to talk about labor law and the challenges facing the local labor movement. From left: Layng; Ying Wang, INNO Community Development Organization, China; Chantharaporn Wisutthikan, Department of Labor Protection and Welfare, Thailand; Mawusi Bedrah, Fair Wages and Salaries Commission, Ghana; Felipe Burgueno Gonzalez, Center for Labor Action, Mexico; Papikie Mohale, South African Municipal Workers Union; Maja Ilic, Ministry of Labor, Serbia; Soon Ji Kwon, Ministry of Employment and Labor, South Korea; Florida Sandanasamy, International Labor Organization, Malaysia, and McIntosh.



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Campfire Marshmallows
Chocolate - Ghirardelli, Hershey
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Grill:

Weber (Genesis, Summit and Q series)

Sunscreens:

Coppertone
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Danner
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Folgers
Maxwell House

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