

Young Democrats meet organized labor

The Democratic Party of Oregon's Labor Caucus introduced millennials — early-20-to-mid-30-somethings — to organized labor at a four-hour gathering April 7 at the IBEW Local 48 Hall in Northeast Portland. Millennials make up the largest generation in the U.S. workforce, yet many younger Democrats don't have much exposure to organized labor.

"This was an opportunity to bring together all progressives to better understand the labor movement, its history, and its challenges, and to illustrate how we *all* benefit when we lift up the rights and working conditions of workers," said Labor Caucus chair Donna Nyberg.

The program featured panels of unionists talking about labor history, current issues, basic union structure, diversity and equity, apprenticeship opportunities, and training future political candidates.



Speakers included retired IBEW Local 48 business manager Keith Edwards and Val Hoyle, candidate for Oregon labor commissioner.

With more than 160 registered guests, Nyberg said it was the largest caucus event Oregon has ever held. More could be coming.



LEFT: New Seasons workers told the story of their fight to organize. Pictured with two workers is DPO 1st vice chair Valdez Bravo (right). **RIGHT:** John Knight hears about labor history from moderator Keith Edwards.



Photos courtesy of Democratic Party of Oregon

Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



Use tax dollars to incentivize the creation of middle wage green jobs

Over the last few years, I have seen significant progress in finding common ground between the labor movement and the environmental community on how to develop win-win projects or campaigns, which create and protect good jobs *and* move us towards a cleaner, greener future.

The Oregon Blue Green Alliance is an example of formalizing and improving these relationships, and I'm excited to see what's ahead for this collective work.

But too often, efforts to promote a clean energy economy or an environmental agenda means the strategy for creating family-supporting jobs is left behind. We are told by some environmentalists and government officials that requirements to ensure tax dollars are spent on middle class job creation will increase the cost of such an agenda, thereby eliminating green options. However, Oregon State Rep. (and 2017 Oregon AFL-CIO Legislator of the Year) Dan Rayfield's guest opinion in *The Oregonian* on April 13 identifies a different path: "Frequently, the efforts to advance labor protections are considered at odds with work to prevent further environmental degradation. This is a false choice that obscures the immediate opportunities our state has to ensure safe, high-quality auto manufacturing jobs through the transition to a clean vehicle future."

Oregon's and our country's lack of an ability to create family-supporting jobs is clear. You see it in the streets, along highways, in public spaces and spilling into rivers as the ranks of the homeless swells. Tent cities, RVs, trailers, and flotillas are too numerous to count. Data reveals that 45 to 50 percent of the homeless are working poor. Eighteen percent of the homeless are children. Homelessness has increased in Oregon by 10 percent since 2016. Homelessness is visible. You can't ignore this symptom of a larger problem: the lack of creation of family-supporting jobs. Since the 2008 recession, Oregon is one of the top states in job growth, but what kind of jobs are we creating?

I recently attended a briefing on Oregon's economy. Since the recession, the majority of jobs created are either low or high wage jobs. Middle wage jobs, the foundation for the emergence of America's middle class after World War II, were lost by the thousands during the 2008 recession. Increasing the divide between social economic groups, high wage households earning a median income of \$75,000 per year often live in West Portland while low wage households with a median income of \$45,000 per year live in East Portland.

Portland and Multnomah County have been playing catch-up for decades to improve infrastructure and provide services such as housing, transportation, public recreation, public transportation, and health care. These efforts are not enough to rebuild the middle segment of our economy unless Oregon deliberately creates middle wage jobs.

That's why Rep. Rayfield's guest opinion is important. It points to a good wage and benefit strategy using tax dollars to incentivize the creation of middle wage jobs. The emerging clean economy can be the keystone in such a strategy. It is an opportunity that Oregon can't afford to pass up. To do otherwise perpetuates an economy that works for a few while leaving the vast majority of workers and their families behind.

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

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