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County's new health headquarters is union-made

By Don McIntosh

Twenty-seven months after breaking ground, Multnomah County's new nine-story Health Department headquarters is open to the public. Located at 619 NW Sixth Avenue, it occupies half a city block between Union Station and the soon-to-be-redeveloped 14-acre U.S. Postal Service site. It was built by union hands, and will now be a union workplace, with three clinics, a pharmacy, a lab, and office space for health department employees who ad-

minister public health programs, emergency response, and mental health and addiction services. Workers at the Multnomah County Health Department are represented by AFSCME Local 88.

At a March 20 grand opening, Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury was plainly proud of the \$94.1 million project. Multnomah County's core values are diversity, sustainabil-

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ROOFTOP TOUR Building trades officers Willy Myers (left) and Bob Carroll praised Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury and her policy adviser Liz Smith Currie for the work they did to craft a project labor agreement.



Local 290 members say it's time to talk about diversity

By Don McIntosh

It's the third Tuesday of March, and 16 plumbers and pipefitters sit at a circle of tables at the front of a giant meeting hall in Tualatin, telling stories. The subject is race and gender, and why so few women and minorities join — or remain — in United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 290. It's the monthly meeting of the United Association Diversity Committee. Anthony O'Neal Jr., an African-American journeyman pipefitter, is the chair.

Local 290 is a massive union of 4,400 members, enough to populate a city half the size of Astoria, Oregon. And yet O'Neal can name nearly every black member without running out of fingers and toes. Women, too, are rare. Latinos, common in some other construction trades, are less so in the pipe trades.



ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL: Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 290's Diversity Committee meets the third Tuesday of each month.

Nor is that on track to change soon: 95 percent of today's Local 290 apprentices are men, and 88 percent are white. Of the 554 current Local 290 apprentices, just six are African American, 10 are Asian or Pacific Islanders, 16 Native Americans, and 26 Hispanic; 30 are women.

The idea to create a diversity

committee was born in an on-the-job conversation O'Neal had with Lou Christian in December 2017. O'Neal was the foreman on the job. Christian, then running for business manager (the local's top elected office), was on his crew. Christian made the issue part of his campaign, pledging to work so that members of

all races and genders feel welcome and supported in the union. He won, and the committee was formed last summer.

Lack of diversity isn't just a fact at Local 290, but across the building trades. According to 2016 data from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women are less than 2 percent of the skilled craft workers in construction nationwide, and blacks are less than 7 percent.

At Local 290, members of the Diversity Committee hope to change that. They want to recruit more women and minority workers into the union, support them when they get there, and encourage them to become active in the local. The committee is open to all members, not just women and minorities. White men, like retired former business

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Legislative action



WASHINGTON LEGISLATURE

Tax the rich House Democrats unveiled a two-year budget March 26 that includes a 9.9% Extraordinary Profits tax on the sale of stocks and bonds when profits are over \$200,000, and an increase in Real Estate Excise Tax rates on those selling property valued over \$1.5 million.

Crack down on noncompete agreements Employers have increasingly been requiring workers to sign pledges agreeing not to go to work for competitors. SB 5478 would prohibit such "non-compete agreements" for workers making less than \$100,000, bar their use when an employee is laid off, and limit them in all cases to 18 months. It passed the Senate 30-18 on March 5 and is now in the House.

Transition to clean energy SB 5116, backed by the Washington State Labor Council, would require Washington electric utilities to phase out coal by 2025 and use 100 percent clean energy by 2045. Tax incentives to help them do that would be tied to labor standards like the prevailing wage and apprenticeship utilization. It passed the Senate 28-19 on March 1.



OREGON LEGISLATURE

Hold business accountable for labor law violations Backed by a union coalition, SB 750 would allow workers or organizations to sue in the name of the state over violation of labor and employment laws. It was scheduled to be taken up by committee April 4.

Combat workplace sexual harassment HB 3333 would bar any employment agreement preventing workers from disclosing or discussing unlawful discrimination, including sexual assault. The bill was scheduled for its first committee hearing April 5, and a possible vote on April 8.