

## Who's on our side?

By Tom Chamberlain Oregon AFL-CIO President



### Simplistic initiatives create complex problems

Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, Bill Sizemore wreaked havoc in Oregon by putting simplistic initiatives on the ballot to address complex issues. Sizemore's success at the ballot box has left a lasting negative impact on our state, including property tax limitations that allow construction without building permits. These measures transferred the bulk of school funding from local property taxes to Oregon's general fund. Sizemore targeted workers, too, by requiring them to contribute 6 percent to their pensions (despite public employers pushing employees to pay pension costs to save money, at the expense of public worker raises). The Oregon Supreme Court overturned that measure.

The initiative process is one of the pillars of Oregon's democracy, but the initiative can be manipulated when Sizemore-like drafters address complex problems with simplistic solutions at the ballot box. Championed by Tim Nesbitt and Ted Kulongoski, two PERS initiatives were recently filed that would reduce pension benefits for Oregon public workers to address the PERS unfunded liability by reducing pension benefits for Oregon public workers.

The problem with PERS isn't that Oregon is providing overly generous benefits. The average PERS retiree receives approximately \$29,500 per year, or about 44 percent of final average salary. And of the 175,997 active PERS members, 119,469 are in Tier 3. Tier 3 members are required to work longer and are paid a lesser benefit than Tiers 1 and 2. The PERS problem is the legacy costs of Tier 1 and Tier 2.

Nesbitt's proposal to move public workers from their current defined benefit plan to a 6 percent employer funded 401(k) is sponsored by the Oregon Business Council. Such changes are severe and unfair. For example, the average 35 year-old teacher would see a 57 percent cut in their retirement benefit. Nesbitt's scheme would shift all the retirement risk from the employer to the worker and do little to nothing to reduce the PERS Tier 1 and 2's unfunded liability. Another smoke screen is Nesbitt's requirement that all public workers pay 6 percent into PERS. Most public workers already pay 6 percent of their wages into an individual account, and those who don't have negotiated it with their public employer instead of a pay raise.

If the goal is to pay down Oregon's PERS unfunded liability, then that should be the focus — not reducing benefits for active Tier 3 employees whose costs are not associated with the unfunded liability. I am discouraged that many in corporate Oregon refuse to pay their fair share of taxes to fund Oregon services, but are quick on the draw to line up public worker pensions as targets. I find it troubling that Kulongoski and Nesbitt enjoy PERS retirements that have contributed to the system's unfunded liability, yet advocate for reducing benefits for workers who have a smaller pension benefit than what they enjoy.

Polls say 57 percent of Oregon voters think that public workers' benefits should not be cut to pay for PERS Tier 1 and 2 unfunded liability. Nesbitt and Kulongoski's ill-conceived ballot measure is another Sizemore-ian attempt to address a complex problem with a simplistic ballot measure that is unlikely to pass and sidesteps the real issue of funding debt for Oregon. It's time to stop scapegoating public workers and roll up our sleeves and find a solution by working together. Isn't that the Oregon way of governing?

Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO federation of labor unions.

## UNION DEMOCRACY

### Trainor launches campaign to lead Oregon AFL-CIO

The state federation's current leader, Tom Chamberlain, isn't seeking re-election.

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Trainor is currently Oregon AFL-CIO chief of staff. A native

of Indiana, he moved to Oregon in 2006 and worked as Oregon state director of Working America, the AFL-CIO's program for workers who

don't have a union in their workplace. He went to work for the Oregon AFL-CIO in 2008, first as field director and later as political director. He's a member IBEW Local 48, which represents Oregon AFL-CIO staff.



Graham Trainor



Christy O'Neill

of Indiana, he moved to Oregon in 2006 and worked as Oregon state director of Working America, the AFL-CIO's program for workers who don't have a union in their workplace. He went to work for the Oregon AFL-CIO in 2008, first as field director and later as political director. He's a member IBEW Local 48, which represents Oregon AFL-CIO staff.

O'Neill is a teacher at Southern Oregon Head Start and first

vice president of Oregon AFSCME. A native of Eagle Point, Oregon, she went to work at Head Start in 2007, and was elected president of her union, AFSCME Local 2619, in 2013. She's also a delegate to the Southern Oregon Central Labor Chapter.

As of their public campaign launch April 11, the two listed the endorsements of 30 labor organizations.

Trainor and O'Neill outline their vision on a campaign website, [oregonlaborforward.org](http://oregonlaborforward.org). Among other things, they propose to maintain a focus on strategic organizing, prioritize racial and gender justice, and continue to grow the political field program.

Workers of the World.

The April 3 vote at the 8218 NE Glisan St. store was 15 to 9 in favor of the union, with 24 out of 28 crew members casting a ballot. The April 5 vote at the 1135 NE Martin Luther King Blvd. store was 14 to 7 for the union, with 21 of 37 crew members voting.

### Two more shops vote to join Burgerville Workers Union

Two union elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board made official what the Burgerville Workers Union had already told the Burgerville fast food chain — that a majority of workers at the company's Montavilla and Convention Center locations in Portland want to be represented by the union, which is affiliated with Industrial

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That brings to five the number of locations that are officially unionized. The others are

at 3504 SE 92nd Ave, Portland, 19119 SE McLoughlin Blvd., Gladstone, and 1122 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Portland.

In bargaining, the union celebrated a company concession April 11: The company will allow tipping, and will set up a system to allow customers to tip in the next month or two. The union is asking the public to boycott the company until a contract is signed.



Raymond Thomas



James Coon



Cynthia Newton



Chris Frost



Melissa Haggerty



Sydney Montanaro



Scott Sell



Chris Thomas



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