



HOW WORKING PEOPLE AND UNIONS FARED IN OREGON'S 2019 LEGISLATURE

BILLS THAT PASSED

PERS changes, including public

employee compensation cuts To stop public employer pension contribution rates from going up sharply, SB 1049 gives Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) more time to restore the investment value that was lost in the 2008 crash. It also "redirects" a portion of the 6% of public employee salaries that has up to now been deposited into their 401(k)-style retirement savings plans. Employees earning over \$30,000 will have 2.5% or 0.75% of their salary redirected until such time as the PERS system is 90 percent funded.

Paid Family and Medical Leave

— HB 2005 sets up the most comprehensive paid family and medical leave program in the country. When the benefits start in 2023, the program will cover up to 12 paid weeks away from work, with an additional two weeks for pregnancy-related conditions. It covers all members of the workforce, even self-employed workers. It's available to parents welcoming a new child into their family; and to adults who need to tend to their own health condition or that of a family member, whether or not they're biologically related. The program replaces

100% of wages for the lowest income workers, and a gradually smaller percentage as income goes up. It's funded by a payroll tax to be paid by both employers and employees.

Greater stability for renters

SB 608 makes Oregon the first state in the nation to enact a statewide rent control law. Under the law, rents on residential units older than 15 years can go up no more than 7% plus inflation. The law also ends "no-cause" eviction: except in cases where landlords share housing with a tenant or need a unit for a family member, they must have legitimate grounds to evict a tenant.

A response to the anti-union Janus

decision In last year's *Janus vs AFSCME* case, a 5-4 Republican-appointed majority on the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it violates state and local public employees' free speech rights for them to have to pay anything at all to the union that negotiates and enforces their collective bargaining agreement. The ruling had long been sought by anti-union groups as a way to weaken unions. In response, Oregon's HB 2016 guarantees to union representatives the right to participate in new employee

orientations, and gives them contact information and reasonable access to the employees they represent, including the right to use employer email to communicate with workers. It also guarantees that unions get accurate and timely lists of represented employees, and requires public employers to grant "reasonable paid time" to designated stewards to conduct union business and access members during the workday.

Make it legal to limit money in politics

Oregon has almost no limits on money in politics, because the state Supreme Court has long ruled that the free speech protection in the Oregon constitution applies to political contributions. SJR 18 puts a constitutional change before voters in the November 2020 election: that state and local legislators, or the people through the initiative process, may limit contributions in connection with political campaigns.

Tax big business to fund schools

HB 3427, known as the Student Success Act, will provide \$1 billion per year in new funding for Oregon's pre-K-12 education system with a commercial activities tax on

businesses that earn more than \$1 million in annual Oregon sales. The bill also reduces personal income tax rates by 0.25% for Oregonians in the bottom three tax brackets.

Make non-profit hospitals live up to their charitable mission

Oregon's 60 nonprofit hospitals pay no taxes, not even property taxes. In return, they're supposed to provide charity care. But most act more like businesses, and their charitable record can be pretty spotty. HB 3076 puts some teeth into the requirement; it directs the Oregon Health Authority to set minimum charitable spending levels for each hospital every two years. It also prohibits medical debt from being passed to family members, caps interest rates hospitals and debt collectors can charge on medical debt, and requires hospitals to provide information and application paperwork for their charity care policies before sending them to a debt collector.

Fund Medicaid

Lawmakers passed two bills to pay for the increased costs of the Oregon Health Plan, the Medicaid-funded insurance program for low-income Oregonians. HB 2270 raises cigarette taxes

\$2 (to \$3.33 a pack) and levies a new tax on e-cigarettes at 65 percent of wholesale price. It will go before voters for approval in 2020. Even at \$3.33 the cigarette tax would be lower than California and Washington. And 10% of the revenue from the bill would go to fund tobacco cessation and prevention programs. HB 2010 increases a tax on hospitals and insurers that voters approved in January 2018 as Measure 101, and extends the taxes for six years. The tax on health insurance providers (including union health trusts) will rise from 1.5 percent to 2 percent, and the tax on hospitals will rise from 5.3 percent to 6 percent.

Move toward single-payer and/or public option health insurance

SB 770 creates a 20-member task force that will hold statewide hearings and come up with a proposal for universal health care by February 2021. It also directs the Oregon Health Authority to come up with a plan by May 1, 2020, for how individuals or families who make too much to be eligible for the Oregon Health Plan could nonetheless buy into the plan as a publicly sponsored insurance option.

BILLS THAT FAILED

Get Walmart off the dole

When big employers pay workers so little that they qualify for food stamps, Medicaid, and other public assistance, that costs taxpayers. Backed by UFCW Local 555, the Oregon Taxpayer Reimbursement Act, HB 3262, would have helped the state get that money back by penalizing retail, hospitality and call center businesses with 100 or more employees worldwide if they have any part-time employees who receive public assistance. After it died in the House Revenue Committee

without a vote, Local 555 filed the proposal as a prospective ballot measure and is planning to take the proposal directly to voters in the November 2020 election.

Let workers and unions go to the courts

to enforce labor laws SB 750, known as the Oregon Corporate Accountability Act, would have allowed private individuals to sue over labor law violations on behalf of the state. Modeled on California's Private Attorneys General Act, it was meant to address the

limitations of Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI). It died in the Ways and Means Committee without a vote. UFCW and the Oregon Working Families Party expect to push the proposal again in future legislative sessions.

Enact prevailing wage in Enterprise

Zones On big publicly-funded projects, Oregon pays the prevailing wage to construction workers so that contractors can compete on quality, not on who can pay the

least. But in construction projects that are subsidized with tax breaks instead of tax dollars, the prevailing wage law doesn't apply. In recent years Google, Facebook, and other big tech firms have gotten generous property tax exemptions when they built in areas designated by the state as Enterprise Zones. For more than a decade, the Oregon Building Trades Council has pushed to make those tax breaks contingent on payment of the prevailing wage. This year's version of the proposal, HB 2408, got farther than any

previous bill: It passed the House 38-20. But it then died in the Senate Workforce Committee after Portland City Council and other local governments argued that a prevailing wage requirement would wipe out the investment-attracting value of the Enterprise Zone incentive. Workforce Committee Chair Kathleen Taylor said she plans to appoint an interim workgroup to study the issue and introduce a bill during the short legislative session in February 2020.

LERC gets budget reprieve

University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) was on track for a devastating 45 percent budget cut this year until the Oregon Legislature stepped in with a temporary reprieve.

With a staff of 11 and offices in Eugene and Portland, LERC provides training and research to Oregon unions, and has trained thousands of union stewards and officers over the last 41 years. LERC faculty were shocked to learn in April that UO Provost Jayanth Banavar and UO President Michael Schill were proposing a \$488,000 cut to LERC's budget. The adminis-

trators justified the cut on the grounds that most LERC programs aren't "student-facing" but instead serve members of the community, something Banavar and Schill regard as outside of the university's core mission.

LERC supporters campaigned hard to get Banavar and Schill to reconsider. Union members, students and faculty from other departments—and a large number of unionized graduate student faculty—packed a May 23 meeting of the University of Oregon board of trustees, and kept up public testimony for more than two hours, oppos-

ing the LERC cuts as well as proposed tuition increases. Over a thousand students and faculty signed a petition. Elected officials and others sent letters of support. But Banavar and Schill held firm. The cuts were slated to take effect July 1.

That's when state legislators on the Joint Ways and Means Committee stepped in, adding a line item in the higher education funding bill that restores LERC's budget for two years. The appropriation isn't a long-term commitment to fund LERC, but it means LERC won't have to lay off staff or shut programs for now.

Climate bill dies again

Last month proved to be the hottest June in global recorded history. But once again, Oregon lawmakers couldn't find a majority to pass major climate legislation, despite its designation by top Democrats as a top priority. The legislation, HB 2020, passed the House 36-24 on June 17, but never got a vote in the Senate, with Senate President Peter Courtney saying it was one unnamed senator short of a majority. HB 2020 would have created a "cap-and-invest" system in Oregon, capping emissions and selling emission permits to about 100 of the big fossil fuel users, and using the proceeds to pay for a transition to a clean energy economy and mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. It was a complicated piece of legislation, and the product of compromise, with some environmental groups saying it wouldn't go far enough, and some business groups saying it went too far.

Most of organized labor — even the labor-environmental group Blue-Green Alliance — stayed neutral, owing to concerns about potential job losses from making fossil fuels more expensive. Machinists District Lodge W24 and one Steelworkers local opposed the bill. Notably, the Oregon Building Trades Council came out in support of the bill after amendments that would have made it the most labor-friendly climate legislation in the country. Renewable energy and conservation construction projects funded by the bill would have been required to use project labor agreements, pay the prevailing wage, offer health care and retirement benefits, and take part in state-registered apprenticeship programs. And only "responsible" contractors would be allowed to bid — serial labor law violators were to be barred. Oregon AFSCME, which represents DEQ employees, was also supportive of HB 2020.