



LABOR LAW CONFERENCE. Labor journalist Kim Kelly spoke to a sold out crowd of more than 300 unionists at the Oregon Labor Law Conference Jan. 31 in Northeast Portland. The yearly gathering provides training on grievance handling and arbitration, collective bargaining, organizing workers, union governance, legislation, and worker rights. Kelly is a freelance writer and the labor columnist for *Teen Vogue*, and a columnist on class and labor at *The New Republic*. She also serves as a councilperson for the Writers Guild of America, East. In 2015, the now 32-year-old led a successful organizing drive at VICE. The greatest barrier she faced in the union campaign, she said, wasn't that co-workers were anti-union. "They didn't know what a union was." Kelly said the good contract they were able to achieve after nine months of bargaining resulted in scores of other digital media shops organizing throughout the country. "The high union density in digital media means there's now an army of pro-labor, pro-union, class conscious people, writers, editors who are now a million times more sympathetic with labor stories, with worker stories, who are familiar with what it takes to organize a union and bargain a contract; and what it means to go on strike," she told attendees. "I think we're going to continue to see the ripple effects of that for decades to come." Kelly pointed to recent polls showing organized labor's record-high approval rating with the public. "Ten years ago, there were like, what, one or two labor journalists to cover things, maybe hidden away in the business section. Now it's all over the place."

Union membership up in Oregon, down in Washington, nationwide

Union membership in Oregon increased from 256,000 to 277,000 in 2019, according to the latest annual estimate from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). That bucks the national trend, where union membership dropped to 14.574 million, down 170,000 (0.2%) from 2018. In the State of Washington, union membership dropped slightly from 649,000 in 2018 to 638,000 last year. When the BLS began its current survey in 1983, 20.1% of American workers were in a union. The information comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

UNION MEMBERS AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE WORKFORCE

10.3%
 ■ Public sector: **33.6%**
 ■ Private sector: **6.2%**

NON-UNION WORKERS EARNINGS COMPARED TO UNION

81%

WHERE STATES RANK, FROM MOST UNIONIZED TO LEAST

- #1 Hawaii 23.5%
- #2 New York 21.0%
- #3 Washington 18.8%
- #4 Rhode Island 17.4%
- #5 Alaska 17.1%
- #7 California 15.2%
- #10 Oregon 14.4%
- #43 Idaho 4.9%
- #50 South Carolina 2.7%

TOTAL UNION MEMBERSHIP

14.6 million
 ■ Private sector: **7.5 million**
 ■ Public sector: **7.1 million**
 ■ Men: **7.95 million**
 ■ Women: **6.6 million**

See the full BLS report: <https://bit.ly/2uuhGN2>



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