

POLITICS

Labor prepares 2021 state legislative agendas

State lawmakers in Salem and Olympia will open their 2021 legislative sessions Jan. 11. Given COVID chaos, it's anyone's guess how it will go.

OREGON



Having discovered their power to stop all legislation by walking out to deprive the Legislature of quorum, Oregon's Republican delegation may again exercise a minority veto this year. A pair of re-introduced prospective ballot measures sponsored by the big public sector unions AFSCME and SEIU Local 503 could curb that tactic, but in the best case scenario, they're nearly two years away from being going before voters.

Organized labor will be going to Salem with a fairly modest agenda this year when compared with recent years' campaigns like sick leave, minimum wage increases, and paid family leave. Here are some of the top proposals:

Grant workers' comp to essential workers who contract COVID-19 So-called essential workers who face the public would automatically get workers' compensation benefits if they contract COVID-19, relieving them of the burden of proving they got the virus at work in order to get their medical bills and lost wages paid for. The so-called workers' comp presumption is the top priority for the state's largest private sector union, UFCW Local 555, which represents grocery workers.

Let workers sue when employers break labor laws Minimum wage, overtime pay, sick leave, and other labor laws only matter if they're enforced, and there's reason to believe Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries is too understaffed to effectively enforce them. A proposal modeled on California's Private Attorneys General Act would give whistleblowers the right to sue employers as individuals or organizations, on behalf of the state. Penalties awarded by the court would go to pay for better enforcement. A "just enforcement" proposal that was introduced in previous sessions as a bill called the Oregon Corporate Accountability Act would make that possible.

Extend paid sick leave to union construction workers When Oregon's paid sick leave law was passed in 2015, union construction workers were exempted because of the complexities of providing paid leave through union trusts to workers who have multiple employers. Now, the Oregon Building Trades Council says it's time to figure out a way to give union construction workers the same rights.

Set safe staffing levels in corrections Nurses recently won a state law setting minimum staffing levels — a boon for both patient safety and nurse stress levels. Now corrections officers, represented by

Oregon AFSCME, are ready to make a similar case, arguing that understaffed prisons create an unsafe environment for staff and for inmates. Understaffing is also leading to abuse of overtime by prison officials, taking a toll on workers.

Calculate a simpler and better prevailing wage The Oregon Building Trades Council and Pacific NW Regional Council of Carpenters will argue that the current method of computing the prevailing wage on state and local public construction projects—an expensive and time-consuming quarterly survey of employers—doesn't produce accurate results. Instead, the proposal is to adopt the union rate of pay and benefits when setting the prevailing wage, like the State of Washington does.

Ensure opportunity for construction apprentices In order to make sure construction trades have the chance to train the next generation and diversify their ranks, the Oregon Building Trades will advocate for minimum standards for apprentice utilization on public construction projects.

End abuse of non-competes A bill supported by the Oregon AFL-CIO would ensure that "non-competes"—agreements binding workers to not work for a competitor for a certain time—would only apply to high wage earners.

Honor the Sixth Amendment A bill backed by Oregon AFSCME, which represents public defenders, would put Oregon on course to end the severe underfunding of the public defender system. A similar bill appeared headed for passage in 2020, but died due to the Republican walkout.

WASHINGTON



Given plans to meet remotely, state lawmakers are encouraging all parties to keep expectation in check. Labor's legislative priorities this year will include:

Pass a high-income capital gains tax Because the Washington state budget is highly dependent on the sales tax, lawmakers are looking at a potential shortfall of up to \$1 billion a year, unless they find new revenue. The state AFL-CIO is preparing to support a tax on capital gains that would affect only the top 2%.

Let workers sue when employers break labor laws Just like a similar bill in Oregon, a Washington bill dubbed the Worker Protection Act would give workers the right to sue employers as individuals or organizations, on behalf of the state, over labor law violations. Vancouver state representative Monica Stonier is expected to be one of the bill's chief sponsors.

Reform unemployment insurance The Washington State Labor Council plans to support a proposal to cut down on unemployment insurance fraud and make it easier for workers to navigate the unemployment insurance system.



THOMAS, COON, NEWTON & FROST

PORTLAND LAW FIRM SINCE 1980

Workers' Compensation

Construction Injuries

Death Claims

Personal Injury & Product Liability

Medical Malpractice

Social Security Disability

Mesothelioma

www.tcnf.legal

503-228-5222

Straight answers. No cost for consultation.

Beware of "nurse case managers" in a workers' compensation claim. You do not have to allow a nurse case manager to accompany you to your doctor's appointments.



Raymond Thomas



James Coon



Cynthia Newton



Chris Frost



Sydney Montanaro



Scott Sell



Chris Thomas

820 SW Second Ave., Suite 200, Portland, OR 97204

THIS NEWSPAPER BROUGHT TO YOU BY AMERICA'S LABOR MOVEMENT ... AND BY OUR ADVERTISERS. LET THEM KNOW YOU APPRECIATE THE SUPPORT!



Proud Partners
Teamsters Local 223 & 58

"Saving Lives Together"

(In emergencies, please dial 911)