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## IN THIS ISSUE



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NATIONAL

# Biden moves fast on pro-labor agenda

Two weeks into his presidency, Joe Biden is showing signs he may make good on his election eve pledge to be "the most pro-union President you've ever seen." So far, the pro-labor moves included executive orders and personnel changes:

- **Cleaning house at the NLRB** Less than an hour after he was sworn in Jan. 20, Biden emailed Peter Robb—the Trump-appointed general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)– to say he had until 5 p.m. to voluntarily resign or be fired, 10 months before his term was set to expire. The NLRB is supposed to protect the union rights of private sector workers, but Robb, a management attorney who helped Ronald Reagan bust the air traffic controllers union, had worked to roll back those rights, refused to spend the budget Congress passed for his agency, and even sued in federal court to curtail the use of the union inflatable "Scabby the Rat." Robb refused to resign, and was fired that day, the first NLRB general counsel to be forced out in over 50 years. When Robb's deputy Alice Stock, another anti-union Trump appointee, assumed the role of acting general counsel, Biden demanded her resignation the next day. She refused, and Biden fired her too. That left Peter Sung Ohr, a career NLRB attorney, in charge, and within weeks, Ohr moved to halt anti-union cases Robb had pending in courts.
- **OSHA action on COVID** COVID-19 has been the biggest on-the-job hazard in OSHA's 50-year history, but Trump's OSHA defied union pleas that employers be required to take measures to protect workers. On Day 2 of his presidency, Biden ordered OSHA to consider an emergency temporary rule by March 15, 2021.
- **$15 an hour** On Day 3 of his presidency, Biden ordered a report to be drafted with recommendations to promote a $15/hour minimum wage for federal employees.
- **Restore federal worker union rights** The same executive order reversed a series of Trump executive orders that had barred federal worker unions using government office meeting rooms and their union officers from using paid time to work on union grievances.
- **'Buy American'** On Jan. 25, Biden signed an executive order declaring that federal purchasing will maximize use of U.S. made goods and services. The order tightens the definition of what constitutes American-made products, makes waivers to buy foreign goods harder to get, and sets up a Made in America Office in the Office of Management and Budget. Under Trump, federal procurement of foreign-made products actually increased.
- **Green jobs now** On Jan. 27, Biden issued an executive order on tackling the climate crisis, which calls specifically for "union jobs" nine times. The order announces plans to electrify the federal government's vehicle fleet, including United States Postal Service vehicles, spurring jobs at U.S. automakers. And to power them, the order announces plans to build a nationwide network of half a million electric-car charging stations. The order also pauses new oil and natural gas leases on public lands, and calls for the creation of well-paying union jobs plugging leaks in oil and gas wells and reclaiming abandoned mine land. The order earned immediate praise from the AFL-CIO and IBEW.

# READY FOR PRIME TIME

### A Portland building trades union member is a contestant on Season Two of CBS' Tough as Nails.

**By Don McIntosh**

Liz Nichols is starting to get texts from people she knows: Was that you on TV? Trailers for Season 2 of the hit prime time reality show Tough As Nails have been airing on CBS. Nichols, an eight-year member of Portland-based Cement Masons Local 555, is one of the contestants.

"You are the toughest workers in America. That's why you're here," says host Phil Keoghan in the trailer.

The new season premieres 8 p.m. Wednesday Feb. 10. Twelve contestants compete individually and as part of two teams of six, tackling realistic challenges on construction sites, farms and fishing boats. Each episode, someone gets eliminated from the final challenge, but nobody gets sent home, because everyone's there until the end competing with their team and cheering on the finalists. The winner gets $200,000 and a brand-new Ford pickup.

Nichols, 37, heard about the show and saw it as an opportunity to have fun *and* represent her craft and local. After applying last July, she did well in several rounds of interviews, and spent four and a half weeks in Southern California filming, starting mid-October with a two-week quarantine in a hotel room.

Nichols isn't allowed to say who won, but she

Turn to Page 2

**Cement Masons Local 555 member Liz Nichols, above on a job in Beaverton, is a contestant on Season 2 of the CBS show Tough as Nails, which premieres Feb. 10.**

# Union membership down, but share of workforce is up

### Oregon now ties with California as the 7th most unionized state.

Union members' share of the total workforce rose in 2020 for the first time in a decade, but not for the right reasons. Total union membership dropped 321,000, but that loss was dwarfed by the 9.6 million drop in overall employment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the latest annual report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Because much of that job loss was in nonunion sectors like restaurants, the union share of the workforce grew.

In 2020, 10.8% of the workforce were members of unions, up from 10.3% in 2019. Union membership totaled 14.3 million workers, a drop of 2.2% from 2019.

By age, union membership continued to be highest among workers over 45: 13.2% of workers 45 to 54, and 13.0% of those 55 to 64. Least unionized were workers aged 16 to 24: just 4.4%.

And as they have every year, union workers continued to out-earn nonunion workers—19.4% more, on average. Median weekly earnings were $1,144 for union members, compared to $958 for nonunion workers. That adds up to $9,672 a year.

Relative to other states, Oregon jumped in the rankings in 2020, and is now tied with California to be the 7th most unionized state. Washington ranked 5th, and Idaho was in 39th place.

BLS has been collecting the same data with the same methods since 1983, when the union membership rate was 20.1% and there were 17.7 million union workers.

### UNION SHARE OF THE WORKFORCE

**Public sector** 34.8% 7.2 million workers
**Private sector** 6.3% 7.1 million workers
**Total** 10.8% 14.3 million workers

### MOST UNIONIZED STATES

**#1 Hawaii** 23.7%
**#2 New York** 22%
**#3 Rhode Island** 17.8%
**#4 Alaska** 17.7%
**#5 Washington** 17.4%
. . .
**# 7 (TIE) Oregon** 16.2%
**# 7 (TIE) California** 16.2%