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Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, will soon issue its official report on the state legislature's 2021 session. Based on a preliminary draft shared with the Labor Press, it was a pretty significant session for organized labor. In the 105-day session that closed April 25, lawmakers delivered tax reform, climate action, and expanded workers rights. Here are some highlights.

GOOD BILLS THAT PASSED

Overtime pay for farmworkers SB 5172 extends the 40-hour week and the right to overtime pay to all Washington farmworkers over the next three years. It comes after the Washington Supreme Court ordered the same for workers in dairies. Beginning in January 2022, overtime will be due after 55 hours of work in a week; in January 2023, after 48 hours; and in January 2024, after 40 hours. The bill is nationally significant, and upon signing, President Joe Biden congratulated Governor Jay Inslee.

Tax fairness means capital gains taxes for the rich, tax rebates for working people Washington has had one of the most regressive tax systems in the country, in that poor and working people pay a bigger percentage of their incomes in taxes than the rich do. But SB 5096, an excise tax on extraordinary profits from the sales of capital assets like stocks and bonds, passed in the senate by just one vote. The tax is 7% and it only kicks in when there's more than



Labor goes to Olympia

\$250,000 per year in profits from the sale of certain capital assets like stocks. Exempt from the tax are proceeds from the sale of small businesses, timber, and homes and other real estate. Meanwhile, lawmakers also passed a new Working Families Tax Credit, Modeled after the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, it's a state program to provide tax rebates of between \$300 and \$1,200 to an estimated 420,000 households starting in 2023.

Juneteenth HB 1016 makes Juneteenth—June 19—an official state holiday in Washington, and a paid day off for state workers starting in 2022.

Wage liens against wage thieves SB 5355, known as the Washington Wage Recovery Act, puts a new tool in the hands of workers who suffer wage theft. It's a response to the fact that almost 45% of wages owed to workers in wage theft cases goes uncollected. Now, they'll be able to place a lien on property owned by the guilty parties.

The bill was fiercely opposed by corporate lobbying groups, but it passed the Senate 25-24 and the House 51-46.

Reduce the exploitation of people with disabilities SB 5284 eliminates the subminimum wage for workers with disabilities.

Climate action The Climate Commitment Act imposes a firm and declining cap on approximately 80% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions, covering emissions from natural gas, electricity, transportation, industry, and more. Emissions-intensive and trade exposed industries like aluminum, aviation, and pulp and paper will get special treatment through at least 2035. The CCA will invest a minimum of \$7 billion by 2037 (and more after), with \$5.2 billion dedicated to transportation projects that reduce carbon, and the balance dedicated to carbon reduction in other sectors, including funds for forest management and wildfire reduction.

And importantly, the investments funded under CCA are restricted to projects that meet high labor standards.

BAD BILLS THAT FAILED (THANK GOODNESS)

Estate tax repeal HB 1245, sponsored by Sen. Ed Orcutt (R-Kalama) would have made the state's tax code even more regressive by repealing the estate tax, which only applies to individuals with assets over \$2.2 million.

School vouchers HB 1215, introduced by Rep. Vicki Kraft (R-Vancouver) would have established a "K-12 education scholarship" program to divert scarce public school funding to unaccountable private schools.

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME

Workers right to sue when employers break labor law The Worker Protection Act, HB 1076, would have allowed workers to seek justice in court if their employer violates existing wage and hour laws, generating resources for stronger state enforcement.

WE CAN DREAM, CAN'T WE?

Billionaire wealth tax House Bill 1406 would have made Washington the first state in the nation to impose a wealth tax—an annual 1% levy on wealth, after exempting the first \$1 billion of wealth. It would have affected just Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and 12 other billionaires who live in Washington. The bill had 26 co-sponsors, though none from Southwest Washington. It was approved by a committee, but never got a vote on the House floor.

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CORRECTION

We got the wrong building. A story about painters union pickets in our June 18 issue incorrectly identified one of the job sites as Reed College's Parker House. The picket was at 3124 SE Crystal Springs Blvd., another building owned by Reed College. Parker House is around the corner.



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