

2021 OREGON BUILDING TRADES CONVENTION REPORT

From Page 1

whatever the union rate is. They extended the right to paid sick leave to construction workers who are dispatched through union hiring halls. They made it clear that it's legal and acceptable for cities, counties, and school districts to sign project labor agreements (PLAs) on public construction projects. And they ensured that upcoming state-funded higher ed construction projects will have PLAs.

"We're setting new expectations of how we do public contracting here in the state," Kotek told delegates.

Kotek wrapped up with remarks about the climate crisis that drew applause from the building trades union delegates.

"The climate crisis is upon us, whether it's the wildfires that devastate our communities ... or the fact that we have neighbors in our communities dying from heat waves. It's here, and you all know that."

This year Oregon lawmakers passed HB 2021, which mandates that electric utilities provide 100% clean energy by 2040. Kotek said she had to fight with the Oregon Senate to make sure that investments in renewable energy come with labor standards



Tina Kotek to delegates:
"As your next governor, I will put working families first, and stand by our values to lift up everybody."

requiring health and other benefits to workers on those jobs, and opportunities for apprentices.

"There are people who say we can't take on the crisis around climate because it's going to kill good jobs. Well, I don't believe that.... We can have good jobs, and fight climate crisis together, and we have to, for our children's children, and for the safety of our planet."

With Kotek still on stage, Painters District Council 5 delegate Dave Winkler went to the mic to make a motion to endorse her campaign for governor. The vote was immediate and unanimous, handing Kotek the first major endorsement since she announced her run for governor on Sept. 1. The move to endorse wasn't totally spontaneous: OSBCTC's Executive Board had discussed the question that morning and recommended endorsement based on Kotek's

outstanding record of going to bat for the trades.

By no means did Kotek accomplish all of that alone, and building trades leaders celebrated other legislators too, including three who addressed delegates in person: State Sen. **James Manning** of Eugene; Senate Majority Leader **Rob Wagner** of Lake Oswego; and freshman State Rep. **Jason Kropf** of Bend, all Democrats. Lane County Commissioner **Joe Berney** also advocated for the building trades in the Legislature, as a fierce advocate of project labor agreements. Berney had previously insisted Lane County use a project labor agreement, he told delegates, and it was a resounding success, coming in under budget.

Why politics matters

Delegates also got an earful about what's at stake in the political arena during a panel on the council's history. The panel included former state building trades leaders Bob Shiprack and John Mohlis, and Pendleton building trades leader Jeff Gritz.

"How important is politics to the building trades?" moderator Wayne Chow asked the panelists. Drawing on generations of experience, panelists poured forth war stories about the early 1980s,

when newly emboldened anti-union groups sponsored a ballot initiative to repeal the state prevailing wage. In response, building trades unions united as if survival was at stake, and they defeated the measure by a wide margin in every county in the state. Gritz then shared what could happen when building trades unions lose a big battle: Idaho once had a strong union movement, but in 1985 it passed anti-union right-to-work legislation, followed by repeal of the state's prevailing wage law. Idaho building trades union locals were crushed. Many ceased to exist entirely. And construction industry wages there plummeted and never recovered.

One sign that the building trades council and its affiliates have continued to be politically consequential in Oregon is the number of elected officials who drop by to declare their support. This year, there were fewer than usual because of the continuing pandemic, but altogether 14 office-holders addressed delegates in person or by video, including an address via Zoom by state treasurer **Tobias Read** and recorded messages from Oregon Gov. **Kate Brown** and U.S. Senators **Ron Wyden** and **Jeff Merkley**. Read had earlier come

in for praise when national building trades president **Sean McGarvey** applauded his passage of a policy that requires the use of responsible construction contractors on projects that are funded by Oregon public pension dollars.

Former Multnomah County Commissioner **Loretta Smith** also asked delegates to support her in her upcoming campaign for Congress in Oregon's not-yet-formed Sixth Congressional District. Smith is the only candidate seeking that seat so far. [On Sept. 27, the Oregon Legislature approved — and the governor signed — two measures to redraw the boundaries of Oregon's congressional and legislative districts.]

The convention is also a chance for trades leaders to build community, with evening social gatherings and a golf tournament on Day 2. At the close of the convention, the council dispensed dozens of raffle prizes, and announced the award of two \$1,000 college scholarships: one to Alexandra Kimberling, daughter of Plumbers & Fitters Local 290 business agent John Kimberling; and the other to Maria Luna Vargas, daughter of Iron Workers Local 29 member Israel Luna Vargas. It was Vargas' second time getting the scholarship.



LEADING THE TRADES: From left, Brent Stephens, Zack Culver, Geoff Kossak, Lou Christian, Garth Bachman, Robert Camarillo, Russ Garnett, Randy Carmony, Brian Noble, Matt Eleazer, Dave Winkler, and Jimbo Anderson.

OFFICER ELECTIONS

All nominees were unopposed and were declared elected by acclamation. They'll serve four-year terms that run through the 2025 convention.

- **Executive Secretary-Treasurer** Robert Camarillo (Iron Workers Local 29)
- **President** Lou Christian (Plumbers & Fitters Local 290)
- **Vice President** Russ Garnett (Roofers Local 49)
- **Sergeant-at-arms** Randy Carmony (Elevator Constructors Local 23)
- **Conductor** Brian Noble (Sheet Metal Local 16)
- **Trustees** Matt Eleazer (Bricklayers Local 1); David Winkler (Painters District Council 5); James 'Jimbo' Anderson (Operating Engineers Local 701); Geoff Kossak (Cement Masons Local 555); Zach Culver (Laborers Local 737); Garth Bachman (IBEW Local 48); and Brent Stephens (Boilermakers Local 242)

BE IT RESOLVED ...

Oregon building trades delegates passed five resolutions this year. Here's a summary.

- **SUPPORT STAFF** renew and extend support for the part-time political special projects coordinator position [to add capacity, IBEW Local 48 president Wayne Chow was hired in 2020.]
- **INCREASE INVESTMENT IN POLITICAL ACTION** empower the heads of each affiliated international union to convene by Dec. 1 to decide whether and how much to increase contributions to OSBCTC's political action committee, Oregonians To Maintain Community Standards, and then review that yearly. The affiliate leaders will have the discretion to increase it as much as double the current assessment of \$1 per member per month. The PAC has been funded at \$1 per member per month since it was created in 1993; adjusted for inflation, that would be \$1.89 today.
- **TOOL UP TO FIGHT WAGE THEFT** declare that it's a priority for the council to pass legislation requiring contractors on public works projects to file formal statements of intent to pay prevailing wage and affidavits swearing to compliance. Washington has such an "intents and affidavits" system, and it's seen as an effective way to reduce wage misclassification and other violations of prevailing wage law. [Resolution sponsored by Cement Masons Local 555.]
- **ENSURE STABLE AND ADEQUATE FUNDING** establish a committee to look at how other state building trades councils are funded, and come back at the 2023 convention with a report and recommendations to ensure strong and stable financing. Currently OSBCTC is funded with a contribution by affiliates of \$1.85 per member per month.
- **BUILD A MORE WELCOMING INDUSTRY CULTURE** support and sign the "Safe from Hate" pledge. In the wake of a job site noose incident in Portland last year, local building trades unions, general contractors, and big construction project owners have been meeting to talk about ways to improve construction culture so that it's free from hate speech and harassment, and more welcoming to women and minority workers. [Resolution sponsored by Willy Myers of Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council.]