



income families make ends meet. They also help maintain and create jobs, because low-income earners tend to spend that money quickly and locally."

Last October, the state Employment Department reported that there were about 121,000 jobs which paid wages less than \$8.50. The wage increase will mean these workers will earn \$208 more in 2011.

Earlier in 2010, OCCP reported on the rising income inequality in Oregon, saying, "While CEOs in Oregon are still cashing huge paychecks, the fallout from the Great Recession has ratcheted up the pressure on Oregon workers."

The OCCP report detailed the stagnant wages that Oregon's workers face: "The average hourly wages for median-wage workers was \$15.85 in 2009, down from \$16.09 in 2001 and lower still the 1979 levels of \$16.12," when both figures are adjusted for inflation. They compared this with the pay levels of the top 1 percent of Oregon's economy. The 40

highest-paid CEOs of Oregon-based public companies in 2009 earned an average salary of \$1.9 million — nearly 40 times the average annual earnings of Oregon workers, says OCCP.

OCCP sees union membership as an aid in battling income inequality: "Data for 2003-07 show that the typical worker in Oregon got a 16.5 percent wage boost by being in a union, while the lowest-paid workers saw a wage gain of 21.1 percent." OCCP sees a rise in Oregon's unionized workers force (last year was the third year in a row that Oregon's unionization rate rose) as a "ray of hope" in Oregon's gloomy economic times. OCCP does note that only 17 percent of Oregon's workforce is unionized.

Unionization is clearly a tool of equality; and income equality, according to Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman, is about more than just economics; it's about how income equality brings us closer to our democratic ideals.

— Philip Shackleton

lighten up

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— Rafael Aldave, Eugene

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