

Delegates Vote "To Put Our Money Where Our Anger Is" to Fight the Tiernan Initiative

On a resounding voice vote, some 200 Local delegates to the OPEU/CAPE Leadership Conference voted unanimously on February 12 to recommend and take to the membership a proposal for a temporary dues assessment to fund an effective statewide campaign "to defeat the Tiernan initiative and all attacks on public employee pay and retirement benefits."

"This will tell Bob Tiernan and the public employee bashers that we're mad as hell and willing to put our money where our anger is to keep their hands off of our paychecks," said OPEU/SEIU Local 503 President **Dawn Morgan**.

The proposed assessment is \$2 per month for twelve months, beginning in March. If approved, it will apply to all members and fair share payers in our bargaining units (except for three private, nonprofit bargaining units unaffected by the Tiernan initiative).

Ballots with postage-paid return envelopes will be mailed to all members on or about February 28, with a deadline for receipt of ballots of March 15.

The proposed assessment will raise approximately \$480,000, which — in addition to voluntary CAPE contributions of two-cents and four-cents per hour — will become the major portion of OPEU's campaign budget to defeat the Tiernan initiative. Contributions will also be sought from management and unrepresented workers in state agencies and in local government jurisdictions.

Similar amounts are being raised by the Oregon Education Association, which is assessing its membership a one-time \$25 per member fee to defeat the

Tiernan initiative and other attacks on their pay, benefits, and working conditions. In a campaign, to defeat a repeal of prevailing wages on state construction jobs, building trades unions have approved an assessment of five cents per hour (almost \$9 per member per month) for their members.

All told, coalition efforts to defeat the Tiernan initiative should enable us to raise the \$1.5 to \$2 million it takes to run an effective statewide campaign with extensive TV, radio, and newspaper ads. A media campaign based on 30-second spots running 20 per week on six stations for 12 weeks costs \$432,000. A similar statewide radio ad campaign costs \$360,000.

Tiernan has predicted the campaign will be a "bloodbath" and is attempting to gain votes early by misrepresenting PERS benefits as "excessive" and using facts and figures that distort the truth. (See story, page 7.) Combined with a strategy of using his House subcommittee investigating PERS as a campaign vehicle and starting its hearings in April, Tiernan is obviously trying to move up the timeline for getting voters to make up their minds on this issue far in advance of the fall campaign season. Our campaign will have to start early and build steadily to November.

"If public employees don't fund this, no one else will," says OPEU/SEIU Local 503 Secretary-Treasurer **Don Patch**. "The good news is OPEU is 20,000 strong and united and motivated as never before on this issue, and there are another 230,000 public employees and retirees in Oregon who will follow our lead in this fight."

Questions and Answers About the Proposed Dues Assessment

Q. Why is the proposal for 12 months, when the election will be over in November?

We need to raise at least \$500,000 to help fund an effective statewide campaign. This is the equivalent of \$2.00 per month for 12 months (\$24 per bargaining unit member) in order to fund this campaign. Spreading it out over 12 months is easier on everybody, and we can advance money from our mandatory reserve fund to put all of the money into the campaign by November.

Q. Will other unions help?

Yes. The Oregon Education Association will be assessing their members (mostly teachers) a one-time fee of \$25 this year to fight the Tiernan initiative and other attacks on their jobs. AFSCME has already helped with the coalition effort by funding a statewide poll. And the PERS Coalition, including firefighters and other school employees, sponsored focus group research on the Tiernan initiative.

Q. How will the money be spent?

The money will be set aside in a special fund dedicated to the campaign to defeat the Tiernan initiative and all attacks on pay and retirement benefits.

Q. Can the money be used to oppose or support other initiatives?

Not unless other initiatives make the ballot that specifically threaten our pay and/or retirement benefits. One initiative now in circulation would use a contrived version of average compensation in the private sector to reduce pay and benefit levels in the public sector. (See page 8.) If this initiative qualifies, we will conduct a combined campaign against it and the Tiernan initiative.

Q. Will the assessment apply to all members and fair share payers?

Yes.

Q. How do we know this assessment won't become permanent?

OPEU's By-Laws require a vote of the membership on any change in dues. This proposal is specifically written to expire after twelve months. There would have to be a new proposal and a new vote of the full membership to continue this assessment in any form.

Q. Will this assessment take the place of two-cent contributions to CAPE?

No, we will continue to seek voluntary contributions to CAPE to add to our campaign budget. CAPE contributions are an important part of the Union's political action program. But, they are insufficient to fund a statewide campaign of the kind we need to defeat the Tiernan initiative. Also, CAPE contributions are eligible for a full credit on state income tax returns. The temporary dues assessment will not be eligible for this credit.

Q. Will management be asked to contribute?

Yes. Some are already asking us where to send their money. We'll be setting up a separate fund for managers and unrepresented employees to help in this fight.