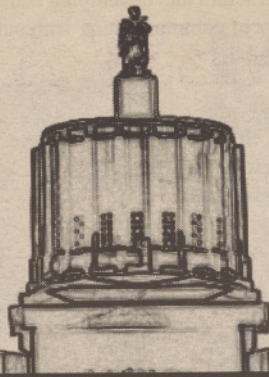


Politics



and your UNION

“Strange days indeed”, John Lennon once sang and these days you’d think he was singing about Oregon’s economic and political landscape. Newspaper headlines are talking about hard times up ahead and announcing the latest round of layoffs. Dwindling revenues resulting from the official Oregon recession have the Governor and the Legislature sharpening their budget-cutting knives. At the same time, the Dept. of Revenue is licking the envelopes closed on those “kicker” checks. Despite the fact that layoffs are sending Human Services caseloads skyrocketing, bridges still need repair, and kids still need schooling.

Despite the dire situation, our agenda hasn’t changed. We’re going to keep pushing our issues. We have a real opportunity to fight for funding for quality public services and controlling health care costs to protect our members’ top issues—services, programs, our jobs, our pay, and our benefits. We will continue our struggle to:

- Fight to fund Quality Public Services and control the skyrocketing costs of Health Care.
- Elect a Governor who proposes budgets that keep health care and other worker issues a top priority.
- Elect Legislators who support worker-friendly budgets so we can get the job done.
- Prepare for the possibility of a strike, if necessary, to protect our jobs, pay and benefits.
- Increase our Union’s strength by organizing new workers into our Union.
- Build on our internal strength by developing our leadership structures and stewards fighting the daily battles we face on the job.

\$300-\$600 Million Shortfall Projected This Biennium

Special Session Coming

Revenue projections are falling far short of the expectations during session. A Special Session is likely to happen, probably in January. However, the content of that session will be determined ahead of time by legislative leaders, their caucus members, and the Governor’s office.

At this point, the Governor’s office and the legislative leadership have restricted their public comments to a debate over whether there should be across the board cuts or prioritized cuts. All program areas appear to be “on the table.” The Governor has requested suggestions for both “administrative” and “program” cuts from 2% to 10% from General Fund/Lottery funded agencies.

SEIU Local 503, OPEU is advocating the notion that various ways of increasing the revenue “pie” should also be on the table. (Safety net services become more, rather than less, in demand when the economy declines. So do investments in the public infrastructure as a way to stimulate the economy.) We’re working in coalition with other like-minded organizations. Ideas for increasing the revenue “pie” vary widely in their political attractiveness. They include:

- ♦ using some tobacco settlement funds
- ♦ putting temporary surcharges on the corporate or personal income tax
- ♦ using additional funds from a Medicaid loophole
- ♦ delaying implementation of Measure 88

Other ideas have involved increasing the excise tax rate on beer or wine products, expanding video poker, and even reclaiming the “Kicker” that’s kicking despite an estimation error via a targeted income tax surcharge. No clear consensus has yet emerged as to which of these ideas are viable politically.

Call the Governor and your legislator today, and urge them not to leave revenue solutions off the table in a Special Session. The Special Session shouldn’t just be about cuts. Contact information available on the SEIU Local 503 website or via links to other sites.

“Think Before You Ink” Bad Ballot Measures!

Voter Education Project

Members are reporting increasing numbers of petitioners with initiative petitions harmful to public and private workers, in particular Sizemore’s clone of Measures 92 and 98 (Initiative number 18). Please give every member in your worksite and all family and friends this number on a card (1-800-295-5597) and ask them to call it when they spot someone collecting signatures. If possible, also call in the petitions that are being circulated and the name of the circulator.

Use the new **“Don’t be Fooled”** flyer (ask your organizer for some) to inform the public that they should be cautious before signing any potentially dangerous initiatives. Every 15 minutes spent with this kind of leaflet when the opportunity presents itself makes a huge difference. Most voters wouldn’t sign these petitions if they knew how bad some of them are. And don’t forget to call the 800-number afterwards.

PERS Benefits Threatened Mortality Rate Tables Discussed

Over the past 2 months, the PERS Board has been trying to figure out how it should implement new “actuarial equivalency factors” which are based in large part on life expectancy tables. For members of SEIU Local 503, OPEU, this is important because the wrong implementation can potentially violate PERS participants’ rights and result in a reduced monthly benefit compared to what the benefit would have been without the implementation. The potential benefit loss depends on the member’s age at retirement as well as other specifics of the members situation, such as account balance. In this whole debate, nobody is arguing that the new mortality rate tables should not be implemented—it’s just a question of how.

PERS staff have made a recommendation for an implementation method, called the 5-Year Wear-Away, which SEIU Local 503 and other PERS Coalition members feel deprive PERS members of fiduciary and contract rights. Its primary weakness is that it applies the new rate tables retroactively to already-earned service credits (or years worked). In the solution backed by SEIU Local 503, OPEU and the PERS Coalition, already earned service credits are untouched, and the new tables apply to future service. This proposal is called the “Multi-Segment Approach.”

A subcommittee of the PERS Board has held a series of hearings about the mortality rate tables problem. Its’ subcommittee Chair, Dawn Morgan, will be bringing a recommendation to the January full PERS Board meeting. The subcommittee meets again in December 2001. The earliest implementation date for any method would be January 1, 2003.

The situation the subcommittee faces is that they have a recommendation from their staff to implement using the “5-Year Wear-Away Approach.” This recommendation is also supported by most of the public employers that are active in the debate.

To express your concerns and to urge support for the Multi-Segment Approach, please call the members of the subcommittee that will be making the recommendation to the full PERS Board before their December meeting. Chair: Dawn Morgan, DHS; Todd Schwartz; Pat Brown; and George Russel.