

Initiatives 2002

The list of measures that voters will consider this year is beginning to come together, now that the deadline for submitting signatures has passed. While the Secretary of State has until August 5 to verify the signatures on initiatives, voters will consider two referrals from the recent special session of the Legislature — both recommended for approval by the SEIU Local 503, OPEU Board of Directors — at a special election on September 20. They are:

- ◆ **Measure 19:** Permits taking money (\$150 million) from the Education Endowment Fund.
- ◆ **Measure 20:** Raises the cigarette tax to 60¢.

On November 5, voters will consider five referrals from the regular 2001 session of the Legislature, as well as those measures placed on the ballot by signature. As of presstime for *The Oregon Public Employee*, the initiatives have not had their signatures verified and, therefore, are also not numbered. That task will conclude by August 5. Here is the ballot measure initiative that will be of critical interest to SEIU Local 503, OPEU members:

Paycheck Deception: The Sizemore measure to prohibit payroll deduction for "political purposes" without the employee's written permission. This measure will cripple our Union's political power. This measure is similar to ones defeated in past years and is just as damaging to the rights of public employees. Bill Sizemore put this measure on the ballot.

Sizemore and the people who support him have used the initiative process repeatedly to do damage to public services and to public employees. If the "paycheck deception" measure is passed, the means public employees, acting together through our unions, have to protect our jobs and the programs we work in will be severely reduced. Here's how:

- This measure, if passed, would reduce the right that public employees have to participate in the political process that all other Oregonians have.
- It would reduce the money that public employees have available to participate in the political process.
- From local government to the federal government, the political process determines the pay and benefits and the programs we work in.

Whether we're talking about highway funds or collective bargaining rights; whether we're talking about programs that benefit seniors or health care; whether we're talking about support for public higher education or PERS, decisions that affect all of these things are determined by the political process.

Paycheck deception will be on the ballot. It needs to be defeated — for the sake of our jobs and for the sake of the quality public services and public education that Oregonians depend on.

Victory of PEBB

Part-time workers won an important victory with the Public Employee Benefits Board, the agency which provides health insurance to state employees.

PEBB voted to continue for another year a subsidy of the part-timer workers' health plan, a subsidy that makes the health insurance affordable and reasonable. But, it took the active lobbying and testimony of SEIU Local 503, OPEU members to demonstrate the importance of part-time health insurance to a workforce that enables the employer to be flexible enough to meet the needs of Oregonians.

About 700 part-time workers are a growing part of a work force that delivers services in a unique, flexible manner. It has been a goal of the Governor and the State of Oregon to create policies that provide affordable health care for low-income workers. The current PEBB part-time health insurance plan is consistent with this goal and the mission of PEBB.

Some of the money for this will come from PEBB reserves and some from BUBB reserves. There may be some very modest increases in premiums for part-

Homecare Workers Celebrate Mileage Reimbursement Reduction Stopped; Unity Picnic—Members Share Food, Fun and Ideas

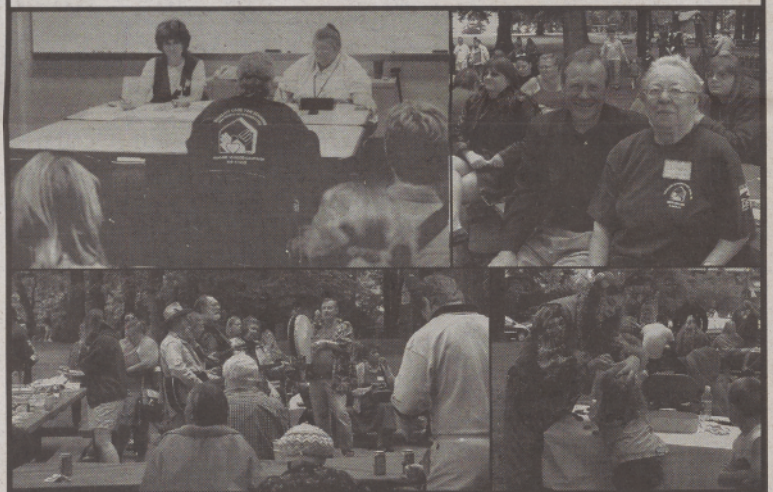
Cutting mileage reimbursement to volunteers is outrageous. Cutting mileage reimbursement to workers in the midst of contract negotiations is a possible unfair labor practice. Fortunately, swift action by SEIU Local 503, OPEU homecare workers and organizers in late June stopped the cuts — including those for the volunteers not represented by the Union.

About this same time, a weekend picnic for homecare workers, their clients and families in the Portland area drew more than 200 — and the SEIU-recommended candidate for governor, Ted Kulongoski.

Arguing that people are more important than pizza, Union homecare workers testified at an Office of Medical Assistance Programs hearing that a possible reimbursement of 9¢ a mile for homecare workers who drive wheelchair-accessible vans is unfair, when pizza delivery people receive 18¢ a mile. Also, a call to the management negotiator for homecare workers stopped the potential unfair labor practice in its tracks.

On the bargaining front, however, things appear to be moving much slower — though we thwarted the state's effort to remove many workers from the bargaining unit. At the present time, the next talks are scheduled to take up July 22.

The Union has given homecare workers who work in clients' homes, often isolated from one another, a means to get together to share experiences and ideas and to negotiate for better pay and benefits. The picnic showed homecare workers in the Portland area all of those things.



SEIU Local 503, OPEU homecare workers testify against a proposed reduction of the mileage reimbursement, and gather in Portland for a unity picnic with family and clients — and SEIU-recommended candidate for Governor Ted Kulongoski.

timers (a few dollars a month), and some changes in the dental benefits for part-timers. But because of our work, part-timers will avoid having their premiums doubled.

Stephanie Denby-Spencer of the University of Oregon Student Health Department makes it clear why this decision was "critical."

"My job requires medical knowledge," she said. "The university would have a very difficult time finding someone with those skills without the promise of benefits. As it is, I forego some of the treatment my doctor recommends because I can't afford the copay. If the health care became more expensive, it would be impossible."

SEIU Local 503, OPEU representatives on PEBB's design review panel include **Karla Spence**, former Local president and currently homecare coordinator, and **Chuck Mendenhall**, the Union's human resources and benefits director.