

Health Care Voters Unite!

by Maribeth Healey, Executive Director
Oregonians for Health Security

Got health care? You are one of the lucky few. Nearly one million Oregonians lacked health care coverage at one point in the past two years. Over 80% were from families with someone who was working or looking for work.

Health care is becoming a bigger and bigger fight in contract negotiations in Oregon and across the country. Health insurance premiums have increased at double-digit rates for the past five years.

One result of increasing health care costs is that employers are attempting to pass more costs onto workers in the form of higher premiums, co-pays, and deductibles. In one survey, 42% of Oregon employers surveyed said they would increase the percentage of premium/plan cost contributed by employees and 38% said they would increase cost-sharing provisions such as deductibles, co-pays/co-insurances and out-of-pocket maximums. (Mercer Human Resources, National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans 2003)

The increasing costs of health care make it more difficult to negotiate on workplace issues, wage increases and other benefits. We need to maintain fully paid health insurance as the standard for all employers. This will be our fight in the 2005 legislature and at the bargaining table. Oregon is one of only a few states to offer fully-paid family health care benefits to state employees. We must maintain these benefits. (Municipal Workers Feeling Insurance Pinch, The Associated Press, October 21, 2003.)

Health care is a top issue in the election this year and an area where the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, has a plan that will reduce the number of uninsured and reduce costs for employers.

Oregonians for Health Security, along with SEIU International's Americans for Health Care are designing common sense solutions to pass in State legislatures from Augusta, Maine to Salem, Oregon.

We are finding Oregonians who want to join us by becoming "health care voters" by pledging to support candidates who will stand for quality, affordable and secure health care. Electing pro-affordable health care candidates at the local, State and national level will help find solutions to the health care crisis. Join us! Sign up to be a health care voter at:

<http://www.oregoniansforhealthsecurity.org>.

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“By educating and electing pro-affordable health care candidates from Laurie Monnes Anderson for State Senate in Gresham to John Kerry for President, we can improve access to health care and reduce costs. That's what I'll be working for this year.”

Barney Gorter
SEIU retiree and health care voter



SEIU International convention highlights healthcare and finding ways to win for working families

by Kathie Best, President

Having just attended the SEIU Convention in San Francisco, I'm reminded about the importance of being part of a national movement to improve the quality of life for working families in this country.

Whether it's expanding access to healthcare for millions of people, creating secure jobs that pay a family wage, or protecting the rights of workers everywhere to organize and have a voice on the job, we must engage in these fights nationally, if not globally.

At the convention we adopted a four-year plan. Nationally we will work to build SEIU in the South and Southwest to increase the number of union workers in America. We also plan to organize more workers in our core industries like hospitals, long-term care, building services, and the public sector. Politically we plan to ensure accountability – the International is setting up a \$1 million

fund to support races against incumbents who betray us.

Here at home, healthcare and tax reform are key issues in our pursuit of better wages, benefits and working conditions. Our success on these issues will result in contracts we can once again get excited about.

Please turn out when called upon to do so, and support these issues and our contract campaigns. And get involved in the upcoming federal election to win for working families. Act locally, win globally.



Local 503's delegation to the SEIU International's convention.



Members Cynthia Harold, Mary Springer, and Darlene Wright join 15,000 SEIU members in an early morning march across the Golden Gate Bridge, demanding that this country bridge the gap between our health care system and the health care needs of working Americans.

Getting our message out: what we do to win public support

Public opinion affects all unions, but especially public sector unions. When we are under attack, public opinion influences whether politicians support us or oppose us. That can make the difference between winning and losing.

The public perspective

Lots of factors determine what average people think about public employees. It's crucial that the public understands how our struggles affect the community. Better wages mean people stay in their jobs longer. That means more experienced workers and better public services.

We talk to the public in different ways – through earned media (coverage we don't have to pay for like articles and editorials in newspapers), paid advertising (television, radio, billboards, newspapers), statements by coalition groups, and talking to our family, neighbors, and friends.

One way to influence public opinion is through media coverage including news reports and editorials. To get this coverage we send out press releases and we meet with editorial boards. We develop relationships with reporters and we have members available to speak with reporters when they call us looking for an opinion.

An example of successful media work was an editorial in the Statesman Journal titled

"University staffers deserve fair contract". This editorial didn't just happen. Bargaining team members helped craft a message and spent time on media training to learn how to best deliver it. Our Executive Director, PR director and team members visited editorial boards throughout the state to meet editors and let them know what was happening. We talked about the important services that our OUS members provide every day of the year.

It takes a lot of groundwork and many calls to reporters and program directors before a story makes it to the newspaper or airwaves. Some stations and papers flatly refuse to cover union rallies. Sometimes other events interfere with our efforts to tell our story. At the PERS hearings in February, the court room corridors were filled with reporters and camera crews. Unfortunately, they had no interest in the PERS hearing. They were there to cover a murder trial!

SEIU's commitment to building a positive public image

As an organization, we are committed to building a positive public image for public employees. SEIU helps fund both Oregonians for Health Security and Citizens for Oregon's Future Today, two coalition groups that educate about health care and taxation. Our Board of Directors has just created another position in the

Public Relations department to help us get more and better media coverage throughout Oregon.

We may not have the advertising budget that Coca-Cola has, but we do have tens of thousands of members who provide quality services that our communities rely on. As always, our members are our best resource. ■

What we can do to help:

- 1 Tell your organizer about interesting things that happen in your workplace or agency. We may be able to get press coverage about them.
- 2 Talk to your neighbors, friends and relatives so they understand that our fight for affordable health care, living wages, and funding for public services benefits our communities. Let them know about the quality public services you provide.
- 3 Whenever you talk to the media, give them your name and say that you are a member of SEIU before you mention where you work. For example, "I'm Jane Doe, a member of SEIU Local 503. I drive a truck for ODOT."