



## May 21: Five thousand march for fairness

The streets of Salem were purple when we marched to the Capitol for affordable health care for all and a fair contract – to make progress on wages, health insurance benefits, and to address the inequities created by two years of a step freeze. We heard from members across Oregon: Nancy Weaver (Portland Metro area), Deon Chandler (Eastern Oregon), Carol Ann Mickey (Southern Oregon), Barbara Casey (Statewide Strategy Committee), Sonya Reichwein (Willamette Valley), Sandra Huckleberry (the Coast), and Greg Ledbetter (Bargaining Team Chair). Legislators Jeff Merkley and Phil Barnhart gave their support. Joe DiNicola, Leslie Frane, and Tim Nesbitt inspired us. But most uplifting was the great show of unity – members with their families fighting for fairness.

“All those people, that energy! It was so inspiring to see so many SEIU members and their families. I really felt a sense of unity. We are truly part of a large, energetic, forward-looking group that is out to change things.”

Deanna Berglund is a Grant Technician at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

## Legislators forced to go on record on health care

by Arthur Towers, Political Director

The Oregon Senate passed legislation to make health care more affordable, but at press time, the Oregon House of Representatives had denied a full debate on the affordable health care package.

Although chances to pass these bills may look bleak, SEIU members forced legislators to take a stand on health care. We lobbied, wrote letters, came to rallies, and marched for affordable health care for all.

SEIU Local 503 members Melany Hammang, Linda Ingham, Paula Allen and Barney Gorter were among the many who testified at hearings about the impact out-of-control health care costs have on working families. More than 1,500 members of Local 503 and sister SEIU Local 49 led the lobbying effort, as did a broad range of community organizations. The session-long focus on the profiteering and price gouging by the health care industry helped to protect SEIU members from a backlash created by talk show host Lars Larson, who criticized the level of public employee benefits.

Here's what happened with the bills in the affordable health care package. On June 27, House Republicans defeated motions to bring Senate Bills 501 and 329 to the floor.

Senate Bill 501 would have required the health insurance industry to report how much of our insurance premium goes to



SEIU homecare members joined thousands of seniors and people with disabilities in at rally at the Capitol on April 20 to protect funding for services.

overhead, advertising, and CEO pay compared to how much goes to providing health insurance.

Senate Bill 329 would have expanded the State's prescription drug purchasing pool, allowing hundreds of thousands more Oregonians access to cheaper medication.

Both bills were denied a full debate by a 32-26 party line vote. Every Republican voted against the two motions and every Democrat voted for the two motions. Two legislators were absent.

Senate Bill 1040, which would have required hospitals to fully disclose their

pricing practices also passed the Senate, but is stuck in the House Budget Committee.

All three bills could come back to life, but as the legislature enters its final days, chances for the passage of affordable health care legislation seem slim.

We put health care on the legislative agenda and legislators had to choose between standing up for people in our communities or standing up for health care corporations. A majority of Senators passed with flying colors, but the majority of House of Representative members failed.

## SEIU contracts reached

### Non-medical expense fund and 3% for members at Baker City

Members in Baker City provide water treatment plant services, maintain roads, and work in information technology, the planning department and as front-line office staff. Contract highlights include a 3% increase each year of the three-year contract, adding a 3% step, and a \$5,000 catastrophic fund (to be distributed by a committee) for non-medical expenses, like driving to Boise for cancer treatment.

### City of The Dalles workers win 10-year battle to gain a voice

Bargaining team members felt this round of negotiations went better than any other with City of The Dalles. Wages will increase 8.3% over their three-year contract, plus workers will get an additional step. Members presented a petition with 25 of 27 signatures demanding a Labor Management Committee. After a 10-year struggle, this committee was finally established.

### Workers at LCOG are able to maintain current health plan

Lane Council of Government workers managed to keep their current Preferred Provider Option plan rather than being forced to move to a Health Reimbursement Account plan. Members purpled up every bargaining day, came to bargaining sessions, and held a rally to show strength and reach victory. Workers also won protection against mis-use of temporary employees, expanded grievance timelines, non-discrimination and harassment language, and a 2% increase in each year of the three-year contract.

### Wallowa County members get innovative retiree plan

Besides a 2.5% cost of living increase (COLA) in the first year and a 2 – 4% increase in successive years (based on the Consumer Price Index), members who maintain roads in Wallowa got a new lead worker scale that is 2% above the top wage and an innovative plan for those retiring at age 60 or higher. These workers can draw on their retirement and come back to work the minimum hours that allow them to pay for their health insurance and stay on the County plan. Courts workers in Wallowa won strengthened vacation scheduling language in addition to their COLA's.

## One of the finest trade unionists

by Leslie Frane, Executive Director

**KAREN THOMPSON**  
November 8, 1954 – May 9, 2005

Karen Thompson, president of our homecare local, passed away after a long struggle with cancer. Karen died the way she lived – with dignity, faith, and courage. Until the end, Karen expressed her gratitude and love for her union brothers



and sisters, whose struggle to win health insurance for home care workers enabled Karen to receive good medical care throughout the final stages of her illness.

It would be hard to over-estimate Karen's importance to our union. As a leader, as a source of inspiration, as a symbol of our progress, Karen gave every ounce of

her energy to build our union and to defend the home care program from budget cuts.

When faced with any challenge – whether in contract negotiations or in her own medical needs – she maintained a level of optimism and determination that was infectious. That optimism helped the rest of us to keep struggling when we might otherwise have grown discouraged. Karen will be greatly missed.