

Change to Win focuses on building the strength of the labor movement

by Leslie Frane, Executive Director

On September 27, delegates from seven international unions met in St. Louis to found the Change to Win Federation. Most of the Change to Win unions split from the AFL-CIO in July, determined to build a stronger voice for working families in America.

I was part of the SEIU delegation, along with Bill Howard, an Oregon State Lottery employee who is helping to lead the efforts of Lottery employees to join our union.

Anna Burger, chair of the new federation, expressed the spirit of the group when she said "We are on the way to rekindle the American dream."

The Change to Win Federation will focus on organizing unorganized workers so that we can rebuild the labor movement. SEIU President Andy Stern reminded us that fifty years ago, one in three American workers were in unions. Now it's down to one in eight workers, and only one in twelve in the private sector. Fewer union members means less power for workers. It's that simple.

The Change to Win Federation pledged to create "a lean, mean, organizing machine" and to spend 75% of its \$16 million national budget on organizing unorganized workers. SEIU's share of that money will come from our international union, not from Local 503.

In Local 503, we spend approximately 20% of our resources on organizing unorganized workers, with the rest of our revenue going

to strengthen our existing membership, through contract campaigns, representation, leadership development, communications, political work on behalf of our members' interests, etc.

The Change to Win Federation also committed itself to organizing by industry. In an era of corporate mergers, workers in one industry have more power if they organize into one union. For example, United Airlines employees are divided among six unions. Imagine how much stronger they'd be if they bargained together.

At the Convention, we passed resolutions promoting diversity so that our leadership will reflect our membership. It felt great to elect the first woman ever to head a U.S. labor federation (Anna Burger, from SEIU), and the first African American ever to hold executive office in a U.S. labor federation (Edgar Romney, from UNITE-HERE).

For me, the best part of the convention was listening to the stories of workers from all across the country who are currently trying to organize unions, often against long odds, and to win rights and benefits that those of us who have been in the union for a long time sometimes take for granted.

The American labor movement clearly came to a fork in the road this year. The key to choosing a new path was recognizing that unless we make growth a priority, further decline in union power is inevitable. Based on what I heard at the

convention, I'm convinced that the seven unions in the Change to Win federation are committed to making that change. Now that the speeches are over, we need to turn that commitment into organizing.

"Change to Win is about looking at how we can make America more liveable – to give a living wage and higher standard of living to American workers. We are a strong country and workers should have decent wages and benefits. The Change to Win founding convention was a step forward for the labor movement."



Bill Howard a Service Technician with The Lottery. Bill and other employees at Oregon Lottery are working to form a union with SEIU Local 503.

Homeowners' Bill of Rights for Oregon consumers Members advocate for changes to insurance code and win

by Greg Ledbetter, Consumer Advocate, Department of Consumer and Business Services

Members at Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) saw first hand the effects of insurance company procedures and took action that improved the situation for consumers in Oregon. This is an example of what we can do, as a union, to fight for fairness. Even though this issue was perhaps a non-traditional labor issue, it was important to members at DCBS.

The State of Oregon regulates insurance companies doing business in Oregon. When the profitability declined after September 11, 2001, they implemented underwriting rules and premium increases to offset their losses.

Company policies costly to consumers

Companies would charge consumers with a claim even if they just called to inquire about an occurrence and were told it wasn't covered under their policy, with no money ever being paid.

Under the law, insurance companies were given great discretion in making these decisions. The theory was that there was so much competition, and so many insurance companies, that when consumers were told to shop around for an insurance company after being cancelled, or when they were unhappy with how they were treated, they would not have any difficulty finding reasonably priced replacement coverage.

Workers recommend solutions to industry abuses

Insurance Division employees at DCBS had observed problems and recommended changes to the Insurance Commissioner to better protect consumers from abuses by the industry they regulate.

The problems had gotten to the point that even the Insurance Commissioner stated that it might be a good idea to require more disclosure by insurance companies.

Members advocate legislation to fight back

Concerned SEIU 503 members organized a committee to advocate for consumers in passing legislation in the 2005 session to improve protection for consumers. When the Commissioner formed a task force of industry representatives, our members requested to be included on that committee as a voice for consumers. We participated in drafting what became Senate Bill 118, known as the Homeowners' Insurance Bill of Rights. We also testified to the Senate Committee on behalf of the bill and it ultimately passed both houses and was signed by the Governor.

Members at DCBS took on a fight for fairness - and won!



Greg Ledbetter at Department of Consumer and Business Services, tells how members took action for legislative change that will benefit Oregon consumers. The Homeowners' Consumer Bill of Rights will protect consumers from insurance industry practices.

**Health Insurance
OPEN ENROLLMENT**

Make a choice - don't default

This year, as in some previous years, PEBB is conducting an Open Enrollment period with a "default" placement.

If you live in Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Yamhill, Columbia, Clark (WA), Marion, Polk, Linn, Benton or Lincoln county - and you are enrolled in the Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield Plan - you must re-enroll during the open enrollment period, or PEBB will put you in its "default" plan: Samaritan, for Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties, and Kaiser Added Choice Plan for the other counties listed above.

There are many advantages to the default plans—including lower prescription co-pays for many drugs in the Kaiser plan, and lower co-pays on certain services for both Samaritan and Kaiser—compared to the Regence plan. There is also a \$250 incentive payment (into a flexible spending account) for any one who enrolls in the Kaiser HMO plan for the first time.

However, we want to make sure that all PEBB participants have an opportunity to make their own decisions about what's right for them.

**Don't get "defaulted"!
Re-enroll in the plan that works best for you and your family!**

Notice of Nominations: DCBS Local 440

**Interim Vice President (1 position)
and Stewards (4 positions)**

Nominations Close at 1:00 PM on Thursday, October 20, 2005

To nominate a candidate or for duties of the officers, contact a member of the Nominations Committee: Von Ledbetter at (503) 947-7268 or Barbara Hopkins at (503)947-7598.

Ballots will be mailed to each member mid-November. You may request an absentee ballot by contacting Barbara at Salem HQ: 503-581-1505, x150 or 1-800-452-2146, x150.

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Pressure from seniors and PERS Coalition lessens blow for retired members

PERS Board goes forward with plan to collect from retirees



Retirees stopped in the Governor's office on their way to the PERS Board meeting on September 23. They presented the Governor's aide with petitions filled out by retirees from all over the state. From left: Governor's Aide receiving letters from retiree Len Cleary; Robert Gourley (behind Cleary); Dean Hulbert; John Hawkins; Natalia Letson; Dave Cleveland.

Despite pressure we have brought to bear on the PERS Board through calls, emails, and a big turnout at the PERS Board meeting, the Board decided to proceed with a plan to collect so-called overpayments from current retirees. But they have adopted an approach which could be called the least pain strategy.

The idea is to stretch out the collection over a period of time based on an actuarial estimate of an individual's lifespan, rather than to attempt to collect any lump sum amounts. In addition, the least pain approach would not charge interest for the time since 1999 or for the future life span of the individual. This is a much better position than the one announced previously.

Although the PERS Board agreed that they liked the approach in concept, they will not likely take formal action on it until their November or December 2005 meeting. Benefits would be recalculated as of April 1, 2006.

However, it is still the position of our PERS Coalition that the Supreme Court's Strunk decision forbids such collections from current retirees. Our PERS Coalition attorney, Greg Hartman, is very firm in his conviction that the proposed PERS action is a violation of Strunk, and it is very likely that our coalition will launch further court action to prevent the implementation of the least pain strategy.

For some members of SEIU's Retirees local, it was their first-ever SEIU Retiree action, and several were brand new members who joined because of our PERS campaign. Along with us were retirees from AFSCME, the Oregon Education Association (OEA), the Laborers Union, and others.

This is a battle that will clearly go on for some time, both on the legal front and on the political front. Stay tuned...