

LERC funding secured

The Labor Education and Research Center is a program at the University of Oregon helping rank and file union members hone their leadership skills. Through recent budget cuts, LERC has been cut substantially. This is a small program, but it is the one program in state government that specifically is geared to labor union education.

In the final stretch of the legislative session, it looked unlikely that funds would be earmarked for LERC. SEIU lobbied in coalition with other labor unions - in particular American Federation of Teachers-Oregon and the AFL-CIO - to get specific funding increases for LERC. However, the funds were going to be added to a catch-all category from which LERC might not have been able to draw down the money.

Senator Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin) stepped in. He has been a strong labor ally for years. Senator Devlin stopped the LERC budget hearing to make a phone call to the President of the UofO. He got the President to testify via speaker phone that he would personally commit to ensuring that LERC would get the increased funding. Committee Chair Larry Galizio also deserves special credit for helping to get this on the record. LERC will be able to expand their important services to hundreds of labor activists who want to build the labor movement.

Department of Human Services Still Fighting for Funding

One of our toughest fights this session was to improve the quality of care for abused and neglected kids in Oregon. Front-line workers at the Department of Human Services protect kids who are in danger. The state wanted to increase case workers so that each case worker would have a smaller case load. However, DHS wanted to pay for this by eliminating more than a hundred assistants (SSAs). Case workers, assistants, and others who protect these children were up in arms for two reasons. One, workload would go through the roof and two, each child would have less protection and attention.

SSAs and case workers across the state rallied to fight the cuts. They fought it in labor-management discussions and in the legislature. Workers testified in budget hearings. Child welfare workers from eastern Oregon made the trip over the mountains and made a persuasive case. While we haven't won this fight yet, we are working with legislators to get the funding in 2008.



"We worked hard to win funding last session for SSAs and CETs, who serve a critical role for both child welfare staff and client families. We have continued the fight since session. Because we elected pro-worker legislators they've had open doors to workers so that we can explain why the management staffing proposal won't work."

Barbara Casey, DHS, CAPE Chair