Unions

continued from page 1

ment initiatives they don't like.

Organizers of the right-to-work movement have seized upon recent economic struggles to suggest that states could gain jobs by making their labor policies more favorable toward business.

A report by the Congressional Research Service last year noted that right-to-work states had stronger employment during the past decade but lower average wages. The report stopped short of attributing that to right-to-work policies, however.

Supporters of such laws contend employees shouldn't be forced to pay fees to a union to get or keep a job. But unions contend the fees are fair because federal law requires them to represent all employees in a bargaining unit regardless of whether they join the union.

Unions have been coordinating their efforts to fight the proposals

Most state right-to-work laws were enacted in the 1940s and 1950s. But businesses and conservative lawmakers, working through groups such as the American Legislative Exchange Council, have mounted a new push as union membership has dwindled and the competition for jobs has intensified among states.

Indiana in 2012 became the first state in more than a decade to enact a right-to-work law. The movement's biggest victory came later that year, when Republicans in the traditional union stronghold of Michigan followed suit even though thousands of union protesters thronged the Capitol.

"What we're seeing is a lot of states are looking and saying, 'Hey, if Michigan can do it, why can't we?'" said Vincent Vernuccio, director of labor policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a free-market think tank based in Midland, Mich.

Vernuccio has traveled Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington state and elsewhere encouraging conservatives to press the issue.

At a conference in Chicago last August that brought together hundreds of Republican officials and business leaders, Missouri Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder publicly predicted that his state's lawmakers would place right-to-work on the November 2014 ballot.

"We need to ignite a series of prairie fires in other states. It helps us pass it in Missouri if Wisconsin kicks over the bee hive," Kinder told the audience.

There's no indication that Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker plans to pursue right to work as a follow up to his successful 2011 push to limit collective bargaining rights for public workers, which sparked noisy around-the-clock protests at the Capitol. But others are embracing Kinder's strategy.

"If a labor-related issue was on the ballot in multiple states at the same time, labor would have to diffuse their resources," said Chris Littleton, a consultant and former tea party leader who is backing the right-to-work initiative in Ohio.

Unions have been coordinating their efforts to fight the proposals. Officials from the Missouri AFL-CIO met recently with union leaders in Ohio. Some union leaders also have looked to Colorado, where a right-to-work measure was defeated by voters in 2008.

Second Chances

PHOTO COURTESY OF FBI

The FBI's Portland Division has named the Big Brothers, Big Sisters' "Second Chance Program" as the recipient of the 2013 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award for Oregon. The Second Chance program pairs adult mentors with youth ages 12 to 17 who are currently involved in the juvenile justice system. Pictured (from left) are: Tami Wallis, Program Manager, Second Chance, Big Brothers, Big Sisters; Chabre Vickers, Director of Community Relations and Diversity Programs, Big Brothers, Big Sisters; and Special Agent in Charge, FBI, Kevin Rickett.

Survey

continued from page 1

Barack Obama called income inequality "the defining challenge of our time."

Obama also called for an increase in the federal minimum wage, now $7.25. Republican leaders in the House oppose an increase, arguing that it would slow hiring.

Several states are acting on their own. California, Connecticut and Rhode Island raised their minimum wages this year. Last month, voters in New Jersey approved an increase in the minimum to $8.25 an hour from $7.25.

Income inequality has steadily worsened in recent decades, according to government data and academic studies. The most recent census figures show that the average income for the wealthiest 5 percent of U.S. households, adjusted for inflation, has surged 17 percent in the past 20 years. By contrast, average income for the middle 20 percent of households has risen less than 5 percent.

Income inequality has steadily worsened in recent decades

The AP survey collected the views of private, corporate and academic economists on a range of issues. Among the topics were what policy decisions, if any, the Federal Reserve might announce after it ends a policy meeting Wednesday.

Three-quarters of the economists surveyed don't think the Fed is ready to announce a pullback in its economic stimulus. Speculation has been rising that the Fed will soon scale back its $85 billion in monthly bond purchases because of the economy's steady gains. The bond purchases have been intended to keep long-term loan rates low to induce people to borrow and spend.

Most of the economists think the Fed will begin slowing its bond buying in January or March.

And most don't think the economy needs the Fed's help. Just over half say they believe growth could reach a healthy 3 percent annual pace even without the Fed's extraordinary help.

As Janet Yellen prepares to succeed Ben Bernanke as chairman early next year, most of the economists expect the Fed to become more "dovish" — that is, more focused on fighting unemployment than on worrying about higher inflation that might result from the Fed's actions. The Senate could confirm Yellen as soon as this week.

The economists are also confident that U.S. growth is picking up. Three-quarters said the recovery, which officially began 4.5 years ago, has yet to reach its peak. And nearly all think the next recession is at least three years away; half think it's at least five years away.

The economists forecast that growth will average 2.9 percent in 2014. That would be the healthiest annual pace since 2005.

One reason they expect healthier growth is that the effects of tax increases and government spending cuts that kicked in early this year should fade.

A budget bill that passed a pivotal test in the Senate on Tuesday will reverse some of those spending cuts. That should add slightly to economic growth. The bill also removes the threat of another government shutdown next year.

Among the economists' other views:

— The Obama administration's health care law will make little or no difference to the job market. About two-fifths said the law would cost jobs. None said it would increase hiring. The law has drawn fierce opposition from many small business owners, who say it will raise hiring costs by requiring companies with 50 or more employees to provide coverage starting in 2015.

— The stock market isn't in a bubble. While the Dow Jones industrial average reached record highs earlier this year, most economists said that higher profits largely justified the gains.

— Europe will keep growing and avoid a recession in 2014. But growth will remain so tepid that inflation will be nearly nonexistent.

Arroyo

continued from page 1

share her artistry with a new generation of opera singers; Herbie Hancock has established himself as one of the most innovative musicians in the world, constantly breaking musical barriers and redefining the art of jazz; Billy Joel's melodies have provided the soundtrack of our lives for over four decades making him one pop music's most prolific and memorable singers and songwriters; the remarkable breadth and range of Shirley MacLaine's acting has left an indelible impression over a nearly 60-year career on stage and screen; from his legendary performance at Woodstock to his sweep at the 2000 Grammys and beyond, Carlos Santana's artistry transcends genres while entertaining millions."

The Skanner News interviewed Arroyo about her life and career in April 2005, when she visited the Northwest. To celebrate her award we are reprinting part of the story here.

Soprana Serenades Singers.

Martina Arroyo's biography reads like a Who's Who of 20th-century opera music. The diva has performed in the world's most prestigious concert halls. She's made more than 50 recordings. And she has opened at the Metropolitan Opera in New York three times. Revered for her interpretative powers, she's a passionate advocate for her art.

"There are, of course, these highfalutin reasons why people should come to the opera, but the first one is because you're going to love it," she told The Skanner News. "Bring your ears and your heart and the rest of you will be taken care of, really."

Arroyo first heard opera music as a child in New York.

"My parents turned on the opera – Saturday afternoon opera – so even without knowing what I was hearing … I heard classical music," she says. "Then the Opera workshop of Hunter College used to meet in our auditorium and we heard the singers. And of course, as young girls we would imitate them, because opera for us was very different sounding"