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## *Oregon initiative targeted for November ballot*

# AFL-CIO, allies launch Fair Share Health Care initiative

SALEM — The Oregon AFL-CIO filed a ballot initiative Jan. 27 that would require Oregon employers with more than 4,500 workers to spend at least 9 percent of their payroll on employee health insurance.

The Fair Share Health Care initiative is modeled after a bill that passed the Maryland Legislature last month. Maryland is the first state to require large corporations to provide health care for their employees. A similar bill has been introduced in the Washington Legislature. Oregon and Washington are among nearly 40 states using the labor-backed Maryland legislation as a model to enact legislation or pass voter initiatives.

“It’s irresponsible and costly when nonunion businesses boost their profits by denying health care to their employees and then let taxpayers pick up the slack,” said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. “The Oregon AFL-CIO filed this initiative to force large profitable employers to pay their share toward a healthy workforce and healthy Oregon economy.”

Once given clearance for a ballot title, the state labor federation will begin collecting the more than 100,000 signatures needed to qualify for the November ballot.

“The Oregon AFL-CIO has a history of successfully putting initiatives on the ballot,” said Jennifer Sargent, public relations/research director for the state labor federation. “We have the internal program in place to do that, and we’re seeing a big re-

sponse from the community for support.”

The initiative already has the backing of three of the state’s largest labor organizations: the 30,000-member Service Employees International Union Local 503, the 25,000-member Oregon Council 75 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the 18,000-member United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555. Locals 555 and 503 are affiliated with the new Change to Win labor federation.

If passed, the Fair Share Health Care initiative would apply to 12 Oregon employers, including Wal-Mart, Oregon Health & Science University, Providence Health System, Legacy Health System, Kaiser Permanente, Intel, Nike, Safeway Inc., Albertsons Inc. and Kroger Co.’s Fred Meyer Stores.

Most of those employers already provide health insurance for their employees, with one glaring exception: Wal-Mart, which employs more than 11,000 workers.

The State of Oregon doesn’t keep tabs on how many employees of private companies receive taxpayer-financed medical insurance, but other states do. And Wal-Mart is the leader in virtually every state.

In Washington, for example, more than 3,100 Wal-Mart employees were benefiting from state-subsidized health coverage in 2004. The cost to taxpayers: \$9.25 million. (See related article on Page 3.)

“It’s not fair that responsible employers play by the rules while some companies shift their health care costs to other employers or the taxpayer,” said Gene Pronovost, president of Local 555 and a co-sponsor of the Fair Share initiative. “UFCW supports initiatives that correct these abuses.”

Washington State’s Fair Share Health Care bill would require companies of 5,000 employees or more to spend 9 percent of payroll on employee health care. The bill passed out of the House Commerce and Labor Committee last month. The new Maryland law (the Legislature overrode a veto by Republican Gov. Robert Ehrlich) requires any private employer with more than 10,000 employees in the state to spend at least 8 percent of its payroll for workers’ health care.

Chamberlain said that by requiring large corporations to report what they are spending on health care for their employees and requiring them to pay their fair share, a Fair Share Health Care Act in Oregon would:

- Reduce the bill Oregon taxpayers pay to cover profitable employers’ labor costs;
- Help alleviate the financial pressures facing Oregon as it struggles to meet a growing need for Medicaid; and
- Level the playing field between companies providing good jobs and benefits to their workers and those that don’t.

## *Independent union trying to raid ATU #757 ambulance unit*

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

In the next month, 532 American Medical Response (AMR) ambulance workers in the Portland metro area will have a choice to make: Stay with the local union that has represented them for nearly two decades, or leave to join a startup union headquartered in Sacramento, California.

Ambulance work is changing. Thirty years ago, “ambulance drivers” picked up bodies and took them to the hospital — or the morgue. But life-saving medical technologies have evolved, and today, training requirements for “emergency medical services (EMS) professionals” include having an associates degree and 65 units of continuing education per year.

Paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are professional lifesavers who take many of the same risks as police officers and firefighters. But they feel underpaid and under-respected compared to their public sector counterparts, and compared to the hos-



**Pro-ATU emergency medical services workers Doug Weinrick and Dale Montgomery wait in their ambulance for the next call. An independent group is trying to raid their union at American Medical Response in Portland.**

pital workers who take up where they leave off.

To close this gap, some have formed

unions. Portland-area EMS workers joined Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 in 1988. Since that

time, in every union contract they have won improved pay, benefits and working conditions.

Nationally, ambulance service is mostly nonunion. A few local governments provide ambulance service directly, but most grant exclusive contracts to private companies.

At ambulance companies like AMR, unionized units are few and far between, and are divided among at least a half-dozen national unions. The largest of those is the International Association of EMTs and Paramedics (IAEP), which is a subdivision of the 1.8-million-member Service Employees International Union.

Just under two years ago, a pair of SEIU staffers serving an IAEP unit in Northern California came up with a plan to leave SEIU — and take their unit with them as a new stand-alone union for workers. While still employed by SEIU, they called the unit’s stewards and elected officers to a meeting in Livermore, Calif., where they pitched their proposal in a 30-page PowerPoint presentation. The group quickly gathered

member signatures and filed for an election to determine which union had the most support in the unit.

SEIU, stung by the betrayal, fought tooth and nail, but lost the election. It also sued the two staffers — Torren Colcord and Tim Bonifay — for fraudulent concealment, misappropriation of trade secrets and breach of fiduciary duty. The case goes to trial Feb. 24 in Alameda County Superior Court.

Colcord and Bonifay christened their union the National Emergency Medical Services Association (NEMSA).

Since then, they’ve made a bid to go national, chiefly by “raiding” already-unionized units affiliated with other unions. Colcord, NEMSA’s president, told the NW Labor Press the union now has 3,200 members in 13 units, five of which were taken from other unions. All but about 800 of those were in the original Northern California SEIU unit.

In December, a Fort Wayne, Ind., unit of about 100 AMR employees became the latest to join NEMSA, after

(Turn to Page 2)











## The Working Families Party rewrites the script for pro-worker politics

We may have found a new answer to the question, "What's the matter with Kansas?"

Author Thomas Frank posed that question in the title of his much-cited book that explores "how conservatives won the heart of America." It's a question that resonates in every state where working people continue to vote for politicians who support trade deals that trash our jobs, bail out corporations that renege on their retirement promises and let employers like Wal-Mart encourage their workers to sign up for health insurance paid by us taxpayers.

The new answer to that question comes from New York, where the Working Families Party is using old-fashioned issues organizing and an electoral system that empowers minor parties to force both Democrats and Republicans to pay attention to its pro-worker agenda.

New York may be a blue state in presidential elections, but it has a Republican governor, and Republicans control one legislative chamber. So if the Working Families Party can force a minimum wage increase through New York's Legislature and override a gubernatorial veto, as it did last year, perhaps it offers something worth copying in red states like Kansas and blue states like Oregon and Washington.

What Frank dissects in his book about Kansas is the politics of diversion. Working people might wake up worrying about the cost of health care 50 weeks out of the year. But, somehow, during the two weeks before an election, they start obsessing about their right to keep their guns or someone else's right to marry a person of the same sex — and those issues suddenly overwhelm the debate about how we can make health care more affordable.

Then those hot-button social issues start to fade the day after the election, and working people start worrying all over again about rising health care costs and their shrinking family budgets.

The antidote to the politics of diversion is the politics of focus: Stick to the issues that matter and keep talking to voters, 52 weeks a year, about what their elected officials are doing to help or hurt their jobs and their families' well-being.

I noted in this column last year how the AFL-CIO's Working America program is doing exactly that. But the Working Families Party does that and more. Because it is a political party, it has the right to nominate candidates in federal, state and local elections. And, because New York's election laws encourage major party candidates to seek and run with the endorsement of minor parties, the Working Families Party has maximized the power of its ballot line to bring wayward Democrats home on pocketbook issues and attract Republicans who support a good jobs agenda.

New York's system of voting is called "fusion." It sounds arcane, but we used to have this system in Oregon and Washington, until big-money interests forced its repeal in the early 1900s. It allows minor parties to co-endorse candidates of the major parties and present those candidates separately to the voters on the minor party's ballot line; then it combines or "fuses" the votes that candidates receive when they appear more than once on the ballot. With this system, minor parties are no longer forced to play the role of spoilers in elections. When they organize well on issues that resonate with the voters, they can bring the major party candidates to their doorstep, begging for that extra

listing on the party's ballot line that can mean the difference between winning and losing a close election.

The experience in New York also shows that working people, who may be divided over the Democratic and Republican Party platforms on social issues, are often willing to set those concerns aside and cast their votes for candidates of either party who support pro-worker positions on economic issues. When they can vote for a candidate on the ballot line of a party that represents clear solutions to their everyday concerns, they're no longer faced with the dilemma of wasting their vote in order to send a message to the top candidates.

Fusion voting gives more power to the voters, who can both send a message to a candidate and put that candidate in office with votes attached to their message.

There's a song about New York that says if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. The Working Families Party is taking its show on the road now with the promise of focus and fusion as the means to force politicians to deliver for working families again, state by state. That show will be playing at the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Hall in Portland Friday, Feb. 3, and it could be ready for a long run.

For more information, go to [www.oregonwfp.org](http://www.oregonwfp.org).

*(Full disclosure: During the past month, I have been paid to provide consulting services to the Working Families Party in Oregon and Washington. But I was not asked to write this column, nor was I compensated for writing this column.)*

*Tim Nesbitt is a former president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.*

## Bush makes recess appointments to NLRB

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President George W. Bush last month made two recess appointments to the five-member National Labor Relations Board. On Jan. 4 he appointed Republican Peter Kirsanow, and on Jan. 17 he named Democrat Dennis Walsh to serve on the Board. Under recess appointments they can serve until the adjournment of Congress in 2007.

This marks the first time that the NLRB has been at full strength since December 2004. The current members are Republicans Robert Battista, chair, and Peter Schaumber, and Democrat

Wilma Liebman.

During the holiday recess Bush also appointed Ronald Meisburg to serve as general counsel of the NLRB. Meisburg served on the NLRB from Jan. 12, 2004 to Dec. 8, 2004, also under a recess appointment by Bush.

Walsh served as a Board member from Dec. 30, 2000 to Dec. 20, 2001 under a recess appointment by President Bill Clinton, and again from Dec. 17, 2002, to Dec. 16, 2004, after being nominated by Bush and confirmed by the Senate. During the past year Walsh has been on Liebman's legal staff.

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## ...Labor Honor Roll

(From Page 2)

Union leaders who sat with Stack on the Labor Press board in the early 1900s included Otis D. Forte of the Brewery Trades; Frank R. Raebig of the Metal Trades; W.F. Otto of the Printing Trades; and Ben T. Osborne of the Building Trades. Osborne was the leader of Iron Workers Local 29 and also served as an international union vice president. He led the Oregon State Federation of Labor as its executive secretary-treasurer from 1926 until his death in 1938.

**OTTO A. HARTWIG**, of Portland Painters Local 10, was president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor from 1916-1924 and was president of the Portland Cooperative Labor Temple Association when the Portland Labor Temple at SW Fourth Avenue and Jefferson Street was built. The cornerstone-laying ceremonies took place on Labor Day 1920. That structure was replaced in June 1966 by a new Labor Center at 201 SW Arthur St. The old Labor Temple was torn down in 1967 as part of an Urban Renewal project. The labor movement lost the Labor Center in 1978 when a bank foreclosed on the mortgage. Prior to his death in 1972, Hartwig worked as an industrial safety consultant. He was a member of Painters Local 10 for 65 years.

**TWO MEN** with long and productive years in the labor movement were Gust Anderson and Phil Brady. Anderson was one of the founders in 1917 of Portland Streetcarman's Local 757 — which later evolved into Amalgamated Transit Union Division 757. In 1923 Anderson was elected secretary-treasurer of the Portland Labor Council, which later became the Multnomah County Labor Council and now is a part of the multi-county Northwest Oregon Labor Council, based in Portland. Anderson held the labor council post until January 1958. Brady was secretary of Teamsters Local 499 for many years and was president of Teamsters Joint Council No. 37. In addition, Brady was president of the Multnomah County Labor Council. Anderson, a Republican, and Brady, a Democrat, both had distinguished careers in the Oregon Legislature at Salem. Anderson died in 1969 at age 81. Brady died at age 87 in 1974.

**CARPENTER B. W. SLEEMAN**, of Portland, was in 1925 elected president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor. He defeated C.M. Rynerson, editor of the Labor Press and a member of Multnomah Typographical Union No. 58. Bert Sleeman, a member of Carpenters Local 226, held the federation office for one year but he served for a number of years as president of the State Council of Carpenters and as a business agent of the old Portland District Council of Carpenters. He died in 1966. Carpenters Local 226 and other locals of the United Brotherhood later merged to form Carpenters Local 247, which is based in its own building on North Lombard Street and Brandon Avenue.

**TWO LEADERS** of the Oregon State Federation of Labor many decades ago were D.E. Nickerson and Paul E. Gurske. Nickerson, a member of Portland Carpenters Local 226, was elected executive secretary-treasurer of the federation at its 1939 convention in Eugene. That was the organization's top job. He had served as president from 1935-1938. Gurske, also of Portland, a member of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, was elected president at the 1939 convention. They served together until 1944. Nickerson died that year. Later, Gurske was appointed by Governor Earl Snell to the Oregon State Industrial Accident Commission. Gurske moved to Arizona after he retired from the state board. Local 226 later became part of Carpenters Local 247.

**HAROLD PRITCHETT** was elected the first president of the International Woodworkers of America when the union was formed and joined the Congress of Industrial Organizations at meetings in 1937 at Portland and in Washington at Tacoma. Worth Lowery succeeded him, followed by Claude Ballard, J.E. Fadling and, in 1951, Al F. Hartung.

**EARL HARTLEY** was an early leader of the Lumber & Sawmill Workers Union. The union now has the name Western Council of Industrial Workers, which is based in Portland. The WCIW is affiliated with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

**KELLEY LOE** served on the staff of the Oregon State Federation of Labor from the 1930s into the 1950s as a lobbyist at the Oregon Legislature and as a publicist and labor historian. He had moved to the Northwest from the Midwest and was a printer and an editor. He became a member of Multnomah Typographical Union No. 58 and before working for the labor federation had been employed by the Labor Press. He was succeeded at the state labor federation by Tom Scanlon, who earlier was on the staff of The Union Register, a newspaper then published by the Lumber & Sawmill Workers and now published by the Western Council of Industrial Workers.

All of the unionists mentioned in this article merit being listed on a Labor Honor Roll as do others who will be mentioned in a later column.

## Kulongoski won't cross NYU picket line

Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski was prepared to cancel a scheduled appearance to speak at a New York University (NYU) School of Law forum Jan. 23 unless it was moved off-campus. The reason: he didn't want to cross a union picket line.

About 1,100 graduate teaching assistants at NYU, a private institution, walked out Nov. 9 to protest the university's refusal to recognize the union and bargain a new contract.

The union — Graduate Student Organizing Committee Local 2110, an affiliate of the United Auto Workers — made history in April 2001 as the first union for graduate teaching assistants at a private university. Their first contract was ratified in January 2002.

However, in 2004, new Bush Administration appointees to the National Labor Relations Board — on a 3-2 vote — reversed a 2000 NLRB decision that graduate assistants at private universities were "employees" and thus entitled

to union representation.

The 2004 ruling didn't bar collective bargaining outright, but it gave private universities the option not to recognize a union. Last August, NYU did just that.

In a letter to students and faculty, administrators said that collective bargaining interfered with academic decision-making and was not needed to protect the interests of graduate students. "We believe that it is of the utmost importance to respect the principle that students are students and not employees."

In a show of support for their TAs, more than 500 professors have moved their classes off campus, so as not to cross picket lines.

During the holiday break, administrators said graduate students who remained on strike when classes resumed in January would lose their stipends. Graduate assistants are primary instructors in 165 of NYU's 2,700 classes, and many more hold recitation sections and

help with grading.

Kulongoski learned of the situation about four days prior to the engagement in New York. His staff and representatives of the UAW spent a frantic weekend Jan. 21-22 looking for an off-campus venue. They found one at a nearby church.

"All my life, I have stood up for working people — from the time I was a bricklayer as a young man, through my years as a labor lawyer and now as governor," Kulongoski told the AFL-CIO's Weekly Update. "We have to stand in solidarity together to make certain that all working people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives."

"I'm proud that Oregon's governor refused to cross the picket line. The right to organize is a fundamental human right. When that right is violated, we must not look away and let that wrong go unnoticed," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain.

## Blumenauer, Baird name new labor liaisons

Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer and Washington U.S. Rep. Brian Baird have named new labor liaisons for 2006.

Willie Smith is taking over for Tom Markgraf in Blumenauer's office and Erin Hyppa is succeeding Harry Glaus on Baird's staff.

Glaus, a retired Teamsters official, has worked at the part-time post for the past seven years.

"I appreciate and commend Harry's distinguished work for this office and

for the people of Southwest Washington," said Baird.

Markgraf has been Blumenauer's labor liaison for seven years, as well. He will work on the congressman's campaign staff, but also has taken a position with Columbia River Crossings to build a new Interstate Bridge linking Oregon and Washington.

Smith joined Blumenauer's staff in January 2005. Prior to that he directed campaigns for Oregon Congresswoman Darlene Hooley and Secretary of State

Bill Bradbury.

Hyppa assumed labor liaison duties in Baird's Third Congressional District on Feb. 1. She has served on Baird's district staff since January 2005. Prior to that she was the Clark County labor liaison and 17th Legislative District field organizer for U.S. Senator Patty Murray's 2004 re-election campaign.

"I am confident Erin will prove excellent at maintaining our strong relationship with the labor community," Baird said.

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# Union card is still a worker's best investment

Forget the lottery or stock market. Carrying a union card is still the best investment a worker can make, according to the latest figures released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The median weekly earnings of full-time union members in 2005 was \$801 — about 29 percent more than nonunion workers' pay (\$622). The difference was even greater among Hispanic union workers (\$713), who made 50 percent more than Hispanic nonunion workers.

And BLS figures show the increase in union members' wages last year was nearly double that of the nonunion — 2.6 percent compared to only 1.6 percent for nonunion workers.

On top of that, a March 2005 National Compensation Survey shows that union workers enjoy better pensions, health and dental insurance, with less out-of-pocket costs.

According to the government survey, 85 percent of union workers participate in pension and health plans, compared to 46 percent of nonunion workers. Seventy-three percent of union workers are offered a defined pension plan by their employers, compared to only 16 percent of the nonunion.

As for out-of-pocket expenses for family health insurance premiums, nonunion workers pay twice as much as unionized workers — 16 percent of the premium cost vs. 32 percent.

Workers are beginning to realize the value of a union card, as membership grew nationally by 213,000 last year (the first increase since 1999). Still, the percentage of union workers remained flat at 12.5 percent — or 15.7 million members. BLS said an

additional 1.5 million people were represented by a union, but were not members.

Last year, women union members' numbers grew by 222,000. The percentage of female union members rose to 11.3 percent in 2005 from 11.1 percent, while male union membership fell to 13.5 percent from 13.8 percent.

In the private-sector, unionists were 7.8 percent of the workforce, while in the public-sector, workers made up 36.8 percent.

In Oregon, union membership was 213,000, down 11,000 from 2004. Union members made up 14.5 percent of the state's workforce. BLS said an additional 18,000 workers were represented by a union, but weren't members). These numbers continue a long-term downward trend in "union density." Comparatively, union workers made up 22.3 percent (222,900) of the Oregon workforce in 1983, the first year that comparable data was available.

Nationwide, in 1983 there were 17.7 million union members (20.1 percent of the workforce).

In Washington State, the number of union members climbed 13,000 to 523,000, but overall union density dropped from 19.3 percent in 2004 to 19.1 percent in 2005. The state added more than 100,000 jobs last year.

Washington continues to rank 6th highest in the nation in terms of the unionization rate. Only New York (26.1 percent), Hawaii (25.8 percent), Alaska (22.8 percent), Michigan and New Jersey (20.5 percent each) have higher rates. Oregon ranked 14th na-

tionwide.

The least-unionized states were South Carolina (2.3 percent), North Carolina (2.9 percent), Arkansas and Virginia (3.3 percent each) and Utah (3.9 percent).

Surveys by the national AFL-CIO indicate that more than half of American workers (57 percent) say they would join a union today if they could.

But workers who try often face an array of employer tactics to suppress their efforts. According to Cornell University's Kate Brofenbrenner, 25 percent of employers illegally fire workers trying to unionize, 75 percent hire outside consultants to run anti-union campaigns, 92 percent force workers to attend closed-door anti-union meetings and, even when workers are successful in forming a union, in one-third of the instances, employers never negotiate a contract.

"In a political climate that's hostile to workers' rights, these numbers illustrate the extraordinary will of workers to gain a voice on the job despite enormous obstacles," said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney.

At the AFL-CIO's request, members of Congress last year introduced the Employee Free Choice Act. The legislation would require employers to recognize a union after a majority of

workers sign cards authorizing union representation. It also would provide for mediation and arbitration of first-contract disputes, and authorize stronger penalties for violation of the law when workers seek a union.

The bill has 208 co-sponsors in the House, including all 10 Democratic U.S. representatives in Oregon and Washington, and 42 co-sponsors in the Senate, including the three Democratic senators from Oregon and Washington.

**The median weekly earnings of full-time union members in 2005 was \$801 — about 29 percent more than non-union workers' pay (\$622).**

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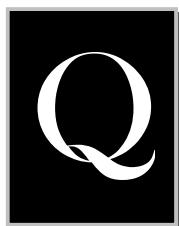
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