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Six building trades unions form Construction Alliance

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Two unions — the Laborers and Operating Engineers left the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department on March 1 to establish the National Construction Alliance with the Carpenters, Teamsters, Bricklayers and Iron Workers. The new alliance will represent roughly 2 million construction workers nationwide.

[At press time, it was not known if the Iron Workers, Bricklayers and Teamsters would leave the BTM, which is part of the national AFL-CIO. The Carpenters disaffiliated four years ago.]

Formation of the National Construction Alliance was announced at a press conference Feb. 14 by Operating Engineers President Vincent Giblin and Laborers President Terry O'Sullivan. At that time, the union officials said they would disaffiliate from the Building Trades Department, effective March 1. The departure, according to Giblin and O'Sullivan, was due to dissatisfaction with the AFL-CIO department's political structure and because it sometimes did not concentrate on bread-and-butter issues of interest to rank-and-file construction workers.

The impact of the National Construction Alliance on statewide and local building trades councils is unclear. Some Laborers and

Operating Engineers locals "will selectively remain" in local building trades councils, Giblin said, assuming the councils are effective. "When the Carpenters and the Teamsters withdrew from the AFL-CIO, a whole host of local building trades councils let them stay to participate, and our speculation is that they would continue to do so," O'Sullivan added.

However, the two international presidents told Workday Minnesota it was likely the National Construction Alliance would be creating its own local structure. O'Sullivan said he had talked with about 25 unionized contractor associations and they all welcomed the changes and the creation of a new organization. He also said Change to Win — the new labor federation — had no role in their decision to leave the building trades. "There is no association between the National Construction Alliance and Change to Win," he said.

The Laborers, Carpenters and Teamsters joined four other unions last year to create the Change to Win Labor federation. The Laborers have maintained their affiliation with the AFL-CIO, but O'Sullivan reiterated that "it is only a matter of when, not if" they leave. Giblin said "the jury is still out" on whether or not

the Operating Engineers will leave the AFL-CIO.

Edward Sullivan, president of the AFL-CIO's Building Trades Department and general president of the Elevator Constructors Union, said in a correspondence to state and local building trades councils that "working members (of the departing unions) should not be punished for the decisions of their leaders. Therefore, we ask you to continue your diligence and your patience as our affiliated unions determine a better path to the future." He said the BTM governing board of presidents will meet soon "to map a definitive course for the building trades."

Bob Shiprack, executive director of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, told the NW Labor Press that he will continue "doing business as we have always done business. None of this stuff has made any sense to me from Day One. We cannot allow the distractions we get from Washington, D.C., to impact our workers and contractors here in Oregon."

John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council — and a member of the Bricklayers Union — has talked to business managers from several of the affected crafts and they all say they do not intend to leave.

Storm Warning Merger madness in utility industry threatens reliability

By ERIC WOLFE

Shortly after making landfall along the Gulf Coast of Florida last October, Wilma was downgraded to a Category 2 hurricane with top winds around 100 mph. Nevertheless, power outages were unprecedented. Over 3 million Florida Power and Light customers lost power, including 98 percent of Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Ten thousand utility poles that were supposed to withstand winds of 119 mph crumpled, 240 substations were knocked out, and Florida regulators launched an investigation to find out why.

But you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to figure this one out. Since 1991, Florida Power and Light has cut operating and maintenance costs per customer by over 35 percent. Between 1995 and 2002 the Florida Power & Light workforce was slashed from 14,500 to 9,800. Between 2002 and 2004 the utility decreased per-customer

tree trimming costs by 5 percent, accompanied by a sharp increase in tree-related outages.

State regulators say that it would take the utility 60 years, at its current pace, to inspect all of its poles.

You might think that Florida Power & Light, chastened by Wilma and under investigation, would embark on a crash program to rehabilitate its infrastructure. The utility has the cash — its stock price has performed almost 20 percent better than the average electric company over the past five years. But Florida Power & Light has found a better use for its money. Recently, the utility announced that its holding company, FPL Group, will purchase Constellation Energy Group — familiar to Californians as one of the out-of-state energy pirates forced to settle with the state's attorney general for gaming California's electricity market in 2000-2001.

The FPL-Constellation marriage was

made possible by the repeal last August of the Public Utility Holding Company Act. But their merger is little more than the advance winds of a monster storm of utility consolidation now gathering on the horizon. For the utility customer who expects reliable service, for the utility employee who depends on a stable employer, for the retiree who relies on a regular dividend from a "safe" utility stock, there may be no safe harbor when the storm arrives.

A World Without PUHCA

For generations, Americans have received electric service from utility companies close to home. The mission of these companies has been to provide everyone with safe, reliable service at the cheapest possible price. State regulators, answerable to the public's elected representatives, have provided the oversight needed to make sure that utility

(Turn to Page 5)



Goodbye, Dubai

Oregon labor unions joined a widening outcry over the Bush Administration-approved sale of major port operations in six U.S. cities to the United Arab Emirates-owned Dubai Ports World. The ports of New York/New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia are currently managed by the P&O Company of Britain. P&O has union contracts with the International Longshoremen's Association at those ports. More than 150 unionists rallied at Terminal 6 in North Portland on Feb. 24 — part of a nationwide event called by the Teamsters, which represents thousands of drivers who work in and around America's ports. "We will not stand by and allow our homeland security to be compromised," General President James Hoffa said in a statement. "This is a bad deal for workers and a bad deal for the security of America's ports." In a statement read at the Portland rally, Oregon U.S. Rep. David Wu, said, "The U.S. prohibits foreign ownership of our airlines and good farmland. We should consider applying such laws to our nation's ports."

Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



Death of telegrams

THE RECENT DEMISE of telegrams as a mode of communication recalls the long-ago life of a labor history-maker, Mrs. O.D. Cook, who was a skilled telegrapher and Morse Code operator. She died in a Portland hospital at age 78 on Friday, Dec. 5, 1958.

The last Western Union telegram was sent on Friday, Jan. 27, 2006. An article in the New York Times said the death of the telegram was a case of Western Union “bowing to the ascendancy of modern technology like e-mail.” Reporter Shelly Freierman also noted that Western Union, which started in Rochester, N.Y., in 1851, “drove the Pony Express ... out of business by offering delivery of a message across the country in less than a day...” compared to 10 days for Pony Express. The NYT added: “In the relatively recent era of e-mail and instant messaging, telegrams were usually delivered by overnight courier services...At the height of business in 1929, more than 200 million telegrams were sent around the world. Just under 21,000 were sent last year.”

TELEGRAPHER COOK preferred using her initials instead of her first and middle names, Ola Delight. Her friends called her “Cookie.” She was born Jan. 21, 1880, in Millersburg, Illinois, and soon moved with her parents to the Deep South. As a young woman she became an accomplished railroad telegrapher and Morse Code operator, working on railroads in Alabama and Georgia. She joined the Railroad Telegraphers Union in 1903.

She became a union organizer shortly after joining the RTU and was an active participant in the early struggles to organize railroad and textile workers in the South. She once described her experiences in these words: “I went through hell for this labor movement. I rode boxcars. I was chased by railroad police. I hid behind depots and I fought them.”

SAMUEL GOMPERS, the founder and first president of the American Federation of Labor, admired O.D. Cook’s courageous organizing and became her friend, referring to her as “daughter.” He appointed her as an AFL organizer and gave her a credential attesting to her connection with the national labor federation. Her AFL role was unpaid but she proudly carried the Gompers credential throughout her life.

In some of the early Textile Workers’ strikes before World War I, Mrs. Cook was assigned to help strikers and their families who had been evicted from company-owned houses. She arranged for setting up tents to house them and established community kitchens to feed them.

HER UNION ACTIVITY resulted in Cook being blacklisted by the railroads in the South, so in 1923 at age 43 she decided to move far away and picked Portland as her new home. By the time she arrived, she was broke. She sought refuge at the YWCA — the Young Women’s Christian Association — where she was given a room and a job washing dishes to pay for her meals and lodging. She soon found a job at the Postal Telegraph office — a competitor to Western Union. Later, she went to work for Western Union where she helped establish Commercial Telegraphers Union Local 92. She represented Local 92 for more than 15 years at the central labor council and the state labor federation. She also maintained a close association with railroad unions and devoted many hours to volunteer work for labor’s Committee on Political Education.

Mrs. Cook never forgot the helping hand extended to her by the YWCA. In 1955 she sparked labor’s participation in financing the construction of a new building for the YWCA. She served on the organization’s board of directors from 1955 until her death in 1958.

MRS. COOK RETIRED from Western Union in 1950 at the age of 70 and was honored at a party given by her fellow members of Commercial (Turn to Page 11)

Byrd seeks vacant AFL-CIO post; COPE to consider political agenda

Oregon AFL-CIO Executive, General and COPE boards meet March 10 in Portland.

The Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board will appoint a new secretary-treasurer when it meets at 10 a.m. Friday, March 10, at the Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 Hall, 2379 NE 178th Ave., Portland.

The post has been vacant since December, when longtime Secretary-Treasurer Brad Witt was ruled ineligible to serve because his union, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, was not an affiliate.

UFCW pulled out of the national AFL-CIO last July and joined with five other unions to create the Change to Win labor federation. Change to Win unions at state and local levels had the option of signing AFL-CIO “Solidarity Charters,” but Local 555 chose not to.

The uncertainty of Solidarity Charters (which must first be approved by national AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and expire after one year), created a budget nightmare for state labor federations and central labor councils. That uncertainty resulted in a resolution at the Oregon AFL-CIO convention last October making the secretary-treasurer a part-time, unpaid (\$400 a month stipend) position.

At press time, the only announced

candidate was Barbara Byrd, a member of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon who is the senior instructor/Portland Center coordinator of the Labor Education and Research Center of the University of Oregon.

“Barbara has my support,” said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. “I think she will be a valuable asset to our organization. She is a skilled strategic planner and she has great relationships with both public- and private-sector unions.”

If no other candidate comes forward, Byrd will be elected by acclamation. If there is opposition, the Executive Board will decide the winner by majority vote.

Later in the day on March 10, the AFL-CIO’s Committee on Political Education (COPE) will gather to consider endorsements in statewide political races and ballot measures.

Chamberlain said Oregon AFL-CIO Political/Campaign Director Duke Shepard has completed candidate interviews and questionnaires and has met with political coordinators from several large unions to discuss endorsements.

COPE has already endorsed Dan Gardner for labor commissioner and Susan Castillo for superintendent of public instruction. As of press time, neither incumbent had opposition.

The filing deadline is March 7.

Early endorsements have also gone to State Senators Bill Morrisette and Frank Shields; and state representatives

Peter Buckley, Paul Holvey, Arnie Roblan, Phil Barnhart, Elizabeth Terry Beyer, Brad Witt, Mary Nolan, Carolyn Tomei, Diane Rosenbaum, Chip Shields and Jackie Dingfelder, and to Mary Botkin, who is not an incumbent.

COPE has also weighed in on several initiative petitions filed for the 2006 general election. The AFL-CIO opposes Initiatives 15, 17, 20, 44, 45, 46, 47 and 48 — all initiatives that restrict the voice of union members in the political process.

COPE also opposes Initiatives 1, 6, 33, 34, 35, 36, 42 and 43 — all arbitrary limits on appropriations that affect the ability of state and local governments to provide basic public services.

Two initiatives filed by Chamberlain — Initiative 149, the Fair Share Health Care Initiative, and Initiative 148, the creation of a Rate Review Board within the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs to evaluate and approve rates for specified group health insurance plans — have been challenged.

“AOI (Associated Oregon Industries) and some big guns from the insurance industry have come out against our initiatives,” Chamberlain said.

Until the initiatives are certified by the secretary of state, signature gathering remains on hold. Initiatives 148 and 149 are statutory changes that will require 75,630 valid signatures of registered voters to qualify for the November ballot.

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Multnomah County union backs Wheeler for chair

AFSCME Local 88 also endorses Gary Hansen and Steve March for county offices.

The union that represents most workers at Multnomah County announced Feb. 18 it will back Ted Wheeler for county chair. Wheeler is running against incumbent chair Diane Linn.

In her two previous races for chair, Linn had the support of the 2,800-member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 88. But a series of decisions she made upset union workers, said Local 88 President Becky Steward, and in the union's meetings there was a clear majority of support for Wheeler, an investment manager with an interest in public policy.

Local 88 is also endorsing Gary Hansen for District 2 of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, and Steve March for county auditor.

The election is May 16, and ballots will be mailed April 28.

With the Wheeler pick, Local 88 members are in effect saying, "We want a new boss."

The county, which has an annual budget close to \$1 billion, is responsible for bridges, jails, libraries and an array of social services for the aged, sick, disabled and mentally ill. Commissioners set policy and pass the \$300 million portion of the budget that is discretionary; the auditor evaluates the performance of county programs; and the

chair is the chief executive officer of the county — the top boss for county workers.

Steward said Chair Linn didn't consult county workers or the union before embarking on major departmental reorganizations, including the now-scrapped "shared services" model borrowed from the business world.

"Part of communication is you've got to listen," said Local 88 Vice President Shelly Immel, "and she doesn't listen very well."

Linn has the endorsement of several unions — Portland Fire Fighters Local 43, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, and the Portland Association of Teachers — but none represent county employees. Local 88 is by far the largest of the eight unions representing county workers, and the only one to make endorsements so far.

In the race for the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, the current office-holder, Serena Cruz Walsh, can't run for re-election because of voter-approved term limits that bar more than two full consecutive terms in county office. Four candidates are vying for Cruz Walsh's seat — District 2, which covers North and Northeast Portland. They are Jeff Cogan, an aide to Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman; Lew Frederick, a former television journalist and spokesperson for Portland Public Schools; Gary Hansen, a four-term state representative; and Xander Patterson, executive director of Oregon

Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Steward said all four seemed worthy of the local's support, but Hansen was the clear favorite, as an experienced office-holder with a history of support for unions. Hansen, a former journeyman plumber with Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, was county commissioner for the same district from 1990 to 1998, before leaving to serve in the Oregon House of Representatives. During his four terms in the Oregon House, he voted in accord with the recommendations of the Oregon AFL-CIO 94.5 percent of the time.

"We have a strong tradition in labor of supporting people that have supported us," said Local 88 Vice President Immel.

Multnomah County auditor Suzanne Flynn is leaving because of term limits and is running for a similar position at the Metro regional government. In the race to replace her, Local 88 endorsed State Representative Steve March. March is a former senior management auditor in the Multnomah County auditors' office, and is running against LaVonne Griffin-Valade, a senior management auditor. Steward said Local 88 was impressed with both candidates, but favored March because he has a labor background. As a part-time professor of urban studies at Portland State, March is a member of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon. The Oregon AFL-CIO gave March a 100 percent rating in each of the three

legislative sessions he served.

Local 88's endorsement process included a questionnaire to candidates from its political action committee and a candidates' forum.

Based on their answers to the questionnaire, the PAC made recommendations. Local 88 then held a candidates forum at its Feb. 15 general membership meeting, giving members a chance to ask questions of candidates before debating and voting on the PAC recommendations.

At the PAC and among the more than 150 members at the standing-room-only forum, Wheeler, Hansen, and March had clear majority support.

But one PAC recommendation failed to win member approval — endorse-

ment of Bernie Giusto, who is running unopposed for re-election as Multnomah County sheriff. A majority of members objected, some simply because he is unopposed, and others because of concerns about his personal life raised in newspaper accounts. Employees in the sheriff's office said Giusto has failed to address union requests that he do something to reduce tension between civilian staff and sworn officers.

It's still possible others could enter the race; the filing deadline is March 7.

As the campaign progresses, Local 88's endorsements are likely to lead to further support by AFSCME for the candidates, including campaign contributions, phone-banking, and other volunteer work.

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Staff: Don McIntosh, Cheri Rice

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WHAT'S HAPPENING

Court upholds ban on piecemeal-paid signature-gatherers

The U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on Feb. 22 upheld 2002's Ballot Measure 26, the union-sponsored measure that bans initiative signature-gatherers from being paid for each signature collected — a practice which had led to widespread documented fraud and abuse.

The measure has been the feature of several news items recently because of alleged violations of the law among signature-gathering firms.

"The court said very clearly that the First Amendment cannot be used as a fig leaf for fraud and forgery," said Tim Nesbitt, past president of the Oregon AFL-CIO and a co-sponsor of Measure 26. "We hope that Oregon's Initiative Integrity Act (Measure 26) and this decision upholding that act will motivate voters in other states to enact similar safeguards to protect their initiative systems."

Boiled down, the 38-page federal court decision says Measure 26 does not violate First Amendment ("free speech") rights by requiring signature-gatherers to be paid by the hour, rather than on the "bounty system" of being paid per signature.

Among the plaintiffs was Jason Williams of the Taxpayers Association of Oregon. Williams' organization tried to place anti-tax measures on the ballot in 2004, but was questioned by the Oregon secretary of state's office about possible violations of Measure 26. Williams (and others) responded to the inquiry by filing a lawsuit alleging Measure 26 was unconstitutional.

Not so, said the court, which asserted that Measure 26 applies reasonable constraints to the process. The courts said Measure 26 is targeted at electoral processes rather than at the communicative aspect of petition circulation.

"... Measure 26 imposed no severe or substantial burdens on the circula-

tion of initiative or referendum petitions, and [the secretary of state's] interest in protecting the integrity of the initiative process justified the lesser burdens imposed by the measure," wrote Justice Carlos Bea.

Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, said "Oregon's initiative process should be people-powered, not run by wealthy out-of-state interests who will pay \$10 for a signature. Measure 26 plays an important role in keeping the initiative process democratic and clean."

Hillsboro School District contracts out custodial jobs

Fifty-six Hillsboro School District custodians and groundskeepers were terminated Feb. 24 as part of a district plan to save money by contracting out. The work will now be done by Somers Building Maintenance (SBM) a Sacramento-based firm which also cleans Intel facilities.

The fired workers were members of Hillsboro Classified United Local 4671 of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon. For eight months, the union resisted the plan to contract out. The district labor agreement expired last July, and in October, members voted down a management contract proposal because it included the plan to outsource.

They relented Jan. 5, however, approving a new three-year contract in a 251-67 vote. Under the new contract, employees will receive a 2.6 percent annual wage increase for the first two years of the contract. [The third year's wage increase will be bargained in spring 2007.] The agreement also sets up a "two-tier" system of health insurance, in which employees hired after July 2007 will pay a higher proportion of premiums. And the contract permitted the district to outsource custodial and maintenance work.

One head custodian per school will remain employed by the district.

The district says the plan will save \$600,000 the first year, an amount that would rise to \$1.2 million a year after that, primarily due to the lower retirement and health benefit contributions of the private contractor's employees.

Local 4671 President Billie Pinder,



UFCW's Ed Clay retires

Ed Clay (right), longtime secretary-treasurer of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, shares a chuckle with family members during a "retirement roast" held on his behalf Feb. 18 at the Portland Hilton Hotel. More than 200 people attended. Clay was elected secretary-treasurer of the local in 1997. In his 29 years with the union, he has served as director of membership services, grievance director, representative and organizer.

a special ed assistant, said the union ultimately agreed to the outsourcing only because it appeared the district was prepared to declare impasse and impose its final offer without the workers' consent. Pinder said the union was able to get some assurances for the laid-off workers, including a promise they'd be paid the same hourly wage if they went to work for SBM. Those who didn't agree to work for the contractor would get severance pay equal to one week's wages for each year of work, and would continue to get employer-paid health insurance coverage for three months.

SBM, too, is a union employer, signatory to a master agreement negotiated by Portland-based Service Employees International Union Local 49. That agreement provides employee-only health coverage, and a 5-cent-an-hour pension contribution. While SEIU seeks to represent all janitors, Local 49 political director Felisa Hagens said the union opposes, on principle, contracting out the work of public employees.

As many as 20 custodians chose to

work for the contractor; the others will be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Corrections staff set March 6 strike in Washington Co.

The union representing community corrections employees in Washington County notified the county of its intent to strike at 12:01 a.m. on Monday, March 6.

About 30 community corrections workers in Hillsboro voted more than a year ago to form Local 3913 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. They have been unable to reach agreement on a first contract.

The county has hired the law firm of Bullard Smith Jernstedt and Wilson to handle negotiations — at a cost to date of nearly \$88,000, according to the union.

"It's a complete waste of taxpayers' money" said Don Loving, public affairs director for Oregon AFSCME

Council 75. "This thing could be settled for about \$20,000 tops."

Wages are the primary cause of the dispute. AFSCME is seeking a 3.3 percent cost-of-living-adjustment retroactive to July 1, 2005 — the date it was granted to all other Washington County employees. The county gave the 30 corrections employees a COLA increase on Jan. 14, 2006.

The union also wants the county to undertake an independent wage and classification survey for community corrections specialists, whose job it is to monitor the daily activities of those incarcerated within the county's community corrections facility, including security checks.

As of press time, no further talks had been scheduled.

Labor bowl for MDA scheduled Sunday, April 23

The 17th annual Labor Bowl Challenge to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) will be held Sunday, April 23, from 1 to 4 p.m. at Cascade Lanes, 2700 NE 82nd Ave., Portland.

Money raised helps provide wheelchairs and braces for youngsters, medical care, research and summer camps. To date, \$257,000 has been collected for the charity.

Pledge packets are available at the Northwest Oregon Labor Council or by calling MDA at 503-223-3177.

Benefit auction to aid ill Painters Local 10 member

A benefit auction and spaghetti dinner for Dave Jenson, a member of Painters and Drywall Finishers Local 10, will be held Sunday, March 19, from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Sunnyside Foursquare Church. Cost is \$7.50 for adults and \$5 for children.

Jenson has an aggressive form of brain cancer and is unable to work while receiving treatment. Money raised at the auction will help support his wife and three children.

For more information, or to donate auction items, call Monte Skiles at 503-201-7626.

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...Storm Warning: Merger madness in utilities

(From Page 1)

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Welcome to a world without PUHCA.

It's a world we've seen before, according to Lynn Hargis, a lawyer who spent 10 years at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and another 17 years helping companies comply with PUHCA.

"The last time there was no PUHCA we had a Great Depression," Hargis wrote in her 2003 monograph PUHCA for Dummies. "PUHCA was enacted because huge holding companies were using secure utility revenues to finance and guarantee other, riskier business ventures around the world." In the seven years following the great stock market crash of 1929, 53 utility holding companies went bankrupt and 23 others defaulted on interest payments.

Holding companies didn't collapse because electricity was no longer prof-

itable. They collapsed, Hargis says, because they had looted their utility subsidiaries to finance non-utility investments. And their collapse deepened and prolonged the Great Depression.

The Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935 was championed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to prevent a resurrection of these enormous utility conglomerates and the havoc they wrought on the U.S. economy. Hargis explains how this historic law worked:

- PUHCA made it possible for states to regulate utility holding companies by limiting the types of business they could engage in, and also by limiting their geographic size.

- PUHCA, by controlling holding company dividends, loans and guarantees based on the utility subsidiary, made it harder for holding companies to loot their utility subsidiaries.

- PUHCA regulated self-dealing among the holding companies' various affiliates.

- PUHCA imposed controls over utility acquisitions of other utilities or other businesses.

And PUHCA worked. For seven decades, electric service was assured by utilities whose profits were closely regulated, whose shareholders were protected, and whose obligation to serve was written into law. No speculators need apply.

Not everyone liked PUHCA. Gas and electric service generate a lot of

money, and PUHCA severely limited the ability of private investors to get their hands on it. Federal energy bills in 1978 and 1992 modified PUHCA, creating opportunities for nonutility investments in the electric industry. The stage was set for Enron to champion "competitive markets" in the 1990s and for investors like billionaire Warren Buffet to push for outright repeal of PUHCA in recent years.

Utility holding companies haven't waited for PUHCA's repeal to start testing their ability to siphon money out of their regulated subsidiaries.

State regulators in Kansas found that Westar Energy of Topeka had quietly shifted more than \$1.95 billion of debt onto the utility side of the business through intercompany loans and other means, according to a Wall Street Journal report in December 2002. John Wine, then chairman of the Kansas Corporation Commission, told the Journal that utility holding companies "can go pretty far down the road of commingling utility assets before it gets detected," and expressed concern about the impact on service and rates.

In 2001, Duke Energy transferred as much as \$124 million in expenses from its unregulated divisions to the books of Duke's utilities. E-mail messages showed a protracted campaign by Duke accountants to shift expenses onto the utilities, according to the audit. Regulators might never have noticed if they

hadn't received an inside tip.

Michael Valocchi, a utility consultant at IBM Consulting Services, told the Journal in 2002 that his utility clients were under orders to cut capital spending by as much as 30 percent in 2003, in some cases to free up funds for use by the holding company parents.

But this disturbing trend received little media attention and the campaign to repeal PUHCA continued, achieving success on Aug. 8, 2005 when President Bush signed the Energy Policy Act.

A Faster Crowd

After PUHCA officially exits the stage in February 2006, what will become of America's utility companies?

One thing we know for sure: there will be a lot fewer of them. Utility mergers and acquisitions were already gaining traction before President Bush signed the energy bill last August.

In late 2004, Chicago-based Exelon merged with Public Service Enterprise Group — the parent of New Jersey's largest utility — in a \$13 billion deal. In May of 2005, Duke Energy bought Cinergy, combining the parent companies of utilities ranging from the Carolinas to Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio. Also in May, Buffett announced he would buy PacifiCorp, with utility operations in Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, California, Utah and Idaho.

FPL Group's planned purchase of Constellation Energy sheds light on the

character of such mergers.

FPL Group, a holding company, gets most of its revenue from its regulated subsidiary, Florida Power and Light. But in recent years FPL Group had begun to dabble in unregulated power generation and wholesale telecommunications services, and was clearly yearning to run with a faster crowd.

Constellation Energy is that faster crowd. A major player in the wholesale power market, Constellation gets less than a quarter of its revenue from its regulated subsidiary, Baltimore Gas and Electric. FPL Group's acquisition of Constellation will make the combined company the nation's largest marketer of wholesale electric power.

Gold Rush

Utility corporations won't be the only ones to notice the new profit opportunities in the utility industry following the repeal of PUHCA. Oil companies, for example, are flush in the wake of last fall's hurricanes. Exxon Mobil currently has \$34 billion in spare cash.

"Is an Exxon or Shell a potential buyer? I say yes," says Jim Hunter, utility director for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in Washington, D.C. It's understandable, he says, that a company in possession of oil and gas resources would be interested in acquiring companies that use those re-

(Turn to Page 8)



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US Bank Institutional Trust & Custody
Vision Service Plan
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OFFICIAL NOTICES

Asbestos Workers 36

Executive Board meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 8. Members meet 8 p.m. Friday, March 10. Meetings are at 11145 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland.

Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers 114

Executive Board meets 10 a.m. Tuesday, March 28, at 7931 NE Halsey, Suite 205, Portland. PLEASE NOTE: Effective March 1, 2006, our office hours for dues/membership record issues will be Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (excluding the lunch period).

Boilermakers 500

Members meet 10 a.m. Saturday, March 11, at 2515 NE Columbia Blvd., Portland.

Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers 1

Members meet 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, at 12812 NE Marx St., Portland. PLEASE NOTE: The annual pin dinner will be held 2 p.m. Saturday, April 1, at the Holiday Inn at the Airport, 8439 N.E. Columbia Boulevard, Portland.

Reservations are required by March 27; tickets will NOT be available at the door.

Carpenters 1715

Members meet 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, preceded by a 5 p.m. Executive Board meeting at 612 E. McLoughlin, Vancouver, Wash.

Cement Masons 555

Members meet 7 p.m. Thursday, March 16, at 12812 NE Marx St., Portland.

Clark, Skamania & W. Klickitat Counties Labor Council

Delegates meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March 23, preceded by an Executive Board meeting, at the ILWU Local 4 Hall, 1205 Ingalls St., Vancouver, Wash.

Columbia-Pacific Building Trades

Delegates meet 10 a.m. Tuesdays, March 7 and March 14, at Kirkland Union Manor II, 3535 SE 86th, Portland.

Electrical Workers 48

Marine Unit meets 5 p.m. Monday, March 27. Residential Unit meets 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 28. General Membership meets 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, preceded by a 5:30 p.m. pre-meeting buffet. Wasco Unit meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, at the Wasco PUD, 2345 River Rd., The Dalles. Coast Unit meets 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, at Astoria Labor Temple, 926 Duane St., Astoria. EWMC meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, in the Executive Boardroom. Sound & Communication Unit meets 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 15. Electrical Women of Local 48 meet 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, at NIETC, 16021 NE Airport Way. Executive Board meets 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays, March 15 and April 5. Bylaws Committee meets 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 28, in the Executive Boardroom. Meetings are at 15937 NE Airport Way, Portland, unless otherwise noted.

DEATH ASSESSMENTS: The following death assessments have been declared for March and are payable at 50 cents each: No. 2094, Gerald M. Sherwood; No. 2095, Michael J. Rushton; No. 2096, Ross A. Hood; and No. 2097, Stanley Hampton.

Electrical Workers 280

Bend Unit meets 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 9, at the IBEW/UA Training Center, 2161 SW First St., Redmond.

Eugene Unit meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, at the Local #290 Training Center, Springfield. Salem Unit meets 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 16, at the Salem Heights Community Center, Salem.

Elevator Constructors 23

Members meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March 9, preceded by a 5:30 p.m. Executive Board meeting, at Kirkland

Union Manor II, 3535 SE 86th, Portland.

SPECIAL NOTICE: Nominations for delegates to the National Convention will be held March 9 at the general meeting.

Exterior & Interior Specialists 2154

Members meet 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, at 1125 SE Madison, Suite 207, Portland.

Glass Workers 740

Eugene area members meet 5 p.m. Monday, March 6, at Holiday Inn Express, 3480 Hutton St., Springfield. Salem area members meet 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, at Candalaria Terrace, Suite 204, 2659 Commercial St. SE, Salem. PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE DUE TO SCHEDULING CONFLICT.

IBEW & United Workers Federal Credit Union

The IBEW Federal Credit Union's Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 21, at 7 p.m. at IBEW Local 48, 15937 NE Airport Way, Portland.

Iron Workers 29

Members meet 7 p.m. Thursday, March 16, at 11620 NE Ainsworth Circle #200, Portland.

Iron Workers Shopmen 516

Executive Board meets 7 p.m. Thursday, March 9, at 11620 NE Ainsworth Circle, #300, Portland.

Members meet 7 p.m. Thursday, March 23, at Iron Workers Apprenticeship Training Center, 11620 NE Ainsworth Circle, Portland. PLEASE NOTE: Nominations from the floor will be accepted at this meeting for the following: Convention delegates, Alternate delegates and Judges of Election; the Judges of Election will be elected at this meeting. Nominees must have been in continuous good standing for the past two (2) years. A February or March 2006 dues receipt must be shown at the door to enter. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington

Delegates meet 8 a.m. Friday, March 17, at Home-town Buffet, 7809-B Vancouver Plaza Dr., Vancouver, Wash.

Laborers 483 Municipal Employees

Members meet 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, preceded by a 5:30 p.m. stewards' meeting, at the Musicians Hall, 325 NE 20th Ave., Portland.

Laborers/Vancouver 335

Members meet 7 p.m. Monday, March 6, preceded by a 6:15 p.m. Executive Board meeting, at the Vancouver Labor Center, 2212 NE Andresen Rd., Vanc., Wash.

Linoleum Layers 1236

Executive Board meets 5:30 p.m. Monday, March 6, at 11105 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland. Portland area members meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March

23, at 11105 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland. PLEASE NOTE: This meeting is SPECIAL CALL to vote on a contract proposal.

Marion-Polk-Yamhill Labor Council

Delegates meet 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at 2659 Commercial St. SE, Salem.

Metal Trades Council

Executive Board meets 8 a.m. Monday, March 13, at NOLC board room, 1125 SE Madison, Portland. Delegates meet 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 28, IBEW 48 Hall, 15937 NE Airport Way, Portland.

Mid-Columbia Labor Council

Delegates meet 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at 3313 W. 2nd, The Dalles.

Millwrights & Machinery Erectors 711

Members meet 10 a.m. Saturday, March 25, preceded by a 9 a.m. Executive Committee meeting, at the Carpenters Local 247 Hall, 2205 N. Lombard St., Portland.

Molders 139

Members meet 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 16, preceded by a 6 p.m. Executive Board meeting at the Carpenters Hall, 2205 N. Lombard, Portland.

Multnomah County Employees 88

General membership meets 7:15 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, preceded by 6:30 p.m. presentation by Rich Dickman on the HRA-VEBA account set up by the Multnomah County Employee Benefits Board. The steward meeting will begin at 6 p.m. and be shortened to allow for the presentation. PLEASE NOTE: Nominations and elections will be held for the JCSS Executive Board position (only Juvenile Custody Service Specialists accepted for this position) and the trustee position vacated by the resignation of Joe Anderko. Contact Becky Steward at stewardb@local88.ws or 988-4010 ext. 29676 if you are interested in being nominated for either position. Meetings are at 6025 E. Burnside, Portland.

Northwest Oregon Labor Council

Delegates meet 7 p.m. Monday, March 27, at IBEW Local 48 Hall, 15937 NE Airport Way, Portland.

Painters & Drywall Finishers 10

Members meet 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, at 11105 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland.

PLEASE NOTE: A benefit auction and spaghetti dinner for member Dave Jensen will be held Sunday, March 19, from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Sunnyside Foursquare Church. Cost is \$7.50 for adults and \$5 for children. Jensen has an aggressive form of brain cancer and is unable to work while receiving treatment. Money raised at the auction will help support his wife and three children.

For more information, or to donate auction items, call Monte Skiles at 503-201-7626.

Pile Drivers, Divers & Shipwrights 2416

Members meet 7 p.m. Friday, March 24, preceded by a 6 p.m. Executive Board meeting, at 2205 N. Lombard, Portland.

Portland City & Metropolitan Employees 189

Executive Board meets 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 14. General membership meets 6:15 p.m. Tuesday, March 28.

Meetings are at 6025 E. Burnside, Portland.

Roofers & Waterproofers 49

Members meet 7 p.m. Thursday, March 9. Executive Board meets 7 p.m. Thursday, April 6. Meetings are at 5032 SE 26 Ave., Portland.

Sheet Metal Workers 16

Portland area VOC members meet 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 7, at the Sheet Metal Training Center, 2379 NE 178th Ave., Portland.

Portland area members meet 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at the Sheet Metal Training Center, 2379 NE 178th Ave., Portland. PLEASE NOTE: There will be a SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS and a vote taken at this meeting on an Executive Board recommendation to fill only one Production Business Agent position at the June 2006 elections and to leave the other position open indefinitely.

Medford area members meet 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, at Abby's Pizza, 7480 Crater Lake Hwy., White City.

Eugene area members meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March 9, at UA 290 Hall, 2861 Pierce Parkway, Springfield, preceded by a 5 p.m. VOC meeting.

Coos Bay area members meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March 16, at the Labor Temple, 3427 Ash St., North Bend. New member orientation will be held at 5 p.m.

Sign Painters & Paint Makers 1094

Members meet 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Monday, March 20, in the District Office, at 11105 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland.

Southern Oregon Central Labor Council

Delegates meet 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 14, at the Labor Temple, 4480 Rogue Valley Hwy. #3, Central Point.

United Association 290

Portland area members meet 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 17, at 20210 SW Teton Ave., Tualatin.

Bend area members meet 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, at the Local 290 Training Center, 2161 SW First, Redmond.

Brookings area members meet Tuesday, March 28, at Curry County Search and Rescue, 417 Railroad St., Brookings.

Coos Bay area members meet 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, at the Coos Bay Training Center, 2nd & Kruse, Coos Bay.

Eugene area members meet 7:30 p.m. Monday, March 20, at the Eugene #290 Hall.

Klamath Falls area members meet 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 21, at the Moose Lodge, 1577 Oak Ave., Klamath Falls.

Medford area members meet 6 p.m. Thursday, March 23, at 650A Industrial Circle, White City.

Roseburg area members meet 5 p.m. Thursday, March 23, at Roseburg Labor Temple, 742 Roberts, Roseburg.

Salem area members meet 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, at 1810 Hawthorne Ave. NE, Salem.

Humboldt-Del Norte Co. area members meet 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, at the Eureka Training Center, 832 E St., Eureka, Calif.

USW 1097

Members meet 4 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, preceded by a 3 p.m. Executive Board meeting, in the union office building, 91237 Old Mill Town Rd., Westport.

March 15 labor forum on health care reform

A "Labor Forum on Health Care Reform" will be held Wednesday, March 15, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the Oregon Council 75 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, 6025 E Burnside, Portland.

Invited speakers include Ann Davidson of the Canadian Auto Workers; Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO; and former Governor John Kitzhaber.

The forum will look at the feasibility of a national single-payer health care program. For more information, call the Portland chapter of Jobs with Justice at 503-236-5573.

Annual 'Faith-Labor Breakfast' March 14 at Portland church

The fourth annual "Faith-Labor Breakfast" will be held from 8 to 10 a.m. Tuesday, March 14, at St. Philip Neri Church, 2408 SE 16th Ave. (off Division St), Portland.

The event is sponsored by Portland Jobs with Justice, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

Clergy, lay leaders and union members are invited to attend. Cost for breakfast is \$5. For more information, or to register, call Jobs with Justice at 503-236-5573.

Retirees group to hold annual confab Saturday, March 25

The Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans will hold its annual convention Saturday, March 25, at the Teamsters Union Hall, 1860 NE 162nd Ave., Portland. Registration opens at 8:30 a.m. and the convention starts at 9:30 a.m.

U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer will be presented a special award by the group for his leadership in the battle over privatization of Social Security.

For more information, call Verna Porter at 503-284-8591.

RETIREE MEETING NOTICES

ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS OREGON CHAPTER

Executive Board meets 9 a.m. Thursday, March 9, in the Northwest Oregon Labor Council board room, at 1125 SE Madison, Portland.

Retirees meet 10 a.m. Thursday, March 23, at Westmoreland Union Manor, 6404 SE 23rd Ave., Portland. All retirees are welcome to attend.

CARPENTERS

Retired Carpenters meet for lunch 11 a.m. Monday, March 13, at JJ North's Grand Buffet, 10520 NE Halsey, Portland.

ELECTRICAL WORKERS 48

Retirees, wives and friends meet Tuesday, March 14, and travel on a FREE 48-seat luxury bus to Lucky

Eagle Casino in Rochester, WA. The bus will leave at 8:30 a.m. from Westminster Presbyterian Church, NE 16th and Hancock, and return at 4:30 p.m. Receive casino coupons, enjoy lunch for \$4.95 plus raffle and snacks for the drive home. We need at least 40 to go or we will be staying one hour longer. Bring friends and let's fill the bus! For reservations, please call Vera Larson 503 252-2296.

ELEVATOR CONSTRUCTORS 23

Retirees meet 12 noon Tuesday, April 4, at Kirkland Union Manor II, 3535 SE 86th, Portland.

IRON WORKERS 29

Retirees meet 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, March 8, at JJ North's Grand Buffet, 10520 NE Halsey, Portland.

NORTHWEST OREGON LABOR RETIREES COUNCIL

Business meeting from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday, March 13, at 1125 SE Madison, Portland.

OREGON AFSCME

Retirees meet 10 a.m. Tuesday, March 21, at the AFSCME office, 6025 E Burnside, Portland. Call Michael Arken for information at 503-239-9858, ext. 124.

SHEET METAL WORKERS 16

Retirees meet 11:30 a.m. Thursday, March 9, at Nicalas Restaurant, 4826 N. Lombard, Portland.

UNITED ASSOCIATION 290

Retirees meet 10 a.m. Thursday, March 16, at 20210 SW Teton Ave., Portland.

Several Change to Win locals sign 'Solidarity Charters' with WSLC

SEATTLE — A number of local unions that are part of the Change to Win labor federation have signed AFL-CIO Solidarity Charters with the Washington State Labor Council.

Among the returning unions are Washington Public Employees Association/United Food and Commercial Workers Local 365; UFCW Locals 21, 81 and 44; UNITE HERE Local 8; Service Employees Local 925; and Teamsters Locals 117 and 252.

"I urge other CTW unions to apply for charters so that together we can rebuild and improve the Washington State

Labor Council, making our state federation an even more effective advocate for Washington's working families," said WSLC President Rick Bender.

Chartered Change to Win locals pay the same per-capita fees as they did prior to their international union's disaffiliation from the AFL-CIO, and maintain the same rights and obligations as other affiliates, including participation in WSLC governance and affairs, and eligibility of their members to hold WSLC office.

Solidarity Charters are effective for one year.

Carpenters benefit golf tourney July 27

The Pacific NW Regional Council of Carpenters is looking for sponsors and players for its fifth annual Scholarship Endowment Golf Tournament.

This year's event is slated for July 27 at Trophy Lake Golf and Casting Club in Port Orchard, Wash.

The nonprofit scholarship fund

helps Carpenters' children and grandchildren attend college.

Entry fee for the four-person scramble is \$150. Sponsorships range from \$250 to \$5,000 for a Title Sponsorship.

For more information, call Dee Chilenski at 800-573-8333, ext. 8847.

Education Association partners with AFL-CIO

SAN DIEGO — The national AFL-CIO signed an historic agreement with the 2.8 million-member National Education Association Feb. 27 and it approved two new Solidarity Charters for the independent United Transportation Union and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

Under the terms of the AFL-CIO/NEA Labor Solidarity Partnership, announced at the AFL-CIO Executive Council's winter meetings, NEA affiliates can join the AFL-CIO at the local and state levels.

Edward McElroy, general president of the American Federation of Teachers, a member of the AFL-CIO for 90 years, welcomed the action.

"The American Federation of Teachers and NEA have become partners on many education endeavors," he said. "Having the support of NEA affiliates inside the AFL-CIO's local and state labor bodies will give educators an even stronger voice inside the labor movement and will help our unions become more powerful advocates for quality education and for an

economy that works for all Americans."

In approving national charters for the two independent unions, the national AFL-CIO will add 65,000 members from the United Transportation Union and 10,000 members from the Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

Senate sidetracks asbestos bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — By a 58-41 vote, the Senate on Feb. 14 sidetracked a controversial asbestos trust fund bill being opposed by labor.

Though most senators backed S. 852 — including Oregon Republican Gordon Smith — it needed 60 votes to overcome a filibuster by senators who, citing studies, said the \$140 billion trust fund for asbestos victims would run out of money, forcing future funding from the U.S. Treasury.

The strongest proponents of the legislation are large corporations like Halliburton and Honeywell, which have

Since last summer, the AFL-CIO has issued 852 Solidarity Charters to 516 local unions of the national unions that disaffiliated from the federation last year. Solidarity Charters allow locals of disaffiliated unions to remain united with AFL-CIO at the local and state levels, with full representation and voting rights.

billions of dollars in asbestos liabilities.

Companies with asbestos liability would be shielded from all asbestos lawsuits by paying into the government-administered trust fund.

Asbestos-harmed workers and their families would be barred from suing for damages in court. Asbestos is known to cause mesothelioma and asbestosis — forms of cancer — and other diseases.

Labor unions and victims' groups have lobbied against the bill, claiming it's not enough money to cover sick workers and because it exempts too many others who have been exposed.



Everyday Heroes

Winter storms don't watch the clock.

Or the calendar. So you can't count on them to roll in on schedule, weekdays between 9 and 5.

Storms slice through when they feel like it, uprooting trees, flinging ice or dumping buckets of rain. It might be just past midnight. It might be on a weekend. Or even on a hard-earned holiday.

That's when we go to work. Plans are put on hold. Meals are kept waiting. And family is asked to understand.

This winter has seen a parade of nasty storms. They've put our line crews to the test, and tested the patience of some customers. PGE would like to thank you, our customers, for your support. We also thank our dedicated line crew members, dispatchers, support staff, and customer service reps who have answered the call and kept the power flowing.



Portland General Electric

We Do This Every Day.

...Storm Warning:

(From Page 5)

sources. "I think utilities are going to be a target."

With the utilities' enormous customer base up for grabs, acquiring utilities could turn into a corporate gold rush. And big oil won't be the only industry saddling up its pony for the ride.

"There is something about electric and natural gas utilities, with their captive, rate-paying consumers, that is irresistible to venture capitalists," says Hargis, the former FERC lawyer. "They want to use those guaranteed revenues to invest in risky, potentially high-profit, nonutility schemes. They want to keep the profits and have the utility's customers bear the risks and assume the debt."

Utility stocks, for decades a safe repository for retirees' savings, could morph into short-term investment properties. Tyson Slocum, who works on energy policy at Public Citizen in Washington, D.C., says private equity funds could seize the opportunity to "Grab a utility, squeeze money out of it and toss it aside for the next buyer."

The gold rush will be global. As Stuart Caplan noted last October in *Infrastructure Journal*: "Overseas investors interested in acquiring critical mass in the U.S. utility sector will no longer be stymied by PUHCA's ... requirements."

What Is A Utility For?

In announcing the merger of their holding companies in late 2004, Exelon and PSEG executives sounded almost

giddy over the possibilities for their new, combined company.

They talked about how they would "create efficiencies." They enthused about "operational synergies" and "improved asset optimization" and "cash-flow growth." They gushed over the opportunity to improve "financial flexibility" and positioning the company "to meet the changing landscape of the energy industry into the future."

But all of this post-PUHCA sloganeering and "positioning" begs a central question: What is a utility for?

Most people believe a utility's purpose is to keep their homes lit and heated, to power their businesses, to do whatever planning and maintenance is needed to keep service reliable, and to respond effectively and immediately whenever that service is interrupted.

Do "operational synergies" and "financial flexibility" serve to further that purpose?

The Exelon-PSEG executives predicted in December 2004 that "synergies" would start out at \$400 million and grow to \$500 million annually by the second year. Synergy, if you believe Webster's, means "to work together" such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Exelon-PSEG executives, however, seem to think that synergy is just another word for saving money. About 85 percent of the savings, according to their projections, will be "cost related." These savings include "the elimination of duplicative activities" and "improving operating efficiencies" and "improved sourcing."

Still not clear? The executives go on to explain that "a portion of any job losses will be offset by anticipated retirements and normal attrition." Or to be still clearer: "Reductions due to the merger are estimated at approximately 5 percent of the consolidated workforce," which boils down to a loss of 1,400 jobs.

Utility workforces, apparently, are no longer being downsized, they are being "synergized." But changing the word for slashing the workforce will not alter the reality that utilities nationwide are already short of the people they need to maintain service reliability at the level Americans have historically enjoyed.

Reliability at Risk

The utility workforce overall was reduced by 25-30 percent during the 1990s, when utilities believed that downsizing was the way to prepare for retail electric competition. Now that shrunken workforce is quickly aging. By 2010, half of today's experienced utility workers are likely to retire, according to numerous published reports.

Some top executives may regard this mass attrition as an opportunity to save money for the next merger or takeover. But some people question how utilities can continue to function if there is continued attrition of the workforce.

"It is possible to end up with a scenario where some utilities are operating like utilities in third-world countries," says Steven Kussmann, executive director of the Utility Business Education Coalition in Reston, Va., quoted in a story in the November-December 2005 newsletter of the American Public Power Association. "They won't have a sufficient number of qualified people to operate them. The result will be danger-

ous working conditions and unreliable power."

Five Florida Power & Light linemen interviewed by the *Miami Herald* in November said the utility had thinned their ranks so drastically that the crews now spend most of their time doing "revenue jobs," like hooking up new customers rather than performing maintenance on existing infrastructure, which may explain why Hurricane Wilma encountered so many rotten power poles.

Inadequate tree trimming around power lines has been implicated in costly wildfires, and worse. When an untrimmed tree branch in Ohio contacted a sagging transmission line in August of 2003, the resulting explosion knocked out power to 50 million people in eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces, costing \$6 billion. A blue ribbon panel convened by Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich found that inadequate tree trimming, obsolete equipment and inadequate training contributed to the severity of the outage.

At a time when utilities ought to be plowing resources into trimming trees away from power lines, replacing aging gas lines and rotten power poles, and hiring and training the people needed to do this work, they are having trouble staying focused on their essential mission. They're looking for "synergies" when they ought to be looking for linemen.

If it's hard to keep utilities focused

on reliability issues as PUHCA fades into history, it will be even harder if utilities fall under the ownership of oilmen or financiers, according to Tom Schneider, an independent energy consultant and former director at the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI).

"Traditionally you get to be a (utility) CEO by learning the business," says Schneider. But if these homegrown CEOs are replaced by new management brought in from outside the industry, there will be a "total loss of any technical understanding or judgment" at the top of the company.

"They're just not going to understand the industry. That translates to (not understanding) workforce requirements," Schneider says. As utilities are absorbed into ever-larger holding companies, there will be a "dilution of management attention" to service issues.

Who's In Charge?

The Energy Policy Act had the virtue of converting voluntary reliability standards into mandatory standards, and giving enforcement powers to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Given its past commitment to "the market," though, it's hard to be optimistic that FERC will perform this role effectively.

As Hargis, the former FERC attorney, noted in 2003, the agency has

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Observers report rampant worker abuses in Katrina-hit area

GULFPORT, Miss. (PAI) — One day in early February, a teenager worker tacking blue plastic sheeting over gaping holes in a Hurricane Katrina-damaged roof of a building in Gulfport, Miss., fell off.

The teenager — who by federal law is too young to even toil on a job like that — was taken to Memorial Hospital in Gulfport, where nurses tried to get him to take a urination drug test before examining his injuries.

But the youngster spoke only Spanish, the hospital personnel speak only English, and he didn't understand what they wanted him to do, says Bill Chandler of Mississippi Immigration Rights Association. So they threw him out of the hospital. And then, to add insult to injury, the contractor who hired him refused to pay him.

Abuses like that, numbering in the thousands, are rampant in the Gulf Coast area as workers and residents try to recover from the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita last August and September.

Data uncovered by Chandler's group, Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and others show widespread importation and use of out-of-area workers, equally widespread refusal to pay workers, abuse of immigrants, use of illegal child labor, and lack of job safety and health enforcement, among other problems.

Worse, as IWJ discovered in a meeting with a top Wage and Hour Division official in Washington, D.C., the federal government is unaware of the abuses, and may not be willing to do much about them.

The problems in the Katrina-hit area come as the Bush Administration comes under increasing fire from all points of the political spectrum for its poor response to the millions of people who lost homes, businesses and jobs when the hurricanes hit.

Labor Secretary Elaine Chao disputes the lack of response. She touts the Department of Labor's channeling of

\$274 million in aid in the weeks after the hurricane wrecked New Orleans, along with much of Louisiana and southern Mississippi and parts of Alabama.

Even so, 1.2 million people are still displaced from their homes. Of the half of those who are workers, 26.3 percent are jobless, federal figures show. Chao's response to their plight was that "many have found permanent jobs elsewhere."

By contrast, unions rushed in teams to help not just their colleagues in the stricken states, but other workers. It still has teams there, retraining area workers for new rebuilding-oriented tasks and occupations.

Meanwhile, Chandler and others are reporting abuses of workers by contractors hired — without competitive bidding — by agencies to undertake the Katrina cleanup and reconstruction. Abuses include:

- **Outright refusal to pay workers.** Chandler's group, with encouragement by one federal Labor Department worker in Mississippi, has documented such refusals through interviews with more than 1,000 workers. It already recovered \$141,000 in unpaid wages for 65 workers hired by a subcontractor for Kellogg, Brown and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, the firm formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney.

Other times, contractors and subcontractors stall on paying workers, who then leave to try to find employers who will pay them. Or the contractors bring the workers in for specific jobs and then when the tasks are done, "they dump them and force them out of the decrepit housing they're living in" while not paying them, he adds.

In New Orleans, contractors got away without paying immigrant workers by calling in the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to conduct sweeps just before payday. Workers fled. ICE agents often pose as Occupational Safety and Health Administration inspectors, over OSHA's protests. "Every immigrant worker has

had wages stolen, in many ways," Chandler said.

- **Lack of wage and hour enforcement, especially in Mississippi, the only U.S. state with no Labor Department.** That puts the entire enforcement burden on overworked and understaffed federal DOL personnel, who in turn have enlisted Chandler's group as their eyes and ears in the field, interviewing workers and gathering evidence.

"All they (DOL) do is take walk-in cases at their offices in Jackson and on the Gulf Coast," Chandler said. And immigrant workers are afraid to approach both offices because the ICE office is right next door. "One result of the lack of enforcement is rampant use of child labor, even in dangerous occupations such as construction, he noted.

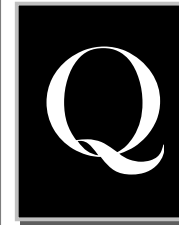
- **Diversion of federal money long before it gets to workers.** Chandler gave an example where the federal government hired KBR to remove debris and fill at a price of \$20 per cubic yard. KBR hired a subcontractor for the same task, for \$4 per cubic yard.

The subcontractor's managers did not speak Spanish, so they hired bilingual "crew leaders" who in turn hired the workers to move the debris at \$5-\$7 an hour. But neither the crew leaders nor the rank-and-file workers were paid. Chandler's group argues the "crew leaders" are really employees, not "inde-

pendent contractors," and thus, like the rank-and-file workers, should be covered by federal wage and hour laws.

- **Lack of job safety enforcement.** Acting OSHA Administrator Jonathan Snare admitted Feb. 6 that the agency still is giving "technical assistance only"

to employers and workers on job safety issues in the hardest-hit areas south of Interstate 10. That includes New Orleans, a key oil refining and importation area where Katrina smashed tanks, pipelines, docks, wells, rigs and other facilities.



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The ABCs of our health care crisis

We have more jobs in Oregon than ever before. We also have more Oregonians without health insurance than ever before.

Maybe this is why pollsters report that health care has supplanted jobs and education as the Number One concern of Oregonians.

Our health care crisis is two-fold. Too many people don't have insurance, and those who have it are paying more than they can afford in premiums, co-pays and deductibles. These two problems are connected, and they're both problems that our government is going to have to solve.

The jobs problem was different. Three years ago, politicians argued over the best ways to grow jobs and help Oregon climb out of the recession, even though there was not a lot that the state could do to accelerate the pace of economic recovery in the short term. Some efforts helped at the margins. Gov. Kulongoski's transportation package is producing the jobs that he promised. But, we gained jobs largely because of forces beyond the control of state government.

Yet, the same market forces that produced most of the new jobs during the past three years encouraged employers to strip those jobs of health benefits or shift more of their health care costs to their workers. Employers like Wal-Mart gain an economic advantage over their competitors, like Fred Meyer and Safeway, by chiseling on health benefits. The market is rewarding bad employers for doing the wrong thing and penalizing good employers for doing the right thing. This is why, for the almost two million Oregonians who get their health care from a job, the trends are not our friends. And this is why we need our government to step in.

Look at how our population is divided by health care coverage. For every 100 Oregonians:

52 get their health care coverage from their jobs or a family member's job.

17 have no health insurance.

11 are disabled or poor enough to qualify for the Oregon Health Plan.

15 are seniors covered by Medicare.

5 pay for their own health insurance.

Category A is shrinking and Category B is growing as employers abandon or reduce their support for health insurance. More than half of all Oregonians without health insurance come from households with a full-time worker. But Category C is shrinking too, because government is running out of money. And, as we pour more of our tax dollars into Category C, we tend to create more incentives for employers to abandon their health plans and tell their workers to sign up for government benefits. This is why some Category C solutions are not sustainable. Government pays more, employers pay less, and then government has to pay more again to make up for declining employer support.

Given this scenario, we need to focus on boosting employer coverage in Category A, which could potentially cut in half the number of uninsured in Category B. One way to do that is to require that all employers above a certain size provide health care for their workers or pay into a state fund for health care. Another way: Government can help employers who provide good benefits by offering re-insurance against extraordinary catastrophic costs.

But government needs to supplement employer efforts as well. We just need to be smarter about how we use our tax dollars in Category C. We could expand coverage for children, more than 100,000 of whom are without insurance from their working parents, by raising cigarette taxes to

broaden the Oregon Health Plan. Still, this idea, embraced by Kulongoski and a number of state lawmakers, could encourage more employers and workers to abandon health insurance for children, which is why it's at best a temporary safety net.

California Congressman Pete Stark has a better idea: Expand Medicare (Category D, above) to cover all children. We could do this by increasing the Medicare payroll tax paid by employers and workers by one percent each. This would also help good employers who pay for full family coverage and reduce costs for working families who have to pay high premiums to cover their kids. If the federal government doesn't do this, states can do it on their own.

The Oregon AFL-CIO drafted such a plan three years ago, estimating that a payroll tax of less two percent shared by employers and workers could guarantee health coverage for every child in Oregon.

These are just steps on the road to universal health care. But they are feasible and effective in the short term, and they will prove that government can help solve our health care crisis.

Plus, these steps lead logically to a more sustainable health care system in which employers finance health care for all working people and government provides health care through Medicare-style programs for the non-working population of seniors, children, the disabled and the unemployed. Such a system will be cheaper (by reducing administrative costs), fairer (by requiring equal support from all employers) and better (by covering everyone).

The only other alternative is Category E above: Pay for your own health insurance.

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

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...Cookie's legacy

(From Page 2)

Telegraphers Local 92. After her retirement she devoted more time to working on behalf of labor's political action programs.

"What we have won on the picket line," she often said, "we must now protect through effective political action."

"She became the friend and confidant of many Oregon political leaders, including U.S. Senators Wayne Morse and Richard Neuberger, Congresswoman Edith Green, Governor Robert Holmes and Mayor Terry Schrunk" the Labor Press said in her obituary. Gov. Holmes had appointed Mrs. Cook to the Oregon State Committee on Services to the Aging.

ANOTHER ACTIVITY of the woman known as Cookie was reported on by the Labor Press in these words: "She compiled huge files of clippings and source materials on labor and politics, and often worked on this project long after midnight." In her will, she bequeathed her voluminous files to the Multnomah County Labor Council for a research library in the Labor Temple, a building situated on SW Fourth Avenue at Jefferson Street, diagonally across from City Hall. However, the labor council lacked the space for a library and gave her files to the Oregon Historical Society so that researchers could utilize them at the Oregon History Center in the Portland Park Blocks.

The Labor Press obituary on Mrs. Cook also said: "She was our last living link with the pioneer days of unionism. The cause of labor was her religion and her life. Mrs. Cook devoted her long life to the labor movement and to helping the underdog. She spent much of her life in near-poverty because she was more interested in advancing the cause of unionism than in her own comfort or gain."

NEARLY EVERY UNION office in Portland was closed during O.D. Cook's funeral on the afternoon of Wednesday, Dec. 10, 1958 so that those working in the offices could join her other friends at her last rites. Hundreds of people were there, this newspaper reported. (Information on Mrs. Cook's life came from Labor Press articles written by then-Editor Jim Goodsell, who now lives in Twisp, Wash., and Associate Editor Emsie Howard, who is deceased.)

Going back to the history of Western Union, the New York Times noted that the company completed installation of the first transcontinental telegraph line in 1871. An old reference tome in my bookcase said that line ended on a San Francisco hill that became a piece of real estate known as Telegraph Hill.

THE MONEY TRANSFER SERVICE of Western Union has long been its biggest money-maker and will continue to operate. Millions of customers worldwide have utilized the service, which enables customers to send and receive money without going through a bank. To handle the money transfers, the NYT said "the company has 271,000 locations — 80 percent of them outside the United States — in more than 200 countries."

PEOPLE USED TELEGRAMS to notify family and friends of personal events like births, deaths and other milestones of life. A 10-word telegram was the most inexpensive way of speedy communication. I can recall that my family got news by telegram of a relative's tragic death in a neighboring state in the Midwest — my uncle, my mother's brother-in-law, had been crushed by the door of his barn when a cyclone wrenched it loose while he was standing near it.

Another personal note from my childhood days; Another uncle, a bachelor who often visited and occasionally brought me small gifts was a telegrapher for Western Union. After he received a telegraphed message for someone in his town he would print it out in strips of words on a yellow Western Union form; if a messenger wasn't immediately available to deliver it, my uncle would inform the woman at the customer counter that he would deliver it. And off he would he'd go in a suit, white shirt and tie pedaling the office bicycle.

FROM TIME TO TIME, I wouldn't see my telegrapher uncle for a week or two. When asked about his absence, I learned that he'd been a U.S. soldier in World War I and that the Germans had attacked his infantry unit with mustard gas. The chemical had left him with a health problem for which he'd periodically undergo medical treatment at a Veterans Hospital.

MANY ORGANIZATIONS used Western Union telegrams for internal communications with shops and offices at different locations. Newspapers were among the companies that made frequent use of Western Union. Earlier in my career, I worked on daily newspapers in other states, which depended on Western Union to transmit stories from reporters who were covering events at locations within the papers' circulation areas but many miles from their newsrooms.

Portland Letter Carrier reports on Venezuela trip

To The Editor:

I recently spent two weeks in Venezuela, South America, representing Portland Jobs with Justice and the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 82, as part of a Portland fact-finding delegation to check out the revolutionary changes going on there. I particularly spent time with postal workers and with union activists.

I walked into a post office in downtown Caracas, connected with the union shop steward, the union president, and spent six hours talking with letter carriers, clerks, supervisors and union officials. What I found was that the "revolution" is unfolding right inside the post office.

Before President Hugo Chavez was elected, the post office was rife with corruption. Top managers were siphoning off postal revenues into their own pockets and union officials were getting in on the take. Union bureaucrats had not held direct elections for decades.

After Chavez' election in 1998 and the creation of the new, pro-workers' rights constitution, union activists forced democratic elections, disaffiliated with the old-guard union federation and later helped form the new, militant UNT federation. They were able to use their newly-won right-to-strike to throw out the corrupt postmaster, to win one elected position on the Postal Board of Governors, an on-site child care center, and an on-site health clinic for workers and their families. Venezuelan

postal workers have won 25-years-and-out with 100 percent of pay in retirement, and unlimited sick leave. This revolutionary labor union also won community access to their health clinic, and community access to post office class rooms, which provide basic literacy and high school completion for under-educated adults, so that they too could become postal workers.

Venezuela has a lot of oil. So they have a lot of money coming in to lift up the poor and improve workers' lives. But Venezuela also gets the attention of the Bushites, who like oil for themselves. Venezuela is also promoting what it calls "food sovereignty" and "endogenous development," which favors local farmers and local industries and opposes market domination by U.S. imports and export-oriented U.S. corporate sweatshops.

Venezuela is boldly challenging the Bush Administration and their free-trade, pro-corporate, privatization agenda on a world scale. Venezuela has been in the lead in organizing the disruption of free-trade talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and at the Summit of the Americas.

No wonder the Bushites and their corporate cronies are nervous and have made several unsuccessful attempts to unseat the elected President Hugo Chavez, including a military coup (2002), an oil industry sabotage and lockout (2003), and a recall referendum (2004). "U.S. Secretary of War" Don-

ald Rumsfeld recently heated up the rhetorical challenge by comparing Chavez to Hitler. The threat of continued U.S. intervention is very real, especially when looking at the history of repeated U.S. military and covert operations against pro-worker governments and movements in Latin America.

What we found in Venezuela was a militant, democratic labor union movement sweeping the country; challenging government bureaucrats and corporate owners; dedicated to not only improving wages, hours and working conditions for their members but taking control of production and distribution decisions, serving the community and improving the lives of all workers.

We found a government under a new constitution which guarantees not only the right to vote but the right to affordable food and housing, free health care and education through university, a secure retirement, and land, seed, equipment, credit and technical assistance for small farmers and small businesses, especially co-ops. President Chavez calls this "socialism for the 21st century."

A Venezuelan union leader will speak, Sunday, March 19, 7 p.m. at the Carpenters Union Hall, 2215 N. Lombard. PCASC is leading another labor delegation to Venezuela in November (503-236-7916). Check out www.venezuelanalysis.com.

Jamie Partridge
Letter Carriers Branch 82
Portland

OPEN FORUM

Organizing Oregon child care workers

SALEM — Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 will have a role representing 6,000 unlicensed in-home child care providers in Oregon, thanks to an executive order signed by Governor Ted Kulongoski signed Feb. 13.

The child care providers are typically family, friends, or neighbors of low-income parents, paid by the State of Oregon to care for the children while the parents are at work. Payment ranges from \$1.60 to \$2.20 an hour per child, and providers can care for up to three children not related to them without going through licensing and certification.

The same program also pays 1,600 "licensed and certified" in-home child care providers. Under a similar executive order signed September 2005, Oregon Council 75 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees represents that group, along with about 3,000 licensed in-home providers who don't take the subsidy.

The two unions have competed to represent in-home child care providers in Oregon and other states. Kulongoski split the group, with AFSCME getting the more-established providers and SEIU getting the lower-income, higher-

turnover group.

The two unions' campaigns to represent child care providers are quite unconventional in several ways. The governor's executive orders specify that the providers aren't employees of the state. The unions won't "represent" them in the classic sense of collective bargaining that produces a labor agreement; instead, the orders direct the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to "meet and confer" with the unions over issues like training, reimbursement rates, and health and safety conditions. Any agreement they reach will be spelled out in a non-binding memorandum.

Abby Solomon, lead organizer on the SEIU campaign, said that "meet and confer" language is similar to legal language in states that don't have a public employee collective bargaining law. Solomon said in-home child care workers are similar in many ways to the in-home health care workers SEIU unionized several years ago: Small-scale low-wage helpers, often related to the clients they serve. If anything, their status is somewhere between employee and program beneficiary, as many would be doing the work anyway.

Child care worker Mary Bronson,

68, gets \$1,600 a month from the program to look after her five great-grandchildren. Bronson was doing the work anyway before her granddaughter found out about the program, but the income from the program enabled her to move to a safer neighborhood.

When an SEIU representative knocked on her door, Bronson was ready to join. She thinks by teaming up with other child care providers in the same program, they can try to get better wages, and maybe even health benefits, so that she could afford dental care. It's a basic principle of unionism — unifying for a common goal.

SEIU won such benefits for the home health care workers it unionized in 2001, and Solomon said SEIU hopes to pull off a similar win for family child care providers.

The group is very low wage, and without immediate hopes of a union contract, it's not clear when they'll get to the point of paying dues and achieving full union membership. But for SEIU, representing the interests of child care providers is a way to organize very-low-wage workers into an economic and political bloc that will support adequate funding for public services.

...Storm Warning: Merger madness in utilities

(From Page 8)

shown no stomach for interfering with holding companies that want to use their utility subsidiaries as cash cows: "FERC has, under its deregulation experiment, uniformly granted blanket approvals under the Federal Power Act for all stock issuances and loan guarantees based on utility assets for all electricity sellers that sell at market-based rates."

Residents of California remember how reluctant FERC was to intervene in the energy crisis of 2000-2001. "California trusted that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission would step in and regulate if necessary, which was a huge mistake — the FERC has never shown any ability to regulate on a state-by-state basis, much less the political will to do so," former California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) President Loretta Lynch said in an interview last year with UC Berkeley News.

The state hemorrhaged \$40-70 billion before FERC finally stepped in and imposed price caps on wholesale power.

Even if FERC had the will and resources to act as enforcer, mandatory reliability standards may not be a powerful enough tool to get the job done. FERC could levy fines on individual utilities for having too many outages, but will the prospect of such fines be enough to persuade utilities to make the investments needed to keep the system reliable?

Schneider, the former EPRI director, is skeptical. What's left out of the reliability standard, he says, is the long-term adequacy of the workforce.

"Having a commitment that five or 10 years from now your staffing is going to be well-trained and of sufficient size is not included" in any standard, he says.

Last Line of Defense

State regulatory commissions may be the last line of defense for customer service. In California, any takeover of a regulated utility would have to be approved by the state Public Utilities Commission, which also has legal standing to address service quality issues. To

what extent that authority will translate into actual power is one of the big unknowns in the post-PUHCA world. Consumer advocates often complain that state regulatory commissions, in terms of staffing and resources, are outmatched by the utilities they regulate.

But today's utilities are shrimps compared to the supersized holding companies expected to emerge from the coming consolidation of the industry. How will state commissioners stack up against a huge holding company with operations in dozens of states and countries? Schneider believes regulators will have less influence over the highest levels of executive management.

The staff of the CPUC knows where to find executives of Pacific Gas & Electric, headquartered just a few blocks away in downtown San Francisco. "But what if the headquarters is in Texas, or worse, Tokyo?" asks Schneider. "Where are the big financial institutions — Tokyo, London, Hong Kong?"

Some state regulators are growing concerned. The California Public Utilities Commission — one of four state commissions examining the impact of PUHCA repeal—started rulemaking in November to reexamine the relationship of the state's major utilities with their holding company parents and their affiliates.

"With the repeal of PUHCA the commission's responsibility to protect the ratepayers becomes even more paramount," the CPUC said.

One model that state commissions could consider is the Wisconsin Public Utility Holding Company Act, or WUHCA. Enacted in 1985, WUHCA limits the amount a Wisconsin holding company may invest in non-utility ventures, protecting utility customers from risky investments that go bad. WUHCA also requires that the state's Public Service Commission approve any sale of more than 10 percent of the holding company.

"WUHCA trumps PUHCA," says

Dave Poklinkoski, business manager of IBEW Local 2304, which represents employees at Madison Gas & Electric and has actively battled against utility deregulation. He's confident that Wisconsin's law will prevent Exxon Mobil or some investor group from taking over that state's utilities.

Unions like IBEW Local 1245 can play a role in keeping the focus on service reliability in the states where its members work. The union can explain

to employers, to regulators, to legislators and to the public what it takes to keep the lights on today, and the investments in manpower that are needed to make sure the lights are on 10 years from now.

But the storm gathering on the horizon is of a size and character it has not faced before. The Enron fiasco was bad enough, but Enron was limited by PUHCA to owning just a single regulated utility. Now PUHCA is gone. Just as Enron's bright young hot-shots felt

compelled to exploit every conceivable chink in the regulatory armor, an army of corporate takeover artists is now circling the utility industry with one thought in mind.

You can be pretty sure it's not "service reliability."

(Editor's Note: Eric Wolfe is communications director of IBEW Local 1245 in California. This article was posted for re-publication by the International Labor Communications Association.)

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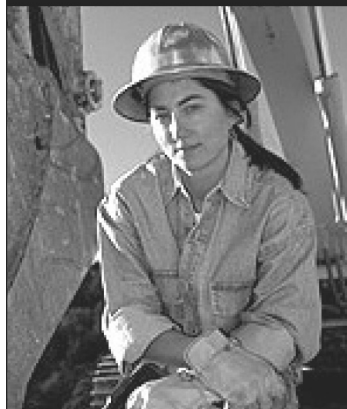
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