Crisis created, then averted

With state shutdown looming, budget deal reached in triple OT

By JOE KENDO

Prior to every legislative session, we tell our members to grid themselves because every win will be hard fought, every good policy will advance by inch—es, and victories are as often noted by what failed to happen as by what did. But even by those standards, the 2017 session was truly one for the ages.

The labor community came to Olympia in January with a few simple goals: advance policies to lift up working families, support our sisters and brothers in K-12 as the Legislature sought to fulfill its McCleary obligation to amply and stably fund our schools, and ensure that the ratified state employee collective bargaining agreements were funded. All the while, we needed to band together to create equitable, accountable election systems. It was the result of months of negotiations between legislators, labor and business leaders spearheaded by Rep. June Robinson (D-Everett) and Sens. Joe Fain (R-Auburn) and Karen Keiser (D-Kent). Gov. Jay Inslee thankfully vetoed that bill into law.

Beginning in 2020, working families in Washington will have a new safety net to ensure that a new baby, ailing parent, or cancer diagnosis doesn’t result in financial calamity. To paraphrase Joe Biden, this is a big deal.

Late on June 30, the same night they were scrambling to avoid a government shutdown, the Legislature approved a historic, comprehensive paid family and medical leave program. It was the result of months of negotiations between legislators, labor and business leaders, and civility. The Senate Majority Leader has proven over and over again these past five years that what cooperation means and even less of an idea about what people are hungry for. This is no way to govern.

The 11th hour—literally—before raised on the backs of working people. That the new revenue necessary was not with our community partners to ensure stably fund our schools, and ensure that its McCabe obligation to amply and stably fund our schools, and ensure that the ratified state employee collective bargaining agreements were funded. All the while, we needed to band together with our community partners to ensure that the new revenue necessary was not raised on the backs of working people. At the 11th hour—literally—before

This is no way to govern

For the past five years the Washington State Legislature has been locked in an ugly and unproductive game of brinkmanship that has cost our state in lost jobs, wages, health outcomes, affordable housing, fair elections, needed social services, and civility.

In 2013, when Sens. Rodney Tom and Tim Sheldon, betrayed those who had voted for them as Democrats by jumping ship to the Republican caucus, partisan extremism has more often than not defined the Republican-controlled Senate.

At the time, Sen. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville) lauded this defection by saying, “This is the sort of cooperation people are hungry for.”

The Senate Majority Leader has proven over and over again these past five years that he has little idea what cooperation means and even less of an idea about what people are hungry for. The majority of Washingtonians don’t want to see workers’ freedom to negotiate a fair return for their work taken away from them. Nor do they want to see minimum wages or prevailing wages lowered. They don’t believe that unemployment should be forced to do community service, and they don’t believe that local governments should

For 5th time, GOP kills Voting Rights Act

By ERIC GONZALEZ

For the fifth straight year, Republicans in the Legislature shut down the Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA), a bipartisan compromise proposal that would provide local governments an opportunity to create equitable, accountable election systems. It passed the House 51-46 (see Vote #2), but was killed without a vote in the GOP-controlled Senate.

HB 1800, sponsored by Rep. Mia Gregerson (D-SeatTac), would enable cities and counties to fix unfair, undemocratic voting systems and avoid costly litigation. It addresses polarized voting, a method of voter suppression that excludes the voices of the communitiies of color and low-income families.

At-large city-wide election systems are prone to polarized voting patterns. The majority determines every member of the city council, school board, public utilities districts—positions that can dramatically impact a community’s social, health and economic

A historic win for families

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Late on June 30, the same night they were scrambling to avoid a government shutdown, the Legislature approved a historic, comprehensive paid family and medical leave program. It was the result of months of negotiations between legislators, labor and business leaders spearheaded by Rep. June Robinson (D-Everett) and Sens. Joe Fain (R-Auburn) and Karen Keiser (D-Kent). Gov. Jay Inslee hailed its passage as “a great bipartisan achievement.”

The Washington Work and Family Coalition—convened by the Economic Opportunity Institute and including the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO and many of its affiliated unions—has been working towards this day for more than a decade.
be prevented from setting workplace standards above the state level.

For the past five years, the Republican Senate has introduced legislation that would limit collective bargaining rights, lower wages, and preempt cities from setting benefit standards above state minimums. They have also opposed the Washington Voting Rights Act, significant reform to Legal Financial Obligations and Second Chance Legislation, all of which would have provided voice and rights to individuals of color.

Twice in three years, the Senate Republicans have taken us to within hours of shutting down government to avoid agreeing to any significant progressive revenue reform and in an attempt to extract unpopular partisan policy changes written by AFIC and funded by the Koch brothers. This has got to stop.

Over the coming weeks and months we will be able to analyze more closely what actually lies in the operating budget and the impact that the property tax hike will have on low and moderate income families living in wealthier areas of the state. Having little to no time to actually read, think about and debate budgets and tax bills is no way to do business. It simply adds to the general cynicism the public has about government.

I want to thank Governor Jay Inslee and House and Senate Democrats for putting forth a set of progressive tax measures, e.g., capital gains tax, and reforming the B&O tax. But once again, the Republicans have refused to deal with our upside down tax system and instead rely on fund transfers, drawing down the rainy day fund, and a property tax hike and shift that needs more analysis.

The problem with brinkmanship politics is that you are forced to sacrifice long-term investments for crisis spending. Had we passed progressive revenue reform in 2013, our state could have made the long-term investments in higher education, mental health, infrastructure, climate adaptation, and long-term care that our residents need. Instead, those decisions are left for another day.

I am glad that the operating budget funds the state employee contracts signed and ratified last fall. These workers have been asked to do so much with so little, it is high time that we begin recognizing their value.

I also want to recognize and say thank you to the legislators and community and business negotiators on the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act. This is a significant piece of social insurance legislation, a truly portable benefit for workers and their families. It is almost 30 years since we passed the Sick Child Act prime sponsored by Rep. Sally Wise, and a decade since Sen. Karen Keiser prime and passed the First Family Leave Insurance Act. Finally, we have a program that will strengthen workers, families, businesses and communities.

The relative gains secured during this session—paid family leave, education funding, contracts, and responsible budget legislation—are testament to the hard work and constant organizing of Washington’s workers, their unions, and their community partners. But the threats remain. Washington is potentially one House seat and one governor away from Right to Work, low wages, and health-care cuts. Our work is not done and the path to securing dignity for working people runs through the Senate.

Missed opportunity for tax reform

While the 2017 session’s delivered historic gains in paid family and medical leave, collective bargaining agreements for state employees, and new money for schools, legislators also missed an opportunity to cement Washington as a truly trendsetting state. Over $7 billion in new revenue was required to meet the state’s obligations to students, workers and families in need, but the Legislature failed to do the bold thing by raising revenue while making our upside-down and backward tax code more fair.

It was not for lack of trying. House Finance Committee Chair Kristy Lytton (D-Anacortes) introduced HB 2186, a tax reform bill to repeal unproductive tax loopholes, and create new sources of revenue to fund services without further burdening working families and people living in poverty. HB 2186 would:

- Make the purchase of a home easier by lowering the Real Estate Excise Tax for affordable homes, while increasing it on houses worth $1 million or more.
- Effectively eliminate the B&O tax credits for small businesses while delivering a win for the state’s most profitable companies.
- Create a modest 7% tax on the sales of stocks and bonds through a capital gains tax, with common-sense exemptions for retirement income, the sale of a home, and the first $50,000 in capital gains per family per year.

Despite the need for major reform of our regressive tax code, and despite the broad benefit these reforms would deliver for rural and urban Washingtonians alike, Republican budget negotiators refused to adopt them. Instead, the GOP Senate passed billions of dollars in property tax increases, and refused to budge even when facing a government shutdown. In addition, they demanded a major business tax cut for manufacturers, effectively moving the goal posts at the last minute with everything at stake.

Ultimately, the Legislature did the right thing by funding services, state employee contracts and public schools to avoid, if barely, a shutdown. But it missed an opportunity to deliver a win for working families, small businesses, rural communities, and future generations of taxpayers when it failed to adopt real revenue reform.

Bipartisan silver linings

A lot has been written about the partisan rancor in Olympia this year—and you will see more of it in these pages—but myopic politics was not the only story to be told this session. Several times, workers saw legislators cross the aisle to do right by working people.

In 2016, state employee unions made significant progress in helping public employees get back on their feet after years of financial harm lingering from the Great Recession. Year after year of missed cost-of-living adjustments, layoffs, and increased health-care costs, the state agencies have struggled to recruit and retain the talent necessary to deliver the high-quality public services that Washingtonians expect.

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This year, building and construction trades work - Responsible bidder bill passes, but other bills languish

This year, the House Finance Committee held hearings on HB 2145, sponsored by Rep. Rich de Bolt (R-Chehalis). Both bills proposed amending the aerospace tax incentives—which have already been amended several times since they were enacted in 2003—to add job conditions for Boeing to receive the full tax incentives. “My colleagues and I don’t understand why the company is offloading significant work from the Puget Sound area,” Boeing engineer Mark Friesen testified. “I’m in favor of tax breaks, but I’m also in favor of good jobs.” At the hearing, current and recently displaced Boeing employees were called to testify by parents and schoolmates concerned about school funding, and advocates for good government and equitable tax policies. But for the unions that represent Boeing workers—Machinists District Lodge 751 and the Society of Professional Engineers in Aerospace/IFPTE 2001—testimony focused on the thousands of jobs cut by Boeing while the company continues to receive its full tax breaks. The bills were sponsored by dozens of Democrats and Republicans; they were eventually introduced at the Senate (see Vote #2) and 63-33 in the House (see Vote #12), and signed by Gov. Jay Inslee.

Many other building trades bills didn’t fare as well in 2017, particularly in the Republican Senate:

PREVAILING WAGE/CBAs—The Washington State Building & Construction Trades Council strongly supported HB 1674, sponsored by Rep. Timm Ormsby (D-Federal Way) to maintain a certain number of jobs to get their tax breaks? This year, the House Finance Committee held hearings on HB 2145, sponsored by Rep. Rich de Bolt (R-Chehalis). Both bills proposed amending the aerospace tax incentives—which have already been amended several times since they were enacted in 2003—to add job conditions for Boeing to receive the full tax incentives. “My colleagues and I don’t understand why the company is offloading significant work from the Puget Sound area,” Boeing engineer Mark Friesen testified. “I’m in favor of tax breaks, but I’m also in favor of good jobs.” At the hearing, current and recently displaced Boeing employees were called to testify by parents and schoolmates concerned about school funding, and advocates for good government and equitable tax policies. But for the unions that represent Boeing workers—Machinists District Lodge 751 and the Society of Professional Engineers in Aerospace/IFPTE 2001—testimony focused on the thousands of jobs cut by Boeing while the company continues to receive its full tax breaks. The bills were sponsored by dozens of Democrats and Republicans; they were ultimately introduced at the Senate (see Vote #2) and 63-33 in the House (see Vote #12), and signed by Gov. Jay Inslee.

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Who sponsored bills that never got a vote

Lots of bills that would have serious benefits or consequences for working families never get a full House or Senate vote. But you can tell who supports the good, bad and ugly bills by checking the list of sponsors and committee votes:

- HB 1300/SB 5527—EMPLOYEE STATUS ENFORCEMENT—Discouraging worker misclassification to ensure more fairness for both employers and employees, and to address the state’s underground economy. SPONSORS: Rep. Marcus Riccelli and Sen. David Frockt


- SB 5541—SUB-MINIMUM WAGE FOR TEENS—Allowing employers to pay 85 percent of the minimum wage to 16- and 17-year-olds. SPONSOR: Sen. Michael Baumgartner

- SB 5550—OUTSOURCING PUBLIC SERVICES—Authorizing state agencies and higher education institutions to contract out for services. SPONSOR: Sen. Dino Rossi


- SB 5822—DECONSTRUCTING WORKERS’ COMPENSATION—Weakening the safety net for injured workers by enacting a collection of benefit cuts and eligibility restrictions. SPONSOR: Sen. Michael Baumgartner

Senate GOP leaders are anti-labor extremists

In the Senate, there are 24 Republicans, 24 Democrats, and one guy who calls himself a Democrat but meets and votes with the Republicans. Given that fragile majority, it may come as a surprise that Republicans have appointed two of their most hostile anti-union members into positions of power. Sens. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane) and John Braun (R-Centralia) were the sole sponsors of 2017 legislation to make Washington a “Right-to-Work” state (SB 5692). It’s a bill that’s occasionally been introduced by the most fringe extremists in the caucus and promptly ignored to avoid any backlash against the party. But this year, as Chair and Vice Chair of the Commerce, Labor & Sports Committee, Baumgartner and Braun held a hearing on their bill, drawing hundreds of angry workers to Olympia.

As Chair, Baumgartner has consistently blocked House-approved bills supported by labor from consideration in the Senate. Each session, he also sponsors bills that have no chance of passage but are clearly meant to antagonize labor. This year, he wrote several to gut the state minimum wage sick leave law overwhelmingly approved by voters last fall. Braun is also Chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. As the GOP’s lead budget negotiator, Braun en-gaged in the three-session game of budget chicken and cyni-cal used the state employee contracts as a bargaining chip.

These guys, who added “Sports” to the labor committee’s name this year, are making sport of antagonizing unions. They both hail from safe Republican districts, but they are doing real harm to their party’s standing among unions and working people across the state.
**SENATE**

1. SSB 5607 (Braun)—Changing education funding. Right vote: NO (Passed 25-24 on 2/1, see Page 1)
2. SSB 5301 (Miloscia)—Responsible bidder criteria. Right vote: YES (Passed 28-18 on 3/3, Page 7)
3. ESB 5720 (Hawkins)—Production-based wages on farms. Right vote: NO (Passed 25-24 on 3/24, Page 1)
4. SSB 5393 (O’Ban)—Religious objectors to unions. Right vote: NO (Passed 25-24 on 3/24, Page 6)

**HOUSE**

1. ESHB 1843 (Sullivan)—Basic education program fully funding schools and ending over-reliance on local levies. Right vote: YES (Passed 52-45 on 2/22, see Page 1)
2. HB 1800 (Gregerson)—Washington Voting Rights Act. Right vote: YES (Passed 51-46 on 2/22, Page 1)
4. ESHB 1234 (Robinson)—Contracive coverage. Right vote: YES (Passed 95-5 on 3/31, Page 3)
5. SHB 1723 (Haler)—Hanford workers’ compensation. Right vote: YES (Passed 69-29 on 3/2, Page 7)
6. ESHB 1237 (Sells)—Bargaining for higher wages at community and technical college. Right vote: YES (Passed 65-32 on 3/3, Page 6)
7. E2SHB 1783 (Holy)—Legal Financial Obligations. Right vote: YES (Passed 91-7 on 3/2, Page 6)
8. SHB 1541 (Robinson)—Rx drug cost transparency. Right vote: YES (Passed 52-46 on 3/6, Page 6)
9. ESHB 1714 (Cody)—Hospital nursing staffing. Right vote: YES (Passed 61-36 on 3/6, Page 6)
10. EHB 1506 (Senn)—Equal Pay Opportunity Act. Right vote: YES (Passed 61-36 on 3/6, Page 6)
11. ESB 5048—House operating budget that fully funds schools and state employee contracts. Right vote: YES (Passed 50-48 on 3/31, Page 1)
12. SHB 5301 (Miloscia)—Responsible bidder criteria. Right vote: YES (Passed 63-3 on 4/7, Page 3)
13. SSB 5975 (Fain)—Paid family and medical leave. Right vote: YES (Passed 65-29 on 6/30, Page 1)
I-1433 set stage for family leave win

By KATHARINE WEISS

Amid threats from the Republican Congress and Trump administration to repeal the Affordable Care Act, the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO and the Healthy Washington Coalition continued to prioritize affordable, accessible health coverage for all Washingtonians. The coalition made important headway in improving the health-care landscape during the 2017 session. Those legislative gains included:

- Expanding the Washington State Health Insurance Pool (WSHIP) is an independent program that provides coverage for individuals who have been denied insurance based on pre-existing conditions. This is critical for making sure that the most vulnerable have access to affordable coverage. It is also a significant cost-control tool. The program relies on funding from the Legislature and was set to expire at the end of 2017. Currently, 1,500 Washingtonians receive coverage as a result of the WSHIP program. SB 1338, sponsored by Rep. Eileen Cody (D-Seattle), extended the expiration date for WSHIP funding to 2022. The bill guarantees that individuals ineligible for Medicare or those that do not have access to a reasonable choice of management plans can maintain coverage. It easily passed both houses and was signed by Gov. Jay Inslee.

- Expanded Access to Contraceptive Coverage—HB 1234 from Rep. June Robinson (D-Everett) and Secretary Treasurer's Column Lynne Dodson

In the midst of a session that demonstrated just how dysfunctional a divided Legislature can be, one amazing thing happened. Washington state passed a paid family and medical disability leave bill that is a model for the nation, and brings us a little closer to the rest of the industrialized world.

Beginning in 2020, working people will be able to take paid time off for the birth or adoption of a child, to take care of an ill family member, when a family member is deployed or wounded in the military, or for their own serious health condition. The new law is progressive in several ways. Twelve weeks of leave generally (with up to 18 weeks in some cases), wages replaced at 90 percent for lower-wage jobs, and employers pay a larger share of the premium than employees. The House voted 65-29 (see Vote #11) and Senate voted 37-12 (Vote #12) to pass SB 5975, and Gov. Jay Inslee signed it into law.

The law was negotiated with labor, community organizations, business, and legislators from both sides of the aisle. But the table was set last year when we passed Initiative 1433, raising the minimum wage and providing paid sick leave. We knew that paid family and medical leave are popular policies, and so did the business community. The specter of an initiative led by labor and community organizations to secure paid family leave motivated business groups to come to the table to help shape the policy. The leverage we had during the negotiations and in securing passage was profound. We learned from I-1433 that when the Legislature fails to pass policies that benefit working people, we can do so through the initiative process.

We can be proud of the Washington Work and Family Coalition led by Marilyn Watkins of the Economic Opportunity Institute and including the WSLC, UFCW 21, SEIU 1199NW, Teamsters 117, Mom’s Rising, and Legal Voice. Democratic legislators who have long worked for paid leave and business leaders who knew this was their opportunity to influence policy before an initiative, partnered with moderate Republican senators and representatives to push recalculant GOP caucus leaders. The result is a huge victory for working people.

The contrast between a difficult, but productive, negotiation for paid family and medical leave and most of the rest of the legislative session is profound. Funding education to satisfy the state Supreme Court’s McCleary decision needed to be a priority. In the end, more money was approved for K-12 education, but the final budget still fell short on fully funding McCleary.

Other education priorities also failed in the divided Legislature. The governor and House Democrats proposed additional funding for the Labor Education and Research Center in their budgets, but Republicans refused. While dozens of well-funded business schools exist, our state’s one labor program is now funded at half the level it was six years ago. Anti-union legislators know the power of labor education, and without additional support, the LERC’s capacity is limited.

Our divided Legislature is not a Democratic or Republican coalition; it is Walsh-Republican. Amid threats from the Republican Congress and Trump administration to repeal the Affordable Care Act, the Washington state passed a paid family and medical leave bill that is a model for the nation, and brings us a little closer to the rest of the industrialized world.

This Washington works to expand health care

From start to finish of the nearly six-month 2017 legislation session(s), the Washington Education Association kept up the pressure on legislators to fully fund basic education. Here, an estimated 6,500 public school educators, parents, students and supporters rallied at the State Capitol on Jan. 16.

This Washington works to expand health care

HB 5554 from Sen. Steve Hobbs (D-Lake Stevens) require private insurance companies to dispense up to 12 months of birth control at a time to patients. Thanks to the tenacious work of the sponsors, Planned Parenthood, and the Healthy Washington Coalition, this bill successfully passed both chambers (see Senate Vote #11 and House Vote #84), a vital step in increasing reproductive health access for women.

Prescription Drug Transparency—Over the past 10 years consumers have watched prescription drug prices skyrocket. Between 2013 and 2015, Washington State Health Authority’s drug spending increased by 45 percent, from $798 million to $1.2 billion. This explains why a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study found that nurses get uninterrupted meal and rest breaks, passed the House 55-42 but died (again) in the Senate.

- Rail Safety—HB 1105 (Rep. Derek Stanford) was approved and signed into law this year. It will strengthen railroad safety standards for workers, equipment and surrounding communities, and ensure proper insurance coverage among railroad employees.

- Equal Pay Opportunity Act—HB 1393 (Rep. Marcus Riccelli, D-Spokane), requiring that nurses get uninterrupted meal and rest breaks, passed the House 97-0, the Senate 46-2, and was signed by the Gov. Jay Inslee.

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- Faculty collective bargaining—HB 1237 (Rep. Mike Sells) allows full-scope collective bargaining so colleges can use local funds to improve faculty/staff wages. The House passed it 65-32, but it was blocked in the Senate Commerce, Labor & Sports Committee.

- WSLC’s Legislative Report

The WSLC will remain vigilant in our efforts to protect and improve upon the Affordable Care Act’s progress in expanding access to affordable health care coverage.

- WSLC’s Legislative Report

Progress on nurse staffing

Progress was made in 2017 on the issue of patient safety at hospitals where nursing staffs are stretched too thin. HB 1714, sponsored by Rep. Eileen Cody (D-Seattle), ensures that staffing committees are a stronger entity within hospitals and requires that the adopted staffing plan actually be implemented. If hospital management fails to do so, nurses will now have a remedy to hold them accountable. HB 1714 passed the House 42-7 (Vote #9), the Senate 61-36 (Vote #10), and was signed into law.

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Some Republicans are working hard to keep their constituents’ wages low

By ERIC GONZALEZ

Republicans offered a series of attacks on working families this session, some that impact the rural workforce in towns, cities and counties they represent.

The rural economy is critically important to the health of our state’s economy. Washington state produces $10.7 billion in commodities per year. Apples make up 22%, or $2.4 billion, of that but also think potatoes, wheat, sweet cherries, grapes, hops, and more. Despite the tremendous amount of wealth created in this industry, the Employment Security Department reports that the average annual salary of crop workers is less than $23,000, below the poverty line for a family of four.

Federal laws exacerbate this income inequality. Agricultural workers are exempt from the overtime pay and other protections of the National Labor Relations Act. Put simply, there are systemic inequities that continue to oppress and discriminate against people of color and low-wage agricultural workers.

So what happens when a court rules that farmworkers were unfairly denied pay, or when voters raise the state minimum wage? Some legislators sent from rural areas to represent those workers do their best to take away those gains. SB 5720, sponsored by Sen. Brad Hawkins (R-East Wenatchee), set out to deny agricultural workers their right to recover in court the full amount on their unpaid wages, including miscalculated rest break compensation. It would also allow employers to avoid responsibility for payment of wages for work performed outside production, such as attending meetings, waiting for equipment to get repaired or replaced, or traveling between worksites.

Our state’s agricultural industry depends on a healthy and willing workforce, but big employers like Stemilt Growers, Kershaw Companies, and Avani Fruit Company, along with the Washington Tree Fruit Association, actively supported SB 5720. This bill is unfair to workers and their families, and drives wages even lower. A version of this bill passed the Senate 28-18 (see Vote #83) but rigously died in the House.

Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane) introduced SB 5530 to delay implementation of Initiative 1433 by two years in all counties except King County. I-1433, approved by nearly 60 percent of voters in 2016, raises the minimum wage to $13.50 by 2020 and allows all workers to earn some paid sick and safe leave, which is important both to working families and to public health. But apparently, Baumgartner believes his own constituents should get lower wages and less sick leave than the people of King County. (It’s worth noting that, even if you threw out every vote that was cast in King County, I-1433 would still have passed.)

Other examples of rural legislators taking a shot at their own constituents in 2017 were:

- Rep. Cary Condotta (R-East Wenatchee) sponsored HB 2065 to regionalize the state minimum wage and have a lower one in “nomaham” areas (like hop, and to block cities and counties from setting higher wage standards.
- Rep. Brad Klippert (R-Kennewick) wrote HB 1724, helpfully titled “Reducing the minimum wage.” It finds that voters made a mistake by raising it too high, so he aimed to cut it. Plus, he wanted a sub-minimum wage for teenagers.

All of these bills failed, but the message is clear: when some GOP legislators claim to represent the interests of the rural economy, they don’t mean the people who live there.

No safety net for workers at nation’s most dangerous worksite

By ERIC GONZALEZ

In 2014, with the resumption of tank remediation work, vapor exposures requiring workers to get medical evaluations were on the increase. The resulting outcry led the U.S. Department of Energy to commission an independent report that produced numerous critical findings and 47 separate recommendations, most of which Hanford is still trying to implement. Among those findings: “The (issue) causing the vast majority of reported worker exposures requiring medical treatment comprise short-term and acute (bolus) exposures, which cause immediate symptoms in the workers and may or may not develop into medi cal signs of chemical exposure. The current program is not designed to detect and is incapable of quantifying this type of transient exposure event. … It is recommended that adopting a “presumption of work-relatedness is consistent with Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidance. Previous medical determinations should be revisited based on a more thorough understanding of the uses and limitations of the monitoring data.”

This year, Rep. Larry Haler (R-Richland) spon sored HB 1723 to enact this recommendation of occupational illness presumption for Hanford workers. With the support of Reps. Marcus Riccelli (D-Spokane), Mike Sells (D- Everett), Mia Gregerson (D-SeaTac), Timm Ormsby (D-Spokane), Beth Doglio (D-Olympia) and Gerry Pollet (D-Seattle), SHB 1723 passed the House on a strong bipartisan 69-29 vote (see House Vote #5).

Unfortunately, despite having a fiscal impact to the state, this important bill to protect workers and their families died in the Senate Committee, Labor & Sports Committee chaired by Sen. Mike Baumgartner (R-Spokane).

Hanford’s story began with a national mission for the benefit and protection of this great country. Our self- less Nuclear Veterans continue that mission to this day, the benefit and protection of this great country. Our self-less Nuclear Veterans continue that mission to this day, the benefit and protection of this great country. Our self-less Nuclear Veterans continue that mission to this day, the benefit and protection of this great country. Our self-less Nuclear Veterans continue that mission to this day, the benefit and protection of this great country. Our self-less Nuclear Veterans continue that mission to this day.

Business gets its wish list on workers’ comp

Every year, business groups in Olympia seek benefit cuts and eligibility restrictions for Washington’s safety net for injured workers and their families— and 2017 was no exception.

SB 5822, sponsored by Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane), was a wish list of workers’ compensation erosions sought by corporate lobbyists.

It proposed:

- Allowing employers and the Department of Labor and Industries to lower claim costs by “scooping up” releases to buy off injured workers as young as 18, who can’t reasonably be expected to know their financial needs until retirement.
- Allowing self-insured businesses to drag out claim approval process from the current 14 days to 60—and, in some instances, up to 240 days.
- Allowing self-insured businesses to impose impossible time frames for filing a claim. Reducing the filing window from two years to one and starting that clock ticking sooner. Whether or not the occupational nature of the disease was known has no bearing. If a worker is given cough syrup from a doctor for a sore throat, their threat exposure treatment 18 months later would be denied.
- Expanding structured lump-sum settlements to younger workers. Employers could negotiate a “settlement and release” deals to buy off injured workers as young as 18, who can’t reasonably be expected to know their financial needs until retirement.
- Prohibiting workers from getting benefits for occupational disease if those diseases could be contracted through the normal course of living. For metal workers, for example, would be denied treatment for arthritis or carpal tunnel due to the possibility of having developed it otherwise. Theoretically, there is no evidence showing the relationship to work.
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found its election system, which had classic signs of fought tooth-and-nail against a federal lawsuit that In Yakima, an all-white conservative city council Act of 1965.

such election systems have been sued in federal court In recent years, municipalities across the state with and concerns.

sion-makers who know and understand their interests real impact—communities lack access to local deci-

dies at every level of local government systems are one of the reasons that people of color are

prosperity. In such systems, there is little incentive for workers and their Right-to-Work legislation. This bill—which would never affect Rossi for multiple reasons—died without a vote. Rossi (R-Sammanish), prohibits state employee unions from contributing to incumbent candidates for governor. This bill—

On short notice, over 1,000 union members turned out in the rain for Senate Republicans’ Right-to-Work hearing.

The hearing and overflow rooms set up to accommodate the crowds were all full, so hundreds more protested in different buildings and outside in the rain—with M.L. King County Labor Council leader Nicole Grant leading chants of “Hands Off Our Union!”—while many visited their legislators’ offices to object to anti-union Right-to-Work legislation. The bill would deny unions and employees in Washington state the freedom to negotiate union-security clauses in contracts. Such a ban is intended to stop union members from paying for representation because they can get it, and the benefits of the contract, for free. The goal is to weaken unions and lower wages and that is exactly what happens in states that enact such laws.

“Right to Work never has and doesn’t now have anything to do with creating or protecting jobs,” said WSLC President Jeff Johnson in his testimony on the bill. “Its purpose is to curb the power of workers and their unions at the bargaining table and in the Legislature.”

Election systems are set up to ignore entire places where communities of color live, among other

enfranchisement. Provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act have been under attack. In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court removed a requirement that states obtain approval from the Department of Justice to change voting procedures. Without the provision, state governments were quick to implement discriminatory Voter ID laws and reduced the number of polling places where communities of color live, among other undemocratic policies.

By empowering local jurisdictions to fix the problem, HB 1800, the real Washington Voting Rights Act, is designed to lower costs for local governments and taxpayers. Municipalities that make meaningful changes would be protected from future lawsuits. It is the product of years of stakeholder input and bipartisan collaboration to put voters front and center. As they have repeatedly killed this legislation, Republicans have promoted another version of the legislation that fails to achieve those goals.

When election systems are set up to ignore entire communities, that isn’t representation, it isn’t demo-

Billionaires vs. bargaining

Senate hears right-wing bills attacking unions of public employees

It’s no secret that right-wing billionaires like the Koch brothers bankroll foundations that are targeting unions for extinction. Millions of those dollars have found their way into Washington state at “think tanks” like the Freedom Foundation and the Washington Policy Center. So in 2017, the think’in’ fellers from these groups showed up in Olympia to testify in favor of a series of Senate bills with familiar attacks on public employee unions and the freedom to negotiate for better wages and benefits.

SB 5533, sponsored by two-time failed gubernatorial candidate Sen. Dino Rossi (R-Sammanish), prohibits state employee unions from contributing to incumbent candidates for governor. This bill—which would never affect Rossi for multiple reasons—died without a vote.

SB 5551 (also from Sen. Rossi) would require state employees to vote on reauthorizing their union every four years. It also died without a vote.

SB 5550 (Rossi again) would open a number of services at state agencies and institutions of higher education to contracting out and privatization. It died.

SB 5539, sponsored by Sen. Steve “Not Rossi” O’Ban (R-University Place), would let public employees who are “religious objectors” to unionization choose from an expanded list of charities for donating their dues equivalent. This list would now include quasi-political groups like... the Freedom Foundation! It passed the Senate 25-24 (see Vote #4) before dying in the House.

The Senate Committee, Labor and Sports Committee chaired by Sen. Michael Baumgartner (R-Spokane) held a hearing on these bills on a snowy morn-

In Yakima, an all-white conservative city council fought tooth-and-nail against a federal lawsuit that found its election system, which had classic signs of polarized voting, had suppressed the Latino vote that makes up 40 percent of the population. The decision to fight that lawsuit rather than change the election system cost Yakima taxpayers nearly $3 million in legal fees. In the end, the city was forced to reform its system to create districts and the change was transformative. For the first time in the history of the city, not just one but three Latina women were elected to the city council. These new leaders have advocated for inclusive policies around public safety, access to community centers and neighborhood parks, infrastructure, and economic development in their communities that had gone ignored under the previous leadership. Washington must step up its commitment to voter