



Report of the President

Larry Brown



In 2018, when I campaigned to serve as President of your Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, I promised to build on the council's successes while ensuring that it was responsive to its affiliated unions and their priorities. In the two years since I was given the honor of serving, that has remained my focus. Working alongside Secretary Treasurer April Sims, a truly dynamic and inspiring labor leader, and with the very talented WSLC staff, your Washington State Labor Council is determined to build power for Washington's working people. During these troubling times, the WSLC has expanded efforts "to combat resolutely the forces that seek to undermine the democratic institutions of our nation and to enslave the human soul," as proclaimed in our Constitution.

In recent years, delegates to our conventions have been very clear. Our affiliates want the WSLC to actively fight for racial justice, immigrant rights, and to address the climate crisis. A series of resolutions call for the WSLC to lead our state's labor movement in these areas internally, by educating our own members about their roles and responsibilities in these struggles, and externally, by working with affiliated unions and community allies to promote public policies addressing all three.

The WSLC now has dedicated staff members and committees in all three areas to advance that work.

We welcomed Vlad Gutman-Britten to our lobbying team as Climate and Infrastructure Advisor. His deep experience in environmental policy and advocacy enables him to work alongside our climate allies to pursue clean-energy infrastructure policies that prioritize family-wage jobs. Dulce Gutiérrez, the WSLC's Union, Community and Naturalization Organizer, has given the council a strong presence in the Yakima Valley advocating for farmworkers and immigrant rights. She recently launched the WSLC's one-of-a-kind naturalization legal services program, providing legal aid to union members who are legal permanent residents seeking citizenship. And we just welcomed Kasi Marita Perreira as the WSLC's new Director of Racial and Gender Justice. She will be refining and expanding our ground-breaking Race and Labor education programs, highlighting the racial and gender justice challenges facing organized labor, and engaging with other social movements in these critical efforts.

These three bodies of work have commonality. They all combat efforts to divide working people in ways that benefit the wealthy few and big corporations. We cannot allow those who stoke divisions by race and immigration status—or who pit jobs versus the environment—to undermine the solidarity of workers. WSLC affiliates' directives in these areas are intended to support the whole working person by fighting threats to their livelihoods and well-being, both on and off the job.

This work must not, and has not, supplanted our fundamental work of fighting for good union contracts, better wages, benefits and working conditions. The WSLC continues to rally union solidarity and community pressure in support of our affiliates' rank-and-file members, and of all workers. That has led to some inspiring moments in the past two years, including successful strikes (Swedish hospitals, multiple school districts, fruit warehouses) and historic contracts (grocery workers, teachers, UW Postdocs, nurses, and many others). The preparation and internal organizing of our public-sector unions has succeeded in blunting the negative effects

of the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision and educated our existing and new members about the importance of remaining strong and united.

In the past two legislative sessions, the WSLC has advocated alongside its affiliated unions to win some extraordinary advances.

Last year, nurses and other frontline healthcare workers celebrated new protections to ensure they get uninterrupted meal and rest breaks and to end abuses of mandatory overtime. Together, we fought for and won post-*Janus* collective bargaining protections, limits on non-compete contracts, new standards to protect refinery workers, expand apprenticeship opportunities, and protections for our state's immigrant workforce. And importantly, we passed a 100% clean energy bill to kick-start a new phase in the campaign to address the climate crisis while also protecting and promoting family-wage jobs in our state.

This year, the WSLC and its affiliates continued to build upon those gains. To name a few, together we won privacy protections for public employees, safe staffing for freight and passenger trains, limits on "bid shopping" on public-works projects, transparency and accountability in government contracting, and we closed a loophole to ensure that all Sea-Tac Airport workers are covered by the city's minimum wage standard.

But then COVID-19 struck.

This pandemic has been an extraordinarily difficult time. We have lost thousands of lives and tens of thousands of jobs to this disease, with no end in sight. But I've been inspired by the determination and power of Washington's labor movement in demanding personal protective equipment, hazard pay, and safety-and-health standards to protect the lives of our members and their families. This is truly what unions are all about: standing together in times of crisis to take care of one another. In the months since the pandemic struck, the WSLC has been working to amplify our affiliates' efforts to protect their members from COVID-19 while also protecting their livelihoods. Thanks to our efforts, strong leadership from Gov. Jay Inslee, and decades of union advocacy to build strong safety nets for sick, injured and laid-off workers, the anti-poverty organization Oxfam America just named Washington the best state in the country for workers during the pandemic.

But the hardest challenges of this pandemic and its economic impact lie ahead. Boeing and the aviation industry have been devastated by the economic downturn and are laying off thousands. Plus, Boeing is once again threatening to shift production away from Washington, which could cost thousands more jobs that we fought for and earned. Restaurant and hospitality workers, live events and arts workers, school support workers, transit workers, and many others have been decimated by the pandemic. A multi-billion dollar state revenue shortfall jeopardizes critical public services and jobs. Even our proud U.S. Postal Service faces attacks, including sabotage, from politicians and privatizers.

The WSLC's Workforce Development team has been working long and hard hours to help our members who have lost their jobs amid this downturn. In addition to helping them secure unemployment benefits and new training and job opportunities, we have assisted our affiliates in securing Trade Adjustment Assistance for thousands of Washington workers like those at Boeing and Alcoa Intalco Works.

My message to you today is that there is light ahead. Unions were made for times of hardship like these.

We just need to stay focused on what lays directly in front of us and use our collective power to make positive change. And as we convene in September 2020, what lays directly in front of us is a critical election. We have the opportunity to elect champions of workers to the Legislature and to Congress, and to reverse the disastrous course of our nation by electing Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

But it won't stop there. Our mission, when we emerge from this pandemic, will be to hold elected officials, employers and everyone else accountable. Working people were always essential, and will remain so. It's time to put their interests first and build an economy that works for all.

In Solidarity,
Larry