

**Testimony of Bob Bussel, Director
Labor Education and Research Center
Before House Committee on
Higher Education and Workforce Development
March 22, 2013**

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chairs Harker and Huffman, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bob Bussel. I am an associate professor of history and director of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon. I have held this post since 2002.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and talk about LERC. Our activity consists of teaching, research, and public service related to issues of work, employment, and labor relations. I'd like to provide members of the committee with a brief overview of LERC's recent activities in each of these important areas.

LERC is a campus-based public service program that was established by the Oregon legislature in 1977. Perhaps the best way to understand LERC's mission is to view us as an extension program. Just as there are university-based programs that serve the agricultural, forestry, or business communities, LERC makes the resources of the university available to labor organizations, and other constituencies involved in the arenas of work and employment. Although based at the University of Oregon, we provide our services to the public on a state-wide basis. We see our work as an integral part of the university's obligation to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Oregon.

One of LERC's core commitments is to provide affordable, accessible instructional services to our constituents. In the past two years, our six-person faculty conducted 105

educational programs that were attended by over 4,000 persons. We teach subjects such as grievance handling, collective bargaining, and labor law that help workers have an effective voice on the job. More recently, we have addressed concerns such as bullying, generational conflict, and workplace violence. We have also conducted numerous trainings supporting joint labor-management efforts to resolve workplace conflict in both public and private sector settings, including programs at a hospital in Coos Bay, at Kaiser Permanente, and in the city of Portland. We are especially proud of helping to educate several generations of Oregon's union leaders in the practice of positive labor relations. Indeed, many of our students have gone on to top leadership positions in their unions and in their communities, testifying to the effectiveness of our efforts.

LERC also serves the public through its applied research capabilities. For example, we just completed our third study, "All Costs Considered III," that reviewed the contracting of school support services in Oregon. Already, the findings in this report are being used by school districts in evaluating the potential benefits and costs of contracting out. Our 2008 report titled "The Immigrant Experience in Oregon" brought together scholars from the University of Oregon to analyze the important demographic changes that have been reshaping our state. LERC faculty subsequently made numerous public presentations explaining the implications of this study and bringing its message to a wider audience. We also have conducted research on the effectiveness of apprenticeship programs in the construction trades and recently developed a curriculum to help unions improve the retention of women and underrepresented groups in these important occupations. Finally, we have a long history of research in the arena of occupational safety and health. In recent years we been integrally involved in a project aimed at reducing violence

directed at home health care workers. This research is being used to design interventions that will ensure the safety of workers who perform this vital work in vulnerable environments.

In addition to teaching and research, we have an extensive and richly varied tradition of community and public service. Our service assumes multiple forms. LERC faculty member Barbara Byrd shares her expertise on green jobs and workforce development as a member of the Governor's Green Jobs Council and through her service on the Oregon Workforce Investment Board. Helen Moss has played an integral role in the Oregon Young Employee Safety program, a consortium of private employers, public agencies, unions, and nonprofits devoted to preventing injuries and accidents among young workers. As part of this work, Helen has coordinated the dissemination of "Talking Safety," a curriculum that teaches young workers to be safe on the job. Affirming the effectiveness of this curriculum, the Oregon Youth Authority now requires young offenders to take Talking Safety Classes before being eligible for work assignments. Through my work on the immigration task force of the Eugene Human Rights Commission and my role in convening the Lane County Network for Immigrant Integration, LERC has helped Eugene and Springfield become more welcoming places for immigrants who are making important social, economic and civic contributions to community well-being. Finally, for the last three decades, LERC has coordinated the biennial Public Employees Relations Conference. This event attracts nearly 300 management and union practitioners and explores new ways to enhance positive labor relations in the public sector.

At an event marking LERC's 30th anniversary, UO president emeritus Dave Frohnmayer succinctly summarized the significance of our work: "LERC embodies the public service commitment of the University of Oregon... It is one of UO's most successful units in integrating the three essential functions of the university: teaching, research, and public service." I should

add that we do this work on an annual budget under one million dollars that has been essentially flat for the last decade.

LERC wants to keep on being what I like to call "the little program that could."

However, as a statewide public service program, we need continued legislative and university support to maintain the level of service that our constituents expect and which we are proud to provide. We hope that this support will be sustained under whatever arrangements may emerge during the restructuring of higher education in Oregon.