

Union political foes up to their old tricks

A voter-approved clampdown on signature gathering abuse doesn't seem to have changed the behavior of one Portland-based signature gathering company — B&P Campaign Management.

According to evidence released Dec. 22 by the union-backed ballot measure watchdog group Our Oregon, B&P has been paying petitioners by-the-signature. That kind of "bounty" was made illegal by Measure 26, which was passed by Oregon voters in 2002. Under the law, ballot measure campaigns may pay petitioners, but they must pay them by the hour.

B&P allegedly paid petitioners in cash, with no documentation — sometimes on street corners or out of the windows of a car, reporters were told at a press conference on Dec. 22.

Petitioners were required to hand in petitions at 10 a.m. Monday and Thursday, and then come back to collect their cash at 3 p.m. after the signatures had been verified.

The company disputes the allegations.

At least four current ballot measure campaigns are employing B&P to gather signatures, including campaigns headed by union foes Bill Sizemore and Russ Walker.

Last year, B&P owner Parker Bell was fined \$2,500 for the same violation — paying per signature.



Told they might have been cheated out of wages, a number of B&P petitioners filed wage claims with the Bureau of Labor and Industries. Above, Patty Wentz of Our Oregon shares a flyer with information on how to file a claim. Photo by Josh Berezin.

Bell used to work for Sizemore.

The Oregon Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers won a \$2.5 million ruling in September 2002 against Sizemore and his Oregon Taxpayers United Education Foundation, a charity he founded along with a political action committee.

A Multnomah County jury found the charity and the PAC guilty of fraud and forgery, and determined they engaged in a pattern of racketeering to obtain signatures on initiative petitions for tax measures.

During the trial, Sizemore testified that Bell had cheated him, charging him for more signatures than were delivered.

That means Sizemore is going back to paying a signature-gathering crew boss that he himself ac-

cused of cheating.

The unions have yet to see any of the \$2.5 million.

On the most recent allegations, Our Oregon filed a complaint against B&P with the Oregon Secretary of State Elections Division. Director John Lindback said the agency is investigating and will determine whether to pursue criminal or civil charges against the firm.

In the meantime, Our Oregon is asking anyone who sees people gathering signatures for initiative petitions to call its "ballot watch hotline" at 503-239-8029. Our Oregon wants reports on initiatives, locations, dates, names of signature gatherers and the pitch that is given to get signatures.

For more information about the organization, go to www.oureregon.org.

Sweeney links global trading system, poverty

HONG KONG (PAI) — The business-run inequitable global trading system enriches corporate CEOs while leaving people in poverty worldwide, says AFL-CIO President John Sweeney.

Speaking Dec. 11 in Hong Kong, at the end of a week of demonstrations for workers' rights in the U.S. and around the globe, the federation chief denounced "the link between the current global trading system and the continued poverty experienced by too many in the world."

Sweeney spoke just after protesters gathered in Hong Kong before the latest meeting of world trade ministers for negotiations on international trade rules. Those talks, held Dec. 12-16, went nowhere. The ministers, including U.S. Trade Representative Robert Portman, did not consider workers' rights.

"U.S. workers join workers globally

in calling for an end to an unjust trading system that increases corporate profits at the expense of workers' rights and workers' dignity," Sweeney said of the demonstrations in the U.S., which drew more than 60,000 people nationwide. "We join you in calling for trade justice — a system of trading that benefits millions of workers and the poor by including workers' rights. The current system creates jobs that keep the majority of workers impoverished ... benefits nobody but the CEOs," he stated.

Sweeney reminded the crowd that in the U.S., workers' rights often "exist only on paper," with workers being harassed, intimidated, spied upon and fired when they try to form or join unions. Almost all global trade pacts, including the World Trade Organization's charter, ignore or belittle worker rights. The Hong Kong trade talks were under the World Trade Organization auspices.

...Who's side are they on?

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cent), Northeast (59 percent) and Midwest (60 percent) say the country is on the wrong track. Among Southern voters, some 48 percent say the nation is on the wrong track, while 35 percent say it's going in the right direction.

A major factor in the disapproval of the nation's direction is the strong belief that both Congress (66 percent) and President George W. Bush (59 percent) are out of step with working families' priorities, the poll found.

The public's concern over the nation's direction crossed economic, political and geographic lines. Among employed adults surveyed, 58 percent say the nation is on the wrong track, as do 64 percent of working women and 63 percent of members of working fami-

lies with incomes of less than \$40,000.

Many media commentators have attributed recent public dissatisfaction to the war in Iraq, but the Hart poll shows working families hold deep concerns over the nation's domestic course, especially in five areas: Health care (69 percent), retirement security (65 percent), fair taxes (57 percent), education (53 percent) and jobs and the economy (47 percent). The survey also finds 63 percent of seniors ages 65 and older dissatisfied with the new Medicare prescription drug benefit plan that opened to enrollees Nov. 15 for coverage that began Jan. 1, 2006.

The survey was conducted Dec. 1-4, 2005, among a representative sample of 801 registered voters, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent.



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