

Let me say this about that

...Woman of Local 49

(From Page 2)

JIM LEARY DIED on May 31, 1985 at age 77, a dozen years after he had retired. Months prior to his death he had undergone surgery for removal of a brain tumor. His funeral took place in his hometown of Butte.

Looking back on his career in the labor movement, Jim once told me: "I got satisfaction that we, the AFL-CIO, devoted so much time to social legislation that brought a better life to so many."

★★★

CELIA GRAVES BOGGS, a retired life member of Portland-based Service Employees Local 49, had attained the age of 105 years old when she died on April 1, 1989 in Hoquiam, Washington. Her career and longevity qualify her for the Labor Honor Roll.



CELIA BOGGS

She was born as Urcelia Graves on Oct. 5, 1883 in Platte County, Nebraska, near the town of Humphrey. Her father, Julius Graves, served with the Illinois Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War. He was in Company A of the 132nd Regiment. She later told relatives that she was "especially proud of her patriotic heritage."

AFTER THE WAR, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln honored Julius Graves with a Certificate of Thanks and an 80-acre homestead in Nebraska. It was on that homestead that Celia was born, the youngest of nine children of Julius and Helen Graves.

In 1904, Julius and Helen Graves and their daughter Celia, by then 21, moved to Portland. Her parents bought a home at SE 66th Avenue and Knight Street for \$700. The older Graves children, who were married, remained in Nebraska and raised their families there.

IN 1909, Celia married James Q. Boggs. Two years later she graduated from the old Normal School of Music and taught music for several years. Celia and James lived in the Graves family home, and she took care of her aging parents until their deaths.

Marjorie Dahlstrom of Aberdeen, Wash., a granddaughter, told the Labor Press two decades ago that Mrs. Boggs "proudly displayed our national flag honoring those who served our country."

MRS. DAHLSTROM added: "She cut, stacked and carried wood for two woodstove heaters for many years. She especially enjoyed caring for and displaying a beautiful rose garden."

At the outset of World War II, Celia Boggs joined the ranks of women who helped the war effort by working in Portland shipyards. In August 1944 at the age of 60, Mrs. Boggs took a job on the staff of the Morgan Building in downtown Portland and became a member of what was then called Building Service Employees Local 49. Later, the international union shortened its name to Service Employees international Union (SEIU) to reflect its expanding scope and membership.

LATER, CELIA BOGGS worked at the old Portland Hotel in the heart of the downtown area. The magnificent building was torn down in the early 1950s to make way for a parking lot. Still later, the parking lot gave way to the Pioneer Courthouse Square, a much-used plaza also known as "Portland's Living Room."

When Mrs. Boggs celebrated her 102nd birthday at a rest home in Hoquiam, Wash., she recollected how she rode "streetcars and trolleys to work in the heart of the city. "After the hotel closed, in preparation for its razing, Mrs. Boggs took other employment within Local 49's jurisdiction. After her retirement in the late 1950s, Service Employees Local 49's executive officer, Secretary-Treasurer Glenn Blake, accorded her "life member" status in the union. Blake, in addition to his duties in Local 49, served for many years as president of Portland's central labor council. The Portland Labor Council became the Multnomah County Labor Council and later the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, which covers the counties of Multnomah, Washington, Columbia and Clackamas.

IN 1961, six years after the death of her husband, Mrs. Boggs moved to Hoquiam to be near relatives living in the Grays Harbor area along Washington's coast. She later moved into a rest home there.

Mrs. Boggs descendants included a daughter, Bertha Johnson, who died in 1983; four grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and 21 great-great-grandchildren.

Verdict's in: Higher minimum wages DO NOT kill jobs

By RICK BENDER

President Ford once said, "The American wage earner and the American housewife are a lot better economists than most economists care to admit."

That might explain why, despite the sky-is-falling cries of "neo-economists" who predict unemployment, Americans consistently support raising the minimum wage. Why? They don't believe these hired Chicken Littles — with good reason.

It's never been clearer than today that higher minimum wages do not increase unemployment. Ironically, we have the Bush Administration and this Republican Congress to thank for that. Their shamefully historic neglect of the federal minimum wage — mired at \$5.15 an hour for eight years and counting — has led many states to pick up their slack. The result is a national patchwork of minimum wages, which have repeatedly demonstrated no negative economic impact of raising the lowest legal wage.

At the high end, the reigning champion, in the Northwest corner, weighing in at \$7.63 an hour — Washington state! But don't get too excited. That's just \$15,870 a year for a full-time worker.

I was proud to file the 1998 initiative that took the politics out of the issue and made Washington the first state to annually adjust its minimum wage for inflation. And I was even prouder when voters approved it by a 2-to-1 margin. Since then, Oregon (\$7.50), Vermont (\$7.25) and Florida (\$6.40) also have indexed their minimum wages.

Back in 1998, corporate lobbying groups trotted out their think tanks to warn of catastrophic consequences if we voted "yes." Well, eight years after we ignored them, Washington state should now be the poster child for runaway minimum wage-induced job loss. Is it?

"The Washington state economy

right now is a job engine drawing people in from the sidelines and into the job market," said Greg Weeks, director of the Washington's Employment Security Department's economic-analysis branch. This March 2006 statement came with a job-growth report that showed Washington outpacing the rest of the nation, with a 3.5 percent gain over last year.

As of January 2006, 12 of the 17 states with minimum wages higher than the federal level have state unemployment rates LOWER than the 4.7 percent national rate, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Washington state is one of them.

Since our state began regularly increasing its minimum wage in 1999, employment in sectors that traditionally pay at or near the minimum wage have posted sustained job growth, according to Employment Security Department data.

For example, eating and drinking establishments have added jobs every single year except 2002, the year the post-9/11 recession began, causing job losses in all sectors. From January 1999 to January 2006, restaurant and bar employment in the state increased 10.1 percent, while overall non-farm employment increased by 7.9 percent.

Back in 1998, the Chicken Little neo-economists also said that employers in high-wage Western Washington may be able to withstand minimum wage increases, but those in lower-wage Eastern Washington would suffer. This was a real cause for concern, especially in places like Spokane, where leaders have struggled for decades with strategies to increase the number of higher-paying jobs.

Guess what? A December 2005 report by state regional labor economist Jeff Zahir finds that is finally happening in Spokane County. There are 4,800 fewer jobs paying less than \$20,000 than there were a year ago. And those jobs didn't disappear. Zahir found evidence that the workers

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simply moved up to the higher \$20,000-30,000 wage bracket, which posted a gain in similar numbers.

Bottom line: the neo-cons who control America are flat-out wrong on this issue.

Since 1997, the cost of a loaf of bread has gone from 86 cents to \$1.04; the cost of a dozen eggs has gone from \$1.15 to \$1.45; and the cost of a gallon of gas has gone from \$1.26 to \$2.32, according to the BLS. But the lowest legal wage hasn't gone up one stinkin' dime. And during that period, Congress has voted itself eight pay raises totaling \$31,600, or three full years' pay for a federal minimum wage worker.

At least the neo-cons aren't conning voters, who'll continue to raise the minimum wage every chance they get.

(Rick Bender is president of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO.)

Fletcher urges contributions to Witt's re-election

To The Editor:

During the 2005 session of the Oregon Legislature, I worked as legislative assistant to Rep. Brad Witt. He was appointed to a vacant House seat several weeks after the session commenced.

Despite active efforts by the majority House caucus (Republican) to deny Brad membership on substantive committees, he was able to provide effective leadership on behalf of Oregon's workers, veterans and seniors. I have been active as an advocate for these same groups at the State Capitol since 1971, and I don't recall any freshman legislator compiling the record that Brad accomplished.

The Republican caucus in the House has targeted Brad's seat and their candidate's campaign is up and running.

In order for Brad to return to Salem and continue to represent workers, veterans and seniors, he must raise several thousand dollars to mount a winning campaign.

I have sent my \$100 (a \$100 tax credit for a couple) to the campaign. I urge my brothers and sisters who believe that Oregon's workers, veterans and seniors need Brad's voice to be continued to be raised on their behalf to send their contribution (\$100 tax credit for a couple, \$50 for an individual) to: Elect Brad Witt, P.O. Box 1055, Clatskanie, OR 97016.

Irv Fletcher
President Emeritus
Oregon AFL-CIO
Woodburn

From Donna Jablonski,
National AFL-CIO

Health care tops U.S. concerns

Being able to find and afford health care is the top concern of Americans today, according to survey results released last week by Gallup.

Editor & Publisher reports: "A total of 68 percent said they worried about this a 'great deal.' Coming in second is the Social Security system at 51 percent. Following close behind that were 'availability and affordability of energy, drug use, crime and violence — and only then 'the possibility of terrorist attacks in the U.S. (at 45 percent)."

Gallup says health care is the top-ranking concern among Democrats, Republicans and Independents — although Democrats tend to be more worried overall.

Other research reports also point to concerns about the economy. In a March 2006 poll from Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg, three choices were tied when respondents were asked about the biggest economic problem for the country — "jobs leaving the U.S.," oil and energy prices and the Iraq war.