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Bill Sizemore is back in business

Judging by recent initiative filings, Bill Sizemore is back. But if he thinks old methods will fly, he may have to rethink. Some Oregon lawmakers are preparing new laws to clean up the initiative process.

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Defying predictions that a 2002 conviction for forgery and fraud would end his run in politics, staunchly anti-union ballot measure sponsor Bill Sizemore is back in business.

Sizemore has so far submitted 38 initiative petitions for the November 2008 ballot, many of them different versions of the same idea, filed to increase the odds of getting a favorable ballot title. Of those petitions, 29 are still active, 10 have been approved for circulation, and at least five have been sighted on the clipboards of Sizemore's roving signature crews.

In the 1990s, Sizemore's ballot measure machine was a major force in Oregon politics. His influence is said to have peaked in 1996, with the pas-



BILL SIZEMORE

sage of Measure 47, a property tax limitation, or in 2000, when he had a record seven initiatives on the ballot. Either way, subsequently, the Sizemore operation fell on hard times. None of his seven measures passed in 2000. Union vigilance prevented him from qualifying two measures in 2002. His group Oregon Taxpayers United was legally dissolved in 2003. Fallout from a successful union lawsuit appears to have sidelined him in 2004.

But in 2006, he was back on the ballot, with an initiative that would have banned the use of credit scores in setting insurance premiums. The somewhat innocuous measure may have been designed to rehabilitate his image. It was defeated.

Judging by his latest crop of initiative petitions, he's attempting a come-

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Unitus employees say, 'Show us the love'

Linda Taylor, Linda Staniford and Paula Johns — members of Communications Workers of America Local 7901 — walk an informational picket line at Unitus Community Credit Union in downtown Portland Feb. 9 to draw attention to slow negotiations for a new contract. Approximately 80 employees at four branches have been working under the terms of a contract that expired on Nov. 30. The union decided to go public two days after management proposed gutting all grievance procedures. "It came out of left field," said CWA President Madelyn Elder, adding that management also has proposed eliminating two floating holidays. Three years ago, employees accepted wage freezes for two years as the company expanded to be more competitive in the market. "The expansion is done. They have this new downtown office building. Now it's time to recognize their employees, who are the face and voice of this credit union," Elder said. The union wants supporters to call the credit union and demand they settle a fair contract. The phone number is 503-227-5571, or 1-800-452-0900.

Unions team with ... Wal-Mart! in push for national health care

Service Employees and Communications Workers of America join the 'Better Health Care Together' coalition

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Leaders of two big unions — the Communications Workers of America and the Service Employees International Union — joined Wal-Mart and several other Fortune 500 companies on Feb. 7 to launch a new coalition that will push for universal health care by 2012.

Members of the coalition, which include AT&T (the nation's largest union employer), Intel and Kelly Services, and public policy groups such as the left-leaning Center for American Progress and the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center (Baker was chief of staff under President Ronald Reagan), did not disclose or endorse a specific plan. But the group did draw some flak because of its most prominent member: Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott.

Wal-Mart, the nation's largest private employer, has been targeted by labor groups for the expensive health care coverage it of-

fers employees, skimpy wages, labor-law-breaking mistreatment of workers and the fact that 46 percent of its workers and their families are in publicly-paid health care programs.

And when a reporter asked Scott if Wal-Mart would commit to spending more on health care or covering more of its workers at a lower cost, he said "no." Scott said he was pleased that 90 percent of Wal-Mart employees qualified for health insurance. "We're not pleased that 90 percent choose not to take health insurance."

That, and the presence of other unionists, drew criticism from United Food and Commercial Workers International President Joe Hansen, who said Scott's presence was nothing more than PR-driven public "posturing."

In an announcement released shortly after the coalition's news conference, Hansen (who served for over a year on a special congressionally-created health care panel) said that although the union supports universal health insurance, "It's not appropriate to take the stage with a company that refuses to remedy its mistreatment of workers, among other irresponsible practices. Wal-Mart is actually decreasing health care coverage to employees and facing the

largest gender discrimination case in the history of this country." UFCW and SEIU are part of the Change to Win labor federation.

SEIU and Wal-Mart are the founding members of the new coalition dubbed, "Better Health Care Together." Stern said he and Wal-Mart CEO Scott had met privately to outline the principles of the coalition.

"It is time to admit that employer-based health care is dead," Stern said. "We can't keep tinkering, hoping that incremental change will fix our broken health care system. We need fundamental change, and it is going to take new thinking, leadership, new partnerships, some risk-taking, and compromising to make it happen. But that is what we all owe our country."

Nearly 47 million Americans lack health insurance, while insurance premiums have jumped 87 percent over the last five years.

Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, explained that he joined the coalition because "Our current system puts a huge strain on employers that provide quality

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