

Republicans, Big Business in uproar over cuts to union oversight agency

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Republicans and Big Business leaders are in an uproar over a vote by U.S. House Democrats not to restore a small cut in funding to the Office of Labor-Management Standards.

OLMS is a division of the U.S. Department of Labor. It was set up under the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act and is charged with monitoring financial disclosures by unions. Under the anti-union Bush Administration, OLMS has seen its funding increased by 33 percent and its staffing increased from 290 full time employees to 406 — while other agencies within the Department of Labor have had their budgets and staffing slashed.

Since 2001, OLMS has adopted new reporting rules that have required unions to spend millions of dollars in new software. The national AFL-CIO says union officials also have been forced to spend time plowing through reporting requirements that track the smallest of expenditures (including the purchase of paperclips), leaving them less time to serve current members and to assist prospective new members in organizing.

In his appropriations budget for the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education departments, Bush proposed a 14.6 percent increase — to \$56.9 million in 2008.

The House bill version reduced OLMS funding to \$45.7 million from \$47.8 million.

An attempt by Republicans to restore \$2 million to OLMS' budget was defeated 186-237 on a mostly party-line vote, touching off the uproar.

In Vancouver, Wash., the Columbian newspaper on July 24 attacked Third District Congressman Brian Baird for his vote not to restore the funding. (All of Oregon's congressional Democrats voted the same as Baird.)

Following the talking points of Republicans, Big Business and the National Right-to-Work Committee, the newspaper derided Baird and the De-

mocrats for targeting OLMS and "protecting unions."

"If fiscal concern is crucial, why was OLMS targeted by House Democrats as the sole division in the Department of Labor that will face funding cuts?" the newspaper asked.

The Columbian made no mention that Democratic lawmakers approved *increases* in funding for all the other investigative offices within the Department of Labor.

During debate on the amendment on July 17, House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) said "(OLMS) has been doing very well while other portions of the Labor Department that are supposed to focus on protecting workers have, in fact, been starved."

Obey said the Wage and Hour Division, which is supposed to enforce protection for workers on minimum wage, overtime and child labor laws, will have seen its staffing drop by over 12 percent since 2001, and the staff level at the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, which protects workers from unfair employment practices by federal contractors, will have dropped by 23 percent.

In his defense, Baird told the Columbian newspaper: "I'm 100 percent for investigating union corruption,

but it would be a more balanced approach if the Bush Administration had shown this strong a commitment to investigating abuse of workers and protecting workers' rights here and abroad."

Later, in a second attempt to restore funding to OLMS, U.S. Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.) offered an amendment to cut \$3 million from the U.S. contribution (via the Department of Labor) to the International Labour Organization for its campaigns against child labor and workers' rights abuses. That move died, too.

John Edwards will speak at Oregon AFL-CIO convention

Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards will be the keynote speaker at this year's Oregon AFL-CIO convention.

The convention will be held in Seaside Oct. 7-10.

Edwards has been confirmed to speak on Tuesday, July 9, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain told the NW Labor Press.

Vancouver non-profit that helps homeless seeks union sponsors for upcoming event

VANCOUVER — Share House, an organization that serves the homeless and hungry in Clark County, is looking for union locals to sponsor a benefit basketball tournament this summer.

Hoops on the River is a 3-on-3 basketball tournament slated Aug. 18-19 at Vancouver Landing, located downtown along the Columbia River. Registration is expected to reach 200 teams and drawing over 1,500 spectators.

Share, founded in 1977, operates

four shelters for single men, single women and families. It provides meals for the homeless and low-income in the greater Vancouver area, and provides street outreach and case management programs for the homeless.

The basketball tournament sponsorships start at \$200.

For more information, call Pam Tower-Penrose, development director, 360-695-7658 or go to www.sharevancouver.org.

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