

Injured workers need access to quality health care

To The Editor:

In recent weeks, there has been controversy surrounding a recent temporary change in workers' compensation rules regarding payments to doctors, physical therapists, and others who treat injured workers. The workers' compensation system is designed to protect injured workers and their families, and one of the most important things we can do to achieve that is to

ensure workers in Oregon have access to prompt, high-quality medical care.

Under Oregon law, the Department of Consumer and Business Services' Workers Compensation Division establishes a medical fee schedule that sets the maximum amount health care providers can get paid for treating workers' compensation patients. By law, "medical fees equal to or less than the fee schedules" are to be paid when

the provider submits a billing for medical services.

For many years, a number of providers have participated in "preferred provider" networks under which they have accepted discounted fees, generally 5 percent to 15 percent less than the medical fee schedule amounts, for treating injured workers. Some of these network contracts are specific to workers' compensation, while others cover both workers' compensation and medical insurance. This system has not appeared to cause problems in the past, and has provided high-quality care to injured workers with reasonable cost controls for employers.

More recently, some providers have claimed they are entitled to be paid the full amounts set by the medical fee schedule, even if they have entered into preferred provider contracts for workers' compensation patients that set a lower amount. Although these contracts have had a long history in our workers' compensation system, our rules were silent on how they should be

treated. In order to preserve the status quo while taking time to study the issue, we issued a temporary rule on July 7 that allowed payments under these contracts to continue. As a result of comments received during the rule-making process, the temporary rule also put several protections for providers into place, such as prohibiting use of discounts from multiple contracts.

It should be noted that the temporary rule applies only when a provider has agreed to accept discounts for treating workers' compensation patients. Although there has been some confusion on this point, a preferred provider contract that covers only commercial health insurance would not apply.

We are now in the process of working with stakeholders to look into the issue in more detail. Many health care providers have objected to the temporary rule, saying that it will result in substantial cuts in the amounts they are paid for treating injured workers. Providers have given us useful feed-

back on how the use of "preferred provider" networks in workers' compensation has changed in recent years, sometimes resulting in discounts far greater than those used in the past.

We look forward to working with stakeholders to develop an approach to this issue that will allow us to replace the temporary rule while maintaining fairness to all parties. Our primary goal remains the protection of Oregon workers. And we are committed to maintaining a level of compensation adequate to provide injured workers with access to quality care.

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Director

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Illegal aliens a threat to American jobs

To The Editor:

"Lewis gets labor council nod in Portland election" (NW Labor Press, Aug. 1). You've got to be kidding me. Charles Lewis supports Portland's city-funded day labor site for illegal aliens.

If ever there was a threat to Americans' job security and wages, 12 million illegal aliens is it. Corporations are the nemesis of unions. Corporations love cheap labor and despise unions. Anyone who supports illegal alien

workers is no friend of unions.

I'm unsure of Amanda Fritz's position on illegal aliens, but if it is similar to Mr. Lewis's, then neither one of them should receive a single vote from an American worker. The Portland City Council is loaded with pollyannas. We don't need another one.

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Curtain falls on AFL-CIO Union Industries Show

Since 1938 the 'Greatest Show on Earth' has showcased union-made, American-made products for the general public

Labor's "Greatest Show on Earth" — the AFL-CIO Union Industries Show — has been canceled.

Sponsored by the Union Label & Service Trades Department, the show has been held annually since 1950. Portland was a host city three times. The most recent Portland show was 2005, which attracted tens of thousands of guests to the Oregon Convention Center. Previous shows were held here in 1992 and 1962.

Seattle hosted its only show in 1956.

"I don't think it will ever come back," said Charlie Mercer, president of the Label & Service Trades Department for the past 14 years.

Mercer told the NW Labor Press that many international unions are focusing on the Internet and Web sites such as YouTube to reach broader audiences.

"They think they can get more bang for their buck going that route," Mercer said. "I'm an old fuddy-duddy. I'm not the right person to expand using the Internet."

Mercer retired on Sept. 1. His successor is Richard Kline, director of communications for the Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics & Allied Workers International Union.

Mercer said the Union Label & Service Trades Department, which is funded by per capita payments from international unions (and not by the AFL-CIO), was crippled when the Change to Win federation peeled off six unions.

"UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) accounted for one-third of our department's income," said Mercer, who spent 31 years working for the UFCW before taking over the Label Trades Department.

A spate of mergers also didn't help the department's bottom line.



The first Union Industries Show was held in Cincinnati in 1938, when the U.S. economy was still in the throes of the Great Depression. According to the Union Label & Trades Department archives, 24 international unions and 58 exhibitors staffed 230 booths at the show. It welcomed more than 178,000 visitors and gave away some \$20,000 worth of prizes.

In introducing the first show, American Federation of Labor (AFL) President William Green declared it as a "momentous national educational campaign never before attempted."

"The public does need to look for the Union Labels of the AFL and its affiliated national and international unions, plainly imprinted upon thousands of products in various fields, proving that the particular articles were produced under ideal conditions by fairly paid workers who feel a just pride in their craftsmanship," Green said.

World War II prevented the show from continuing. It returned in 1946 in St. Louis, and was held every two years until 1950, when it became an annual event — each year in a different city.

The Union Industries Show always featured the latest in union-made automobiles and accessories, motorcycles, hardware, clothing, sporting goods, furniture, baked goods, appliances, housewares and more.

In 1992, the NW Labor Press reported on the many "technological innovations" at the show. One of the biggest hits among visitors was a high definition television.

One of the show's visitors was Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton.

"That was one of the great things about the show," Mercer said. "I would come into a town and all the local unions would get together. Members would get involved. Families would get involved" to help plan it. "Then for three days you open the doors to the public and show off your stuff."

Alongside all the product displays and giveaways were exhibits by skilled service providers, including teachers, air traffic controllers, health care professionals, firefighters and letter carriers. And skilled craft workers would demonstrate everything from ornate sheet metal work to bricklaying, decorative plastering, iron work, electrical work and intricate glass crafts.

In the early years, show visitors were entertained by many of the biggest stars from the entertainment world — including Bob Hope and



Lana Turner (pictured above), and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra. Dwight D. Eisenhower cut the ribbon to open the show one year.

"This is an event that has inspired me and hundreds of thousands of working Americans since 1938," Mercer said. "I'm going to miss it."