

...DePaul CEO denies any wrongdoing, ULP dropped

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swore that receiving notification of the unfair labor practice charge was the first they'd heard of any union activity. And if they didn't know there was a union campaign, they couldn't really have fired workers for taking part in it, could they?

All the fired workers believe they were terminated for supporting the union, but they couldn't prove that, or even that management knew of the union. The unfair labor practice charges were dropped.

"The word 'union' didn't even come out of my mouth after that," Taylor said. Taylor said he'd had no disciplinary problems before. But once the union drive died, he says he was hassled constantly for petty violations of company policy, each men-

tion of which made it into his personnel file. A gold necklace with a New York Giants ring would sometimes tumble out of his shirt, and that violated company policy against wearing loose jewelry. He spent too much time in the bathroom, managers said.

Taylor lasted until March 3, when a manager suspended him on accusation of taking pictures with his cell phone. His phone doesn't have a camera, he told the manager. Still, he had a phone in his hand in a work area, came the company's retort: He must have been goofing off. Taylor was on lunch break when the incident occurred, he says. He was fired anyway.

In an interview with the Labor Press, DePaul CEO David Shaffer wouldn't discuss particulars of the firings, but said workers are sometimes fired when they violate company

rules. "Are employees terminated? Yes, they are," Shaffer said, "just like in any other company where an employee violates a particular policy."

Shaffer said he stands by DePaul's mission — providing employment opportunities to people with disabilities, so they can move on and become contributors to society.

"If we can bring people in, have them gain some work skills, develop a work history and then get employment elsewhere where there are higher wage opportunities, that's A-okay with us," Schaffer said.

Pierre is still out of work. So is Francois. Perez enrolled in Job Corps. Taylor is mulling his legal options, including a possible civil lawsuit.

In the last year, national business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have aired millions of dol-

lars worth of television ads showing a fictional union organizer who knocks on a worker's door and intimidates him into signing a union card. Nothing could be further from the reality DePaul workers experienced. There, the union organizer was a fellow worker, Crane, who would meet with them on weekends and before and after his shifts at Frito-Lay. DePaul workers had plenty of reason to unionize, but their campaign fizzled when the promoters were fired.

The business ad campaign is meant to prevent the Employee Free Choice Act from passing in Congress. The Employee Free Choice Act would rewrite the nation's labor law to make it easier for workers to unionize and get a first union contract.

If the Employee Free Choice Act had been the law last year, the cards that DePaul workers signed would have been enough to get them their union, and management would have had to negotiate a decent first contract — or have one imposed on them in binding arbitration. Employers would think twice about firing workers for supporting a union drive, because under the Employee Free Choice Act they would face fines of up to \$20,000 per violation, plus triple back pay. There are no fines in the current law, only reinstatement with back pay — minus whatever wages workers earned elsewhere after they were fired.

If it passes, Crane says, the union will be back for a second try at DePaul.

Rep. Wu doubtful Congress will reform health care system with single-payer plan

Oregon Congressman David Wu doesn't foresee a single-payer health care system in the United States.

The Obama Administration has put reforming the nation's health care system front and center in its strategy to revive the struggling economy. But Wu, a Democrat representing the First District, told nearly 60 union leaders at a breakfast meeting April 15 sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council that Obama is likely to retain the current employer-based system.

Wu said 150 million to 190 million Americans are currently covered under an employer-based system. "Most people like it and they want to keep it," he said. "To doom any type of reform is to say you are taking that away."

A majority of unions support a single-payer health care plan as proposed by U.S. Rep. John Conyers of Michigan. HR 676 would institute a single-payer health care system by expanding and making improvements to Medicare.

As for labor's top legislation — the Employee Free Choice Act — Wu said there is still work to be done to get it through the Senate. Until then, it won't come up for a vote in the House, where it has strong majority support.

Wu is an original co-sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act.

On trade, the six-term congressman said it's time to "re-think what we do" in regard to trade treaties.

"Working folks have suffered a lot" under free trade agreements that have been signed over the last 10 to 15 years, he said. "Shareholders and investors are the winners."

Wu supports an amendment to the TRADE Act, a bill that was introduced last year by U.S. Rep. Michael Michaud of Maine. HR 6180 did not come up for a vote in the 110th Congress, and has yet to be reintroduced this year.

Wu has been working with Michaud to incorporate new language into the bill before submitting it. Overall, the TRADE Act would require the Government Accountability Office to review all existing U.S. trade pacts, and based on the review, would allow the renegotiation of those deals. The bill

would also set the terms for future trade agreements, including labor, environmental, and human rights standards.

During a question and answer period, Wu reiterated his opposition to a labor-backed liquefied natural gas plant near Astoria unless the community supports it and until it is proven to be safe.



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