



Justin May, a 10th term UA Local 290 apprentice from Eugene, works on a threaded pipe project.



UA Local 290 apprentice Corby Campbell builds a lateral as part of the welding competition.

## UA Local 290 hosts regional apprenticeship contest

Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 played host to the District 5 Regional Apprenticeship Contest June 10-11 at its training center in Tualatin.

Thirty-six apprentices from nine states competed in one of five disciplines — plumbing, steamfitting, welding, HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning), and sprinklerfitting. The competition consisted of timed, hands-on skills, as well as a written exam.

Winners in each discipline qualified for the national contest in Ann Arbor, Michigan in August.

The UA's apprenticeship contest has been dormant for more than two decades. It was revived last year, with the regional contest in Seattle.

Winners of the regional contest were: Plumbing — Jeff Love, Nevada Local 350; Steamfitter — John-Mark Carlson, Washington Local 32; Welding — Kyle Callies, Washington Local 598; HVAC — Bradley Taylor, Washington Local 598; Sprinklerfitter — Joshua Cooper, California Local 709.



An unidentified steamfitter apprentice performs a rigging test at regional contest.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN KLICKER

# AFL-CIO praises draft Senate health care bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — AFL-CIO President John Sweeney praised the Senate's draft health care reform legislation for its plan to establish a Medicare-like alternative to compete against the private health insurance industry.

But a leader of one of the federation's top health care unions — California Nurses Association Executive Director Rose Ann DeMoro, publicly dissented.

Sweeney said senators drafting the health care overhaul are following principles the labor movement campaigns for: Providing an alternative to the insurers, letting people choose their own doctors, controlling costs, and providing universal, affordable coverage.

President Barack Obama also agrees with those principles and pushes them hard in town meetings, speeches and appearances.

But DeMoro called the Senate bill "a sham" that wouldn't work to control costs and provide universal care. She said a government-run single-payer health care system would do that.

And DeMoro said the public is on her side — in town hall meetings and nationwide polls that show majority support for a single-payer system that would eliminate insurers, their high co-pays, deductibles, huge profits, and denial of care.

DeMoro declared single-payer would cut down on the nation's annual \$2.3 trillion health care bill by at least \$300 billion.

Senate committees began working on details of the legislation the week of June 15.

"We will introduce legislation that will strengthen what works and fix what doesn't," said Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), vice chair of the Senate Health Education and Labor Committee. "If

you like the insurance you have today, you can keep it. If you don't like what you have today, we'll give you better choices, including a public option for health care."

The public option has drawn virtually unanimous condemnation from Republicans, the insurance lobby, and business groups, who oppose any government-run health care.

The AFL-CIO insists that any health care reform legislation require all employers to either provide health insurance to their employees or pay into a system to make sure everyone is covered, and that workers' health care benefits must not be taxed.

## Sen. Merkley open to 'public option'

Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley was among 28 senators co-sponsoring a resolution that calls for the inclusion of a public option in any health care reform package that comes out of Congress.

The resolution says that "any reform of our nation's health care system should give consumers a choice of an affordable, federally-backed option to introduce competition in the health insurance market ..."

"Health reform should provide consumers with the full range of choices to meet their needs," Merkley said. "A public option will provide competition that will keep private insurance companies honest and help improve service and lower health care costs for everyone."

The resolution was carried by Ohio Democrat Sherrod Brown.

Merkley was the only senator on the West Coast to support it.

# Labor board issues formal complaint against nursing home

Elizabeth Lehr, a receptionist at Laurelhurst Village nursing home, was fired because she engaged in legally-protected union activity, and to discourage other workers from doing the same. It's not just the union she wants to join — Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 — that says so. That was the conclusion of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the federal agency that runs unionization elections and handles complaints of labor law violations.

The NLRB issued a formal complaint May 29 after an investigating agent determined that management at the Southeast Portland facility committed 11 separate violations of U.S. labor law in late March and early April when a campaign to unionize was heating up. A July 14 date has been set for a federal administrative law judge to hear the case.

The NLRB found that Laurelhurst



ELIZABETH LEHR

Village changed what had been a lax policy on employees visiting the workplace in off-hours — in response to its employees' union activities. Once workers started coming in off the clock to talk with co-workers about the union, a "No Access Rule" was announced and enforced, "to discourage its employees from forming, joining or assisting the union," the NLRB said in its complaint.

The agency found that manager Hannah Austin, director of operations, created an impression among workers that their union activities were under surveil-

lance, and interrogated employees about their union activities. Other managers surveilled pro-union workers, threatened them with reprisals for distributing union literature in non-work areas on non-work time, and gave verbal and written warnings for union activities. In one case, managers even called the police on employees, "to threaten them with arrest for engaging in union ... activities."

And they fired Lehr April 2.

Laurelhurst Village is one of 16 nursing homes owned by Portland-based Farmington Centers, Inc., none of which are union-represented. Local 503 spokesperson Ed Hershey said the union is still hopeful Farmington will switch gears and join a partnership the union has with six other nursing home companies. SEIU joins with the industry during state legislative sessions to advocate for better funding, and in return, companies agree to remain neutral on the ques-

tion of whether their employees should unionize. That agreement has helped the union grow to where it now represents 26 nursing homes.

But until the company comes around, the union will continue legal and community pressure.

Hershey said the union is asking the NLRB for a 10(j) injunction, a court order reinstating Lehr.

The union is also asking that the NLRB order Farmington to recognize the union and begin bargaining a contract. Such orders, known as Gissel bargaining orders, are rare, but Hershey said the conditions are right at Laurelhurst Village: SEIU can show, with signed authorization cards, that it had majority support before management's anti-union crackdown. After the crackdown, Hershey said, some workers who were taking a public role felt they couldn't afford to lose their jobs, and backed off. The union isn't sure it would win an

election if held today — because management lawbreaking poisoned the atmosphere.

Lehr, 23, was profiled in an article in the May 15 issue of Northwest Labor Press. She is still without work, has used up her savings, and has appealed her denial of unemployment insurance benefits. Laurelhurst Village contested her unemployment claim, saying she was fired for cause. A hearing scheduled for June 12 was postponed when an attorney for the nursing home (from Stoel Rives) demanded that the state administrative law judge assigned to the case recuse herself because she is represented by SEIU Local 503.

The judge did so. A new hearing had not been scheduled at press time.

Lehr says she's as committed as ever to the union campaign, and wants to return to work, even if just to send a message to co-workers about the power of the union and the possibility of justice.