

Chamber, Associated Oregon Industries, file lawsuit to stop Worker Freedom Act

Associated Oregon Industries (AOI) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce filed a lawsuit Dec. 22 to stop the Worker Freedom Act from becoming law. Senate Bill 519 — the Worker Freedom Act — was labor's top priority bill at the Oregon Legislature last session. The new law prevents employers from punishing workers who opt-out of mandatory meetings on topics such as politics, religion, and union organizing.

Oregon is the first state to pass such a law. It was to take affect Jan. 1.

The lawsuit specifies Laborers Local 296 and Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian as defendants. AOI and

the U.S. Chamber claim SB 519 violates federal law and the First Amendment.

The lawsuit appears to revolve around Local 296's union organizing campaign at cooked meat producer BrucePac. In June, BrucePac fired at least 17 union supporters, just weeks into the campaign among 350 workers at the company's Woodburn and Silverton plants. Local 296 protested the firings in legal charges filed with the National Labor Relations Board, and the agency found merit to some of them. That case will go before a federal administrative law judge Jan. 12.

The lawsuit describes the BrucePac

campaign, without specifically naming the company.

Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, says the lawsuit is without merit. "(SB 519) addresses separate issues from the laws they refer to, and specifically protects both an employer's right to free speech and a worker's right to be free from unwanted communication."

Chamberlain said some employers "seem to be threatened by the idea that they will no longer be able to fire or punish workers who don't want to sit down and listen to their opinions on non-work-related topics."

Seattle to host large MLK event

One of the largest Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations in the nation will take place in Seattle Monday, Jan. 18.

Entitled "Justice Now! Health care, Housing, Jobs & Education," the day-long event will feature workshops, entertainment, and a rally and march through the streets of Seattle.

Workshops start at 9:30 a.m. at Garfield High School, 400 23rd Ave at East Jefferson. At 11 a.m., a rally with speakers, poetry, and music will be held. Then, at noon, participants will march to the Jackson Federal Building,

2nd & Marion, downtown for a brief outdoor rally.

"This year, MLK Day occurs during a time of hardship with unemployment rates not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s," said Jean Buskin of the MLK Jr. Celebration Committee. "The urgent needs of our communities inspired this year's theme."

The celebration is open to all and is free. A collection will be taken to help cover costs.

Buskin said Seattle holds one of the largest annual Martin Luther King Day celebrations in the U.S.

you that rare sense of nobility that can only spring from love and selflessly helping your fellow man. Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."

APRIL 18, 1959

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