

Labor Dept. seeks rule to shed light on union-buster expenditures

WASHINGTON, D.C. —The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is proposing a new rule that would shed more light on union-busters by narrowing a loophole that they've used to hide their activities.

Under the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act, employers are obligated to file a form with the Office of Labor-Management Standards if they pay a labor relations consultant or other person to persuade employees against unionizing. Under the regulation this is known as "persuader activities."

[The Landrum-Griffin Act also requires unions to annually report their finances and activities. The rules are much more extensive for unions than

they are for businesses.]

Union officials estimate union-busting firms rake in more than \$300 million a year on "persuader activities." But no one really knows for sure, the DOL says, because reported spending by that industry and its use by employers is hidden.

One way union busters and employers hide spending is through a loophole in the regulation that allows an exemption if the consulting firm offers only "advice" and doesn't actually interact with employees. In other words, a union-buster can get away with not reporting anything if it has only "indirect" contact with the workers, such as creating an anti-union campaign for a

company, or writing anti-union speeches for employers.

In an official notice published June 21, the Office of Labor-Management Standards said that currently union-busters' reporting is "negligible" because they take advantage of the advice exception.

Under DOL's new proposal, "reportable 'persuader activities'" by union-busters would be "all actions, conduct, or communications that have a direct or indirect object to persuade employees."

That means not just advice, but also preparing materials, creating a campaign or coaching bosses in union-busting, or almost any other anti-union ac-

tivity. It also means "oral or written recommendations regarding a decision or a course of conduct," even if the employer rejects it.

The Labor Department views reporting of persuader agreements or arrangements as providing employees with essential information regarding the underlying source of the views and materials being directed at them, as aiding them in evaluating their merit and motivation.

DOL said disclosing the union-busting consultants' activities would "mitigate the disruptive impact of labor relations consultants, or as Congress called them, 'middlemen,' on peaceful and stable labor relations."

"Full disclosure of the participation of outside consultants will lead to a better informed electorate, which invariably produces more reliable and acceptable election results less subject to charges and counter-charges, and thus becomes a less disputed, more stable foundation for subsequent labor-management relations," DOL said.

DOL emphasized that it could have changed the advice exemption administratively, but it wants a formal rule that will lock in standards for when and what union-busting consultants must report. The Labor Department held meetings in 2009-10 with stakeholders — unions, businesses and consultants — to discuss its plan.

The DOL tried to rein in the consultants' abuse of exemptions in the closing days of the Clinton Administration, but that effort was quickly dumped when George W. Bush took office.

Summer School set Aug. 5-7 in Eugene

EUGENE — The Oregon AFL-CIO Summer School is scheduled Aug. 5-7 at the University of Oregon. This year's guest speaker will be Wisconsin AFL-CIO Legislative Director Joanne Ricca.

Some of the core courses to be taught will include Media Training for Labor Activists; The Real Life of Stewards; and Building the Union: Keeping and Expanding Your Activist Base. Workshops will focus on communicating across generations, bully bosses and harassment, and dealing with member conflicts.

"Come ready to learn, share experiences, get to know other union brothers and sisters from Oregon, and enjoy the solidarity," said Helen Moss of the Labor Education and Research Center at UO, which co-hosts the event with the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Registration is \$230 for commuters. Rates are available for lodging at university dorms. For more information, call Moss at 503-412-3722 or by e-mail her at hmosse@uoregon.edu.

Portland union electrical contractor involved with creation of solar vehicle charging station

The first of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, a solar/electrical vehicle charging station opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony June 8 at the Portland Development Commission (PDC) parking lot on 3620 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

The publicly accessible solar electric charging station includes a quick charger that drivers can plug their electrical cars in with a "shade" made of solar panels. Two cars can be parked under the shade at a time. It has the capacity to fully charge six electric vehicles per day. The charging station will be able to service cars such as the Chevrolet Volt, Nissan LEAF and a variety of other electric vehicles.

The charging station is the creation of Christenson Electric of Portland and EV4 Oregon. Founded in 1945, Christenson Electric is one of the largest electrical contractors in the Northwest, with a workforce of approximately 400. The company is signatory with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

The two companies formed a special joint venture to create the solar electric charging station, also known as an energy transfer merchant. An ETM

has the ability to use both solar and electrical power to charge electrical cars. The charging station is built by Oregon companies, using Oregon products, as a kit that can be assembled anywhere in four days.

"We're very excited to see this concept come to life," said Dean Skaar, vice president of business development at Christenson Electric. "We've been working with EV4 Oregon for a few years to bring this charging station

from the drawing board to the real world. Being based in the Northwest, it was natural for us to work with a company and a project that incorporates renewable energy."

The June 8 ribbon-cutting ceremony started with speeches from PDC Executive Director Patrick Quinton, Bonneville Power Administration Vice President Mike Weedall, Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen, and Eric Anderson of Pacific Power.



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