

...Three Washington legislators write to Younglove

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and the general contractor on the United Grain project — Younglove Construction LLC of Sioux City, Iowa — turned up in a 2006 Wall Street Journal article about how the use of immigrant workers from Mexico is driving down U.S. wages in construction. In the article, Younglove is mentioned as one of several Midwest silo construction companies using recruiters on the U.S.-Mexico border.

United Grain's export terminal expansion is one of Vancouver's largest construction projects. When completed in September 2012, 24 new silos will provide 60,000 metric tons of storage space for corn and soybeans. And at 299 feet, it's now the tallest structure in Clark County. United Grain, founded in Portland in 1969, became a subsidiary of the Japanese conglomer-

ate Mitsui in 1997.

Dave Ritchey, business manager of Vancouver-based Laborers Local 335, says he approached Younglove about employing local union labor, but was rebuffed. Local 335 has over 200 members out of work. The rate for a general laborer on a project like that is \$28.51, but Ritchey said workers he spoke with on the job were earning a top rate of \$12 an hour.

White, joined by other local labor leaders, began complaining about the project to any local politician who would listen. On March 3, three Washington state representatives took action. Vancouver Democrats Jim Moeller, Tim Probst, and Sharon Wylie wrote a letter to United Grain and Younglove Construction, based on information White provided.

"It has come to our attention that

Younglove Construction hired approximately 200 foreign workers under the H1B1 Visa program and brought them in Vancouver to build the grain silo," the lawmakers wrote. "We are concerned that these 200 jobs could and should have been filled by local workers, at a time when local jobs are direly needed. It is clear that the construction method used in building this grain silo is a skill that is readily available among workers in our region."

Legislators also asked Younglove for a record of workplace accidents, and confirmation of the company's workers' compensation coverage.

Five days later, Younglove President Michael Gunsch issued a 17-point statement in response. Slipform construction is very complicated and requires specialized skills of employees, Gunsch wrote, and Younglove is one of a very small number of companies with the experience and capability to do it. In 14 months on the site, the vast majority of employees have been hired locally and live in the local area. About 20 locally-based subcontractors have done portions of the work, and Younglove plans to subcontract to at least 10 more before the project is complete. The slip pour portion of the work was only a very few weeks in total, in pours that were weeks and months apart. Moreover, Younglove has never used the H1B1 Visa Program for short-term slip workers, Gunsch wrote, and it uses the Department of Homeland Security's E-Verify program to verify each new hire's legal right to work in the United States. Finally, Gunsch said its crew has worked 170,000 hours with only one lost-time accident. And all its employees on the project have workers' compensation insurance purchased from a private insurance company under the Longshoremen and Harbor Workers Compensation Act.

KATU News reported that of 240 workers brought in to do the specialized work for a couple of weeks, about 60 percent of them were from another country, mostly Mexico.

Younglove declined to divulge the names of its local contractors, but calls by the Labor Press turned up several. Whitaker/Ellis — which employs members of Cement Masons Local 555 — did the roughly one-and-a-half acre concrete foundation for the silos. Rebar for the foundations was installed by local firm R2M2 Rebar and Stressing, and hopper installation and structural work were performed by Triad Mechanical; both employ members of Iron Workers Local 29. Electrical work is being performed by Cherry City Electric, signatory with IBEW Local 48. And some crane work was performed by Campbell Crane, which is signatory with Operating Engineers Local 701.

But United Grain CEO Tony Flagg told the Labor Press that slipform silo construction doesn't lend itself to recruiting local workers. To avoid seams, concrete is continuously poured in a circular form that is raised about an inch an hour.

"In our case, you need almost 240 people to do this work for about a week, and they work typically 12-hour shifts," Flagg said. "It's very difficult to go out and find 240 people to do this and train them to work as a team so this can go up at a uniform speed. So crews have developed that travel around the United States and Canada, and this is the work they specialize in."

But union leaders express skepticism. Ritchey said he himself worked on such a silo in Vancouver. Brett Hinsley, business manager at 378-member Cement Masons Local 555, was glad to have members working on the United Grain foundation, but said his 50 to 60 out-of-work members would have liked to have done the slipform work as well.

Third generation Longshoreman Cager Clabaugh, former president of 193-member Local 4 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, said nearby longshore workers can see the work going on from cranes in their cranes.

"They say this is specialized construction. We're not that stupid," Clabaugh said. "Basically all those guys are doing is pushing wheelbarrows. Anybody who's got a garden is qualified to work there."

Union ironworkers, cement masons, laborers, and operating engineers can look up at silos in Portland, Longview and Kalama that they helped build. But that slipform work, which used to be exclusively union on the West Coast, is now exclusively non-union, says Mark Sorensen, president of R2M2 Rebar and Stressing. That's because firms like Sorensen's can no longer compete

against low-wage nonunion firms from the Midwest. Sorensen said R2M2's last slipform project was an Anheuser-Busch silo in Idaho Falls six years ago. When EGT took bids for work on its grain terminal project in Longview, R2M2's bid to do rebar on the slipform

was triple the cost of the winning bid, Sorensen said. R2M2 did rebar on the foundation at United Grain, but wasn't given an opportunity to bid on the slipform.

For White, the overriding issue is how to maximize local development to benefit local workers.

"We only have a finite amount of industrial property we can work with that's supposed to benefit the community at large," White said, "and I don't think it's unreasonable to ask that we who live in the community get more benefit out of the finite property that we own."

Rep. Moeller, who took the lead on the letter to United Grain and Younglove, said for the future he wants more transparency when tax breaks are given out. In January, Moeller introduced a bill in the Washington Legislature to require companies receiving warehouse and grain elevator tax exemptions to file an annual accountability survey that would list the total number of jobs, the percentage of those that are full-time, part-time and temporary, the number that have medical, dental, and retirement benefits, and roughly the wages. The survey — intended to give legislators information to judge the effectiveness of tax breaks — is filled out by recipients of 32 other tax exemptions. The bill went nowhere this year, but Moeller says he plans to reintroduce it.

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Oregon Building Trades Council endorsements

The Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council interviewed candidates for political office March 5 and issued endorsements for the May primary.

In the only statewide contested primary race, the Council is backing Dwight Holton for attorney general.

Incumbent John Kroger is not running for re-election after one term.

Holten, a U.S. attorney, has competition from retired Appeals Court Judge Ellen Rosenblum. The winner of the primary will be the next state attorney general, as no other political party fielded a candidate for the position.

In contested Democratic state House races, OSBCTC endorsed John Lively in Dist. 12 (Springfield area), Ben Unger in Dist. 29 (Hillsboro, Forest Grove), Jennifer Williamson in Dist. 36 (Southwest Portland), and Jessica Vega Pederson in Dist. 47 (East Portland).

Lively is running to succeed Democrat Terry Beyer in the 12th District. He has one opponent, Sandra Mann.

Unger is facing Katie Riley in District 29. The winner will take on incumbent Republican Katie Eyre.

Williamson is up against Benjamin Jay Barber in the race to succeed Democrat Mary Nolan, who is leaving to run for Portland City Council.

Vega Pederson has two opponents in District 47, which is being vacated by Jefferson Smith, who is running for mayor of Portland.

In uncontested primary races, the Council endorsed Republican incumbent Brian Boquist in Senate District 12 (representing parts of Polk, Marion, Yamhill, Benton and Linn counties); and Democratic incumbents Mark Haas in Dist. 14 (Beaverton area), Ginny Burdick in Dist. 18 (Tigard), Diane Rosenbaum in Dist. 21 (Southeast Portland), Chip Shields in Dist. 22 (in-

ner North/NE Portland), and Laurie Monnes Anderson in Dist. 25 (Gresham, Troutdale).

Neither Burdick nor Shields have opponents in the general election.

Democratic State Rep. and co-Speaker of the House Arnie Roblan was endorsed in Senate District 5 (Coos Bay). Roblan is leaving House District 9 to run for the Senate, where incumbent Democrat Joanne Verger is retiring.

OSBCTC endorsed State Treasurer Ted Wheeler, Secretary of State Kate Brown, and Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian for re-election. Wheeler is uncontested in both the primary and general elections. Brown and Avakian have opponents in the general election in November.

In the Oregon House, OSBCTC endorsed the following incumbents based on their legislative voting records:

Republicans Sal Esquivel, Dist. 6; Tim Freeman, Dist. 2; Vic Gilliam, Dist. 18; Wally Hicks, Dist. 3; Bob Jenson, Dist. 58; Wayne Krieger, Dist. 1; Andy Olson, Dist. 15; Greg Smith Dist. 57; and Matt Wand, Dist. 49.

Esquivel, Freeman, Gilliam, Hicks, and Smith are the de facto winners, as they have no opposition in the general election.

The only endorsed incumbent with a contested race is Democrat Mike Schaufler in District 48 (Happy Valley).

Other Democrats endorsed are Jeff Barker, Dist. 28; Margaret Doherty, Dist. 35; Chris Garrett, Dist. 38; Paul Holvey, Dist. 8; Val Hoyle, Dist. 14; Betty Komp, Dist. 22; Tina Kotek, Dist. 44; Greg Matthews, Dist. 50; Tobias Read, Dist. 27; and Brad Witt, Dist. 31.

OSBCTC delegates will meet again later in the summer to consider endorsements for the general election.



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