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Knocking on Doors with Working America

If you want to see the boots of the Oregon AFL-CIO political operation, look no further than Chellema Qolus. Qolus is a paid canvasser for Working America — the AFL-CIO's at-large affiliate. Most of the time, her job is to go door-to-door to build Working America's membership list. But during election season, it's to elect AFL-CIO-endorsed candidates.

On Tuesday, Oct. 7, a scorcher

of a day, Qolus is in Gladstone to help state representative Brent Barton and state senate candidate Jamie Damon. At 4 p.m., she and a coworker are dropped off on the evening's turf. They'll split up and spend the next five hours knocking on doors, checking off names from a voter address list on a tablet computer.

Qolus, 51, has been a Working America canvasser since 2012. On

the doorstep, she's seasoned and friendly. She's a dog and cat lover. And she's unfazed by signs that say "No Soliciting." Those signs might be aimed at salespeople, or might have been left by the previous homeowner. Qolus says she gets half her donations from houses with "no soliciting" signs at the door.

"We're not trying to disturb anybody," Qolus tells the Labor Press.

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Federal judge orders employer to hire seven union painters

Federal administrative law judge John McCarrick didn't hold back in his verdict on Edwards Painting. Edwards violated federal labor law 18 separate ways, McCarrick ruled Sept. 26, and now must make amends.

Edwards Painting is a family-owned company based in Oregon City that specializes in interior and exterior painting of multifamily residential buildings.

In January 2014, owner Gene Edwards told an NLRB agent he'd shut down the company before he'd go union. But McCarrick ordered the company to hire seven union painters, pay back wages with interest, and read the court order in English and Spanish to his assembled employees in the presence of a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) agent.

Gene Edwards acted as if his company were immune to the effects of the law. He and his family went into a five-day hearing without an attorney, and made such a mess of the proceedings that the voluminous transcript is full of dark comedy, like when the company denied it was engaged in interstate commerce, or argued that the Painters Union was not a labor organization. During the trial McCarrick repeatedly

made allowances for Edwards' lack of legal experience. But in his decision he seems to have lost patience with Edwards' thumbing his nose at the law.

Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act says employees have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. That's followed by Section 8(a)(1), which says it's an unfair labor practice for an employer to interfere with, restrain, or coerce employees in the exercise of those Section 7 rights.

Keep that in mind when you consider that Edwards Painting, more specifically Gene Edwards and wife Connie and sons Grant and Bob interrogated employees about union activities on numerous occasions; threatened to lay off or terminate employees if they signed a union petition, attended a union meeting, or voted for the union; promised a wage increase — and work throughout the winter — if they'd cease union activities; and told workers their

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Portland teachers unions host festival in Pioneer Square

Free pumpkins, face-painting ... and standardized tests.

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

Portland-metro-area teachers unions are throwing a party Sunday, Oct. 19 at Pioneer Courthouse Square, offering free pumpkins, face-painting ... and standardized tests.

Yes, standardized tests. As part of the Portland Association of Teachers' (PAT) Quality Education Festival, one booth will give parents and kids a chance to answer sample questions from the new test that fourth graders are slated to take this Spring. The Smarter Balanced Assessment is part of a nationwide roll-out of high-stakes tests the federal government is at-

tempting to impose on states.

Ironically, the test itself is incomplete and untested. Students will use computers to take the Smarter Balanced test, but software glitches have plagued early run-throughs, and sections of the test like social studies haven't yet been developed. In May, the Representative Assembly of 48,000-member Oregon Education Association (OEA) approved a resolution calling for a statewide moratorium on the test. And the National Education Association, of which OEA is an affiliate, is supporting a bill in Congress to lessen the number of federally-mandated standardized tests.

PAT Vice President Suzanne Cohen — a science and math teacher at Peninsula Middle School — says people who take the sample Smarter Balanced test at the booth will be surprised how challenging it is.

"It's not that we're against challenging tests," Cohen said. "It's the high stakes associated with this test. This test has yet to be validated or proven, and yet they want to use it to measure students, schools and teachers, and school districts. And we just really question this notion that funding should be based on this, or that a school would be rated positively or negatively based on test scores."

States are spending \$1.7 billion a year on standardized tests, according to the Brookings Institution — money that could be going to instruction. That's particularly a problem in Oregon, where school funding has declined steadily and dramatically over the past two decades when adjusted for inflation. After successive rounds of budget cuts and belt-tightening, Oregon schools today are less likely to have art, music, dance, and drama of-

ferings than they used to. High school foreign language offerings are less robust. Shop class is a distant memory. Schools have fewer nurses, librarians, and counselors. High-quality, properly-staffed maintenance of school grounds and physical plant are a thing of the past. And in the midst of an epidemic of childhood obesity, many elementary schools lack physical education teachers, and cafeterias are heating and serving processed foods to save on labor costs.

So the event in the square is a kind of launch party, to take forward the public campaign Portland Association of Teachers waged when it faced down district managers in February's near-strike. PAT won contract gains, including an agreement that teachers won't be graded based on scores on student tests that weren't designed for that purpose. But union leaders say that's only

the beginning. The event in the square is meant to demonstrate three principles: That students deserve to be a funding priority for the state, that a student is more than a test score, and that strong schools build strong communities.

"We want students and families engaged and involved," Cohen said. "It can't just be teachers."

PAT and over a dozen metro-area sister locals are taking part in the event, backed by OEA. Besides free pumpkins and popcorn, the Quality Education Festival will feature student performances led by licensed teachers, a fun photo booth, and a video booth for participants to record statements on what kind of education they think Oregon students deserve. The festival runs from noon to 3 p.m. Oct. 19 at Pioneer Courthouse Square in downtown Portland.