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Portland's *OTHER* school lead exposure problem?

By Don McIntosh
Associate editor

Given the uproar this Spring over lead in the drinking water at Portland Public Schools, you'd think there'd be heightened vigilance against further lead exposure. But at Franklin High School in Southeast Portland, a massive remodel may be creating a worse lead problem than the minute concentrations

that were found in the water of some classroom sinks.

Franklin, built in 1917, is mid-way through a \$104 million renovation thanks to a voter-approved bond. Its fenced-off grounds have been a gigantic construction site for over a year.

Because lead paint is present in virtually all structures built before 1978, construction contractors are typically required to

carefully contain and dispose of lead-contaminated materials when they disturb painted surfaces. But accompanied by a field rep for Painters and Allied Trades District Council 5, I visited the construction site and saw firsthand that that's not happening everywhere at Franklin.

General contractor Skanska

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On core union issues, conventions showcase a growing partisan divide

Democrats approve a strongly pro-union platform. Republicans call for a prevailing wage ban, and laws to weaken unions.

Once upon a time, both Democrats and Republicans competed for union support and gave at least lip service to the value of a strong labor movement. No more. Increasingly, Democrats are adopting official positions right out of organized labor's political agenda, while Republicans adopt positions directly attacking labor. Nowhere is that more clearly demonstrated than in the party platforms adopted at the national conventions.

Take Davis-Bacon, for example. That's the name of the 1931 law that requires that on federal government projects, construction workers be paid the local



At the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, labor union members and officers made up a sizable fraction of delegates. Oregon delegates with ties to organized labor, above, included supporters of both Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, the ultimate nominee.

“prevailing wage” for each craft specialty. It's a big deal to building trades unions. Davis-Bacon prevents federal spending from driving down construction wages — because contractors can't gain competitive advantage from lowering wages. It's named after Republican Sen.

James Davis and Republican Rep. Robert Bacon, and was signed into law by Republican President Herbert Hoover. Today, the official Republican position, ratified in 2012 and 2016, is to repeal it, saying, “it drives

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Bakers close Wells Fargo account for its link to an anti-union group

For business leaders, actions sometimes have consequences.

Oregon and Washington unions are under attack by the Freedom Foundation, a business-funded non-profit whose mission, as its spokesperson put it last August, is “making life miserable for government employee unions.” The group has filed numerous lawsuits against unions, and has campaigned with mailings and house visits to get workers to drop union membership. It even produces a weekly anti-union radio show. So to support the Freedom Foundation is to make a statement: You're an enemy of organized labor.

One of the group's largest funders is Vancouver-based M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust, set up by Tektronix founder Melvin J. Murdock. The Murdock Trust is led by three trustees, one of whom is Wells Fargo senior executive Jeffrey T. Grubb, executive vice president for private client services in the Pacific Northwest.

To fight back against the Freedom Foundation, unions set up their own non-profit last year called the Northwest Accountability Project. The group

has publicly targeted Murdock, noting that the Trust is also a big funder of other right-wing groups, such as the anti-gay-rights legal group Alliance Defending Freedom. Now the Northwest Accountability Project is targeting Wells Fargo too.

Bakers Local 114 Secretary-Treasurer Terry Lansing heard of the campaign in February, and wrote to Wells Fargo: “We feel strongly that Mr. Grubb's support for these groups, through his paid role as one of three trustees ... undermines many of the values we hold dear as labor activists in the Pacific Northwest.”

Local 114 has had an account at Wells Fargo since 1963. But in July, it transferred its account balance of about \$40,000 to IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union, and closed its Wells Fargo account.

“We cannot in good conscience continue doing business with a company where there is an executive officer such as Jeffrey Grubbs who supports philosophies that are the exact opposite of what we stand for,” Lansing wrote July 30 in a final letter to Wells Fargo.

WORKERS RIGHTS

Oregon Democrat Kurt Schrader takes aim at Obama's overtime rule

Democratic Congressman Kurt Schrader can't seem to stop taking stands that are directly opposed to the well-being of working people. The latest: He's sponsored a bill to delay and limit a long-overdue overtime update that is set to take effect Dec. 1.



Kurt Schrader

The update has to do with which employees are eligible for overtime pay. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act,

workers must be paid time-and-a-half for every hour they work over 40 in a week, but “executive, administrative and professional” employees can be considered exempt from the overtime pay requirement. Increasingly, employers have

been paying low-level managers on a salaried basis and claiming they're exempt from overtime. They get away with

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