

... The 'anti-union' organizers

From Page 1

functioned as a “think tank” — part of a national network of organizations funded by far-right millionaires and billionaires that seek to influence public policy by producing research papers and generating op-eds. But in 2013, the group hired a new director, Tom McCabe, and turned to a more exclusive focus on opposing unions.

McCabe had for two decades led an anti-union construction lobby group, the Building Industry Association of Washington, which spent considerable money on Republican candidates for governor and state Legislature. BIAW also succeeded in a ballot measure campaign that repealed a state ergonomics rule that

aimed to protect workers from repetitive motion injuries. And it flirted with the idea of placing an anti-union “right to work” initiative on the Washington state ballot.

Under McCabe’s direction, the Freedom Foundation became an all-purpose anti-union shop:

- In sync with groups around the country, it encouraged anti-union county commissioners in Washington to pass **local “right-to-work” ordinances** making dues voluntary. [Facing legal and political challenges, each of those efforts failed.]
- It also began to act like a local version of the National Right To Work Legal Defense Foundation, **helping anti-union workers campaign to decertify unions** in their workplace, or vote to make

dues optional. [The group has campaigned, so far without success, to turn Polk County workers against AFSCME, City of Portland workers against Laborers Local 483, and Washington childcare workers against SEIU Local 925.]

- It set up a full-time **anti-union media operation**, with videos, TV ads, podcast/radio spots, and a blog providing a daily barrage of anti-union venom. [There too, the operation is well-funded but it’s not clear it’s been a big hit. Its YouTube channel has just 1,300 subscribers, and its slickly produced two-minute anti-union rants typically get 350 views. But its messaging has earned placements in right-wing media outlets.]
- It hired a crew of **attorneys**, who keep busy (and tie up union resources) with public records requests, lawsuits, and campaign finance complaints for even minor rule violations.

- And it hired **canvassers** and set up a mail operation directly targeting public employee union members, trying to get them to drop their union membership.

At first, the pitch was for union-represented public employees to become “fair share” payers — non-members who don’t pay union dues but instead pay a reduced amount to the union to cover costs of negotiating and enforcing the contract. That “convert-to-fair share” message continues for regular public employees the group targets.

But a 2014 U.S. Supreme Court decision opened a new frontier for the Freedom Foundation: In *Harris v Quinn*, a 5-4 Republican-appointed court majority said that state-paid home

care workers had too tenuous a relationship to the state to count as public employees, and that therefore it violated First Amendment rights for them to be obligated to pay anything at all to the union that represents them. In theory, that should make Freedom Foundation’s sales pitch stronger: Drop your union membership, and instead of paying a discounted “fair share” rate, you pay nothing at all to the union.

Northwest unions meanwhile, took evasive action to prevent the Freedom Foundation from accessing their members’ private information.

That included changing their charters. In Oregon, SEIU Local 503 and Oregon AFSCME had

Turn to Page 11

... Hammond

From Page 4

intended to harm her and Shabazz.

After that, she says, everyone on the job site knew something had happened, but nothing was spoken.

“There are several ways of getting to your truth. You can be Martin or you can be Malcolm. I’ve always found it’s good to pick your battles,” Hammond says. “We chose not to say anything.”

At the same job site, she was assigned to work with another journeyman, a white man. He made no secret of the fact he didn’t like her race.

“I don’t know why the foreman assigned you to work with me,” Hammond remembers him saying. “He knows I hate black people. The foreman is f---ing with me by assigning you to work with me.”

As they went around the job site, he told her to walk five paces behind him. She did as she was told.

But by the time the project was done, Hammond says that same journeyman invited her to his home for dinner, and gave her the best progress report she’d ever had.

People change. And Hammond could be a catalyst.

Hammond made journeyman in due time, but didn’t imagine she could ever be a foreman on a job site. Then in 1989, she was

working under Kit Fox, a Local 48 member who was superintendent on a Swan Island project making skids for Arco’s Alaskan oil pipeline. Fox is white.

“He said, ‘You’re the most qualified. I need you to be a foreman.’”

“I told him I didn’t think white guys would work for me,” she recalls.

“He goes, ‘If they don’t work for you, they don’t work here. And if they have a problem with you being the foreman, they’re going to have to talk to the union steward.’”

At the time, the steward on the job was Keith Edwards, who later became Local 48’s first black business manager.

Hammond became foreman, and found her fears were overblown.

Growing up black in white Portland

Hammond says if one thing prepared her to work in an overwhelmingly-white industry, it was growing up in overwhelmingly-white Portland. She began at the all-black Highland school near her family’s home in the Albina neighborhood, but in 1966 when she was in fourth grade, the district made a decision to integrate schools, and she and other black kids were bused to Rigler, a majority-white primary school at NE 55th and Prescott.

There, she was isolated, but excelled academically, and she

learned that though her classmates were different, she could be as smart as they were.

But she and the other black students weren’t welcomed by all. She was called the ‘n’ word, and remembers white kids rocking her bus as she and the other black kids waited to go home. Once a white boy threw an egg through the bus window, which got all over her nice dress.

In 1968, when she was 12 years old, a white family she was friends with brought her with them to the pool at the YWCA. The attendant told her she couldn’t enter, but her white classmate’s grandmother demanded that she be allowed in. Then she got in the pool.

“I felt like Moses, because I’d get in the water, and the pool would empty. Then I’d get out of the pool, and people would get in.”

After high school, Hammond studied international business and French at the University of Oregon, then transferred to Portland State, where she dropped out without completing a degree.

Entering the workforce, there was never any question but that she would work union. Her mother worked at the Tradewell grocery store on North Williams and Fremont as a member of Retail Clerks Local 1092. Her father was a union machinist at Zidell Tube Forgings of America. They had only two requirements for her: That she love her work, and that she work union.

“He would say, ‘The protection that you’re going to need at work will only be afforded if you have union representation.’”

For a time, Hammond worked at Nordstrom (which was then union). She got a garage job at the phone company, also union. Applying for an apprenticeship as an installer, she was told she lacked the “personality” for it, but was offered a job in directory assistance.

It was the union electrical apprenticeship — which she obtained with some coaching from the Urban League — that changed her life.

A union career

For a time, she hit the road as a union “traveler” in Miami, Atlanta, and New York City. Then in 1991, after a decade of work as a construction electrician, she took a temporary dispatch at the City of Portland’s wastewater treatment plant. She stayed 21 years, leaving twice for stints working with the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council and Oregon Tradeswomen Inc.

Meanwhile, in the union, she found kindred spirits and got active in the union’s Electrical Workers Minority Caucus. She ran for union office, and was elected recording secretary, receiving encouragement from then-business manager Ed Barnes.

In 2007, she ran for Local 48’s top office, business manager. She came in fourth place,

out of four. But not long after, the winner, Cliff Davis, hired her as a rep to negotiate and enforce union contracts.

That’s where Hammond spent the last 10 years, a sister spreading the gospel of brotherhood. Unlike in construction, the work is never done.

But she’s not as alone as she used to be. Hammond has gone to the Electrical Workers Minority Caucus conference nearly every year since 1991. At first there were a few dozen attendees. Last month at the group’s 28th Annual Conference in Detroit, there were over 600.

At the meeting, Hammond was honored with the group’s “Robbie Sparks North Star Award,” named after the group’s first president. The award is given each year to someone who has committed their life’s work to organized labor and has advanced equity, equality and quality of life for union members and the greater community.

GUMBO FEED

IBEW Local 48 is hosting a fundraiser to help send members to the next national conference of the Electrical Workers Minority Caucus. The event is open to all, and will be followed by a union karaoke outing at McGillacuddy’s Bar & Grill.

When: Wednesday, Feb. 17 from 4 p.m. until the gumbo runs out.

Where: Local 48

Cost: \$20 per person.