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JOBS

Unions denounce move by Congress to privatize Veterans Administration

Just before Memorial Day, Congress passed a law that could lead to closure of veterans hospitals and send more veterans to private doctors for care. President Trump applauded the law's passage. The AFL-CIO called it "a giant misstep toward privatization."

Known as the VA Mission Act, the law extends and expands a three-year pilot program called Veterans Choice that pays for veterans to go to private health care providers instead of veterans hospitals. American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), which represents 250,000 VA employees, says that will result in more costly, less effective care, and will bleed veterans hospitals of patients and resources. The law also creates a commission to look at closing VA facilities, and gives the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the authority to close facilities without consulting Congress.

The VA Choice program, begun in 2014 in response to a media scandal about long wait times at VA hospitals, has up to now been lim-



The Portland Veterans Hospital, above, could lose patients to private clinics under a new law.

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What did New Seasons pay union busters?

By Don McIntosh

Day after day, Isaac Byrd checked the Department of Labor (DOL) web site, wondering when the report would appear. Byrd, 20, works at the New Seasons Market at 3445 N. Williams, where he supports a union effort by employees. But just after the campaign launched publicly last November, anti-union consultants from the firm Cruz & Associates swept through New Seasons stores and led meetings among employees for weeks. When companies hire "union avoidance consultants," and those consultants talk to employees, that triggers a requirement that employers and consultants file disclosure forms detailing the nature of the service provided and how much the company paid for it. That's what Byrd was searching for on the DOL site.

Byrd wanted to know how much New Seasons — which touts itself as a socially respon-



New Seasons worker Isaac Byrd got tired of waiting for a federal disclosure about union-buster payments to appear. So he called the union-buster.

sible, progressive grocer — paid Cruz & Associates, the same firm that fought union campaigns at Trump Hotel Las Vegas, American Apparel, and Williams Sonoma. Based on past filings, Byrd thought the disclosures would come at the beginning of April. But as days passed and no report appeared on the DOL web site, Byrd decided to call the union-buster himself and ask. After a couple attempts, Byrd found himself on

the phone with Lupe Cruz, the head of the firm. Identifying himself as a New Seasons employee, Byrd asked when the form would be coming. Lupe Cruz, presumably thinking Byrd was calling from the corporate office, explained that the form wouldn't be filed until April 2019 — because New Seasons waited until 2018 to pay the firm.

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Portland City Council looks at Uber driver standards

Portland City Council, in a unanimous 5-0 vote May 23, moved forward on a plan to give drivers for app-based transportation companies like Uber and Lyft greater say over their working conditions.

The Oregon AFL-CIO and its largest private-sector affiliate, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555, have been calling on City Council to do something for the drivers, who are currently in a legal limbo somewhere between employees and independent contractors.

But an hour before a hearing on the City Council proposal, a group of Lyft drivers held a rally outside City Hall opposing it, and then testified against it. That led to several lively exchanges in which City Commissioners Nick Fish and Chloe Eudaly challenged the resolution's critics, and spoke in defense of union principles.

The resolution in question, co-sponsored by all five City Council members, was part of a package of three items in which the City Council is reviewing its

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UNION ORGANIZING



At Outside In, an overwhelming vote to unionize

By Don McIntosh

The union campaign at Outside In began with a stabbing.

Workers at the Portland homeless youth non-profit had been feeling unsafe, and some complained to managers about a lack of training or any plan for what to do in the event of violence. Their complaints weren't acted on. Then at 10:35 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 7, two male staff members were stabbed by an Outside In client. The attacker was arrested, and is being held on felony assault charges. The workers were taken by ambulance to the hospital, and recovered, but decided not to return to work.

But other Outside In workers decided it was time to take action. As individuals, they'd had no success getting managers to deal with their concerns. What if they formed a union?

The stabbing was the first violent incident in Outside In's 50-year history. But some said it laid bare the gulf between front-line staff and managers who hadn't taken safety seriously.

From its downtown headquarters at 1132 SW 13th Avenue, Outside In provides a range of services to homeless youth, many of whom are also dealing with addiction and behavioral

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