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OREGON

Oregon public employee unions drop tax transparency initiative as defensive fights loom

To unite business and labor against anti-tax measures, governor brokers a stand-down on a union-backed initiative.

By Don McIntosh

Leaders of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503 and Oregon AFSCME announced July 6 that they decided to withdraw a ballot initiative that might have shed light on how much Oregon's biggest corporations pay in taxes. The announcement came on the day signatures were due, after their campaign had gathered over 130,000 signatures.

The stand-down by the two biggest state employee unions followed a visit from Oregon Gov. Kate Brown to Local 503 headquarters and weeks of conversations between Brown and labor and business leaders.

The withdrawal puts Oregon labor in an all-defense posture on ballot measures this November, but it may also result in the addition of new allies as unions campaign to defeat several initiatives. Money that some businesses might have spent opposing the tax transparency initiative known as Initiative Petition (IP) 25 could instead now go to fight anti-tax initiatives IP 31 and 37.

To that end, top Nike lobbyist (and Portland Public Schools board chair) Julia Brim-Edwards formed a new political action committee June 29 called the Common Good Fund, which on July 3 reported a \$100,000 contribution from Nike. Listed as president of the fund is Portland real estate developer John Russell, who's also vice chair of the governor-appointed body that directs the

investment of state funds like the Oregon Public Employees Retirement Fund. Russell, who has been held up as an example for paying his office building's union janitors and security guards a dollar an hour above the union scale, was also part of the governor's behind-the-scenes discussions.

In a statement released by Gov. Brown's re-election campaign, Russell said Brown helped business and labor leaders develop a new coalition focused on "the biggest challenge this fall, a pair of unnecessary and poorly written constitutional amendments headed to the ballot."

IP 31, which turned in final signatures June 27, is the latest entry in a series of anti-democratic measures that attempt to

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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

AFSCME members ratify first contract at Volunteers of America

About 70 workers at a pair of publicly funded addiction treatment centers ratified their first union contract in a 41-1 vote July 13. Kay Toran, CEO of non-profit Volunteers of America (VOA) Oregon, had refused to agree to even basic union contract features during 18 months of bargaining with Oregon AFSCME. But that hard-line stance crumbled a week before VOA's annual fundraising gala, which the union planned to picket. That would have presented a dilemma for gala guests, including many elected leaders. The June 11 tentative agreement also came three weeks after union supporters occupied VOA offices in an act of

civil disobedience for which 10 were arrested.

The new contract provides annual inflation-based cost-of-living increases, if the budget permits. It also gives 3 percent wage increases for workers who have work-related certifications, and it provides holiday pay and an easier path to benefit for relief workers. VOA didn't agree to a formal wage scale, but did commit to wage "ranges," with increased wages at the top and bottom of the ranges. The contract also includes standard union contract features such as "just cause" progressive discipline procedures. It runs through November 2021.

UNION ORGANIZING

Workers vote on union at chain-owned Clackamas pet clinic

After Mars Petcare swallows up giant VCA chain, workers vote 54-53 to join ILWU Local 5.

A group of 113 workers at the Northwest's biggest veterinary hospital voted July 5 on whether to unionize, but the results are too close to call.

The vote to join International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 5 was 54 to 53 at VCA Northwest Veterinary Specialists, but the company challenged the right of four workers to cast ballots, and it could take several weeks for the National Labor Relations Board to decide on those challenges.

The Clackamas pet hospital, located at 16756 S.E. 82nd Drive, is part of the massive

800-hospital VCA chain. VCA was a publicly traded corporation until last year, when it was bought for \$9.1 billion by an even bigger company, Mars, Inc.

Mars — privately owned by America's third richest family — is the famed and almost entirely nonunion candy maker that makes M&Ms, Skittles, Dove Chocolates, and Mars, Milky Way, Snickers, and Twix chocolate bars. But it also has a less well known petcare division, which owns eight pet food brands, including IAMS, Pedigree, and Whiskas, plus three other veterinary chains besides VCA (Banfield Pet Hospital, BluePearl, and Pet Partners).

Mars' acquisition of VCA

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WASHINGTON

A union guide to Washington's August primary

Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, is a state-wide federation representing over 500 local unions with a combined membership of 400,000. It promotes and defends the interests of working Washingtonians in the State Capitol, and issues ballot recommendations. For this year's elections, rank-and-file delegates considered endorsements May 19 in Seattle and July 17-19 in Wenatchee. For Southwest Washington, the candidates they recommend are in **bold** below:

CONGRESS

U.S. Senate **Maria Cantwell** has voted in accord with the national AFL-CIO's recommendation 91 percent of the time in her three six-year terms in office.

U.S. House, 3rd CD

Carolyn Long, a political science professor at Washington State University Vancouver, is one of three Democrats



running active campaigns to challenge incumbent Republican Jaime Herrera Beutler. The other two are David McDewitt, a Vancouver businessman who has self-funded his campaign with \$700,000 in loans, and Dorothy Gasque, an Iraq war veteran and former Bernie Sanders national delegate. Beutler has voted in accord with the national AFL-CIO's recommendation just 17 percent of the time in her four two-year terms in office.

STATE SUPREME COURT

Position 2 **Susan Owens**

Position 8 **Steve Gonzalez**

Position 9 **Sheryl Gordon McCloud**

WASHINGTON LEGISLATURE

17th Legislative District

House 1 — **Tanisha Harris**

House 2 — **Damion Jiles**

18th Legislative District

House 2 — **Kathy Gillespie**

19th Legislative District

House 1 — **Erin Frasier**

House 2 — **Brian Blake**

49th Legislative District

House 1 — **Sharon Wylie**

House 2 — **Monica Stonier**

If you're a registered Washington voter, your ballot should be mailed to you no later than July 20 and must be post-marked no later than election day, Aug. 7, to be counted. In Washington's "top two" primary, voters affiliated with any party or no party can participate, and the top two vote-getters, regardless of their party preference, appear on the November general election ballot.

NOTICE!

Due to budget constraints, the Northwest Labor Press will publish only one issue in August — but it's our special Labor Day edition. Look for it in your mailbox August 24!