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UNION ORGANIZING

A union for bank workers

The bank owned by Tom Steyer, billionaire presidential candidate, agrees to union neutrality.

By Don McIntosh

Workers at Beneficial Bank in Oregon, California and Washington are now members of Communications Workers of America (CWA), thanks to a union neutrality agreement signed by the bank last year. Both the bank and the union announced March 2 that a majority of the 113 workers at 13 branches in the three states have signed union authorization cards.

Beneficial committed to stay neutral toward union organizing last year after CWA secretary-treasurer Sara Steffens reached out to its CEO.

Formerly known as OneCalifornia Bank, Beneficial Bank was co-founded by billionaire Tom Steyer and his wife Kat



Taylor in 2007 as a bank focused on community development, serving non-profits and small businesses. Steyer resigned from the bank's board of directors in July 2019, the month he launched a campaign for president. Taylor remains the bank's current board chair and was its CEO when CWA requested union neutrality. The union campaign got under way in December. Steyer dropped out of the race Feb. 29 after

spending over \$250 million and failing to win any delegates in the first four states to hold votes.

Beneficial Bank has for years promoted itself as a good employer, paying 150% of the living wage wherever it operates, and offering a benefits package that exceeds industry standards.

"Beneficial has tried to be a leader in the finance industry in pursuing a model in which they can be both ethical and profitable," CWA organizing coordinator Erin Mahoney told the *Labor Press*.

Though common in other countries, bank industry unions are incredibly rare in the United States. Just 1.3% of workers in U.S. finance are union members, according to the latest census survey compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)—tying banking with the restaurant sector for "least unionized industry." BLS esti-

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Safeway.com drivers become the first home grocery delivery workers to unionize

By Don McIntosh

In mail ballots counted Feb. 25, a unit of 53 Portland-area Safeway.com delivery drivers voted 30-18 to join the Teamsters. Employed by Groceryworks.com Operating Company LLC—a subsidiary of Safeway—they pick up groceries ordered online and deliver them to nearby homes in refrigerated box trucks.

The campaign began Sept. 30 with a shot in the dark by brand-new organizer Bobby Rispler on his first day on the job. Safeway.com drivers in Olympia and Seattle had joined the Teamsters and won a \$2-an-hour raise, a "90-10" health insurance plan and a \$1 an hour pension contribution. Rispler decided to talk to Portland-area drivers.

"Pardon me for intruding, but what's the pay like?" he asked the first driver he saw. "Horrible!" the driver replied, adding, "We don't have a union!"

Rispler gave his card to the driver.

Rispler had seen what a union could do in 18 years at UPS. He became a steward six years ago, and in September took an indefinite leave from UPS to attend a three-day union organizing school and become a full-time Teamsters organizer.

Rispler learned that at Safeway.com, pay started at \$14.50, and with 15-cent annual raises, didn't get much higher. And drivers suffered from



extreme instability in shifts, never knowing when they'd be called in on a day off or told on their way to the job that there'd be no work that day.

Still, the first few Safeway.com drivers Rispler spoke with seemed nervous about the idea of a union. But then some enthusiastic union supporters stepped up, and a campaign got under way. Pro-union workers talked with their co-workers. Drivers have a lot of time to talk in the stores while they're loading their refrigerated vans. Word got around. Three to four weeks in, union-busters arrived.

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Union-backed initiatives would punish GOP walkout

On Feb. 24, for the third time in under a year, Republican state senators walked out to deprive the Oregon Senate the quorum needed to vote on bills. The intent was to prevent a vote on a cap-and-trade carbon reduction bill, but it prevents the Legislature from passing any laws at all.

Fed up with lawmakers abandoning their duties, several Oregon unions helped draft prospective ballot initiatives to sanction the legislative deserters, and turned in initial signatures March 3.

Initiative Petition 63 is a constitutional amendment that defines 10 or more unexcused absences from a floor session as disorderly conduct, and disqualifies a legislator from run-

ning for a House or Senate seat in the subsequent election. Initiative Petition 64 levies fines of \$500 a day on a lawmaker who walks out, and prohibits them from profiting from walkouts by stopping their salaries and per diem payments. It also prohibits lawmakers from using or accepting political contributions to pay their fines or other expenses for walking off the job.

Chief petitioners are Service Employees Local 503 Vice President Andrea Kennedy-Smith, a paralegal and union steward in the state Child Welfare Department; and Oregon Education Association Vice President Reed Scott-Schwabach, a Spanish teacher in the Centennial School District.

KOIN-TV moves forward with union-busting

After more than two years of fruitless contract bargaining, the owner of Portland CBS affiliate KOIN-6 TV told NABET-CWA Local 51 that the company will no longer recognize the union or negotiate. Since 2017, KOIN has been owned by the nation's largest television broadcaster, publicly-traded Nexstar Media Group, a Dallas-headquartered behemoth with 197 TV stations. Via a FedExed letter in January, Nexstar told union negotiator Carrie Briggs-Adams that it doesn't have to keep negotiating because most workers at KOIN don't want the union any more.

Briggs-Adams felt like Nexstar hadn't been negotiating seriously anyway, but says there's no basis for the claim that the union has lost majority support. Pro-union workers at KOIN collected the signatures of 26 of the 41 represented employees on petitions saying they still want to be union-represented. The employees are

news photographers, engineers, editors, assignment desk editors, directors, web producers, and commercial production workers. Father Jack Mosbrucker, a retired Roman Catholic priest, then presented those petitions Feb. 20 to station manager Pat Nevin at KOIN's 222 SW Columbia St. offices.

Since January, NABET has been asking the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for a court injunction ordering the company to return to the bargaining table. Nexstar stopped returning Briggs-Adams' calls and emails, and was a no-show to a scheduled bargaining session Jan. 23-24, leaving NABET stuck paying the \$1,000 tab for the Portland Hilton meeting room. NABET has also filed NLRB charges accusing Nexstar of failing to negotiate in good faith, and disciplining a worker in retaliation for union activity. A federal judge is set to hear the charges May 19.