

NORTHWEST LABOR PRESS

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Beating the odds, free public preschool ballot initiative turns in signatures

Now the union-backed measure faces a competing measure and a business-backed legal challenge.

By Don McIntosh

They did it. In just five weeks, a union-backed grassroots campaign gathered 32,356 signatures on a ballot initiative to provide universal publicly-funded preschool for three- and four-year-olds in Multnomah County. That's roughly one out of every 15 registered voters in Multnomah County, and nearly 10,000 more than the 22,686 valid signatures needed to qualify for the ballot. More than 500 volunteers contributed to the signature gathering effort, and the campaign received over 2,000 single-signer petitions.

The Universal Preschool Now (UP Now) campaign turned in signatures July 6, and the county has until Aug. 5 to validate signatures and determine if the measure qualifies for the Nov. 3, 2020, ballot.

UP Now was led by chief petitioners Suzanne Cohen, presi-



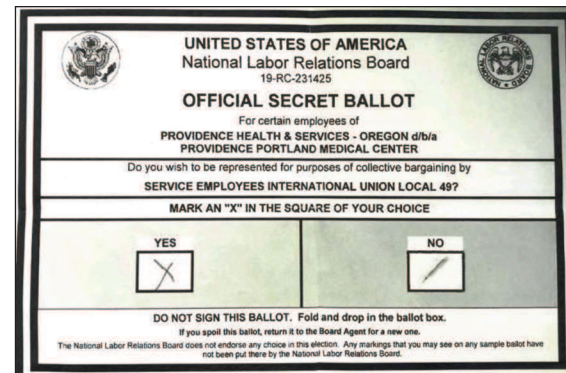
Photo courtesy of Universal Preschool Now

MASK ON, PETITIONS OUT In just five weeks — and in the midst of a pandemic — hundreds of volunteers gathered signatures to get the Universal Preschool initiative on the ballot in Multnomah County in November. One of them was Sunnyside Elementary School third grade teacher Tiffany Koyama Lane, a member of Portland Association of Teachers, who set up a white board to collect signatures at Laurelhurst Park.

dent of Portland Association of Teachers (PAT); Will Layng, director of Portland Jobs with Justice; and Sahar Muranovic, president of the Oregon chapter of the National Organization of Women. The campaign was endorsed by more than 30 groups, including at least 10 labor organizations: Northwest Oregon Labor Council, PAT, Reynolds

Education Association, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, AFSCME Local 88, International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Communications Workers of America Local 7901, Portland State Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (PSU-

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YES MEANS NO? A worker tried to erase a mistaken mark in the 'no' box. The NLRB, led by three management lawyers appointed by Donald Trump, used it to reverse a union election win.

Smudge on a union ballot costs 800 Providence workers their union

The decision is the latest by Trump appointees on the NLRB.

By Don McIntosh

Back in February 2019, we reported on a razor-thin union election in which over 800 hospital support workers at Providence Portland Medical Center won a union by just one vote. Now we have to update it: This May, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49's election victory was overturned by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in Washington, D.C.

Federal law says the NLRB's purpose is "to encourage collective bargaining." The agency exists to prosecute violations of private-sector workers' union rights and hold elections to determine if workers want union representation. But in the last few years, led by Trump appointees, the NLRB has steadily

reversed labor rights reforms of the Obama era and ruled against unions whenever it could find justification.

In this case, it came down to whether a single ballot should be counted as "yes" or "no."

By any measure, the union vote at Providence Portland hospital was tight when the election was held Dec. 12 and 13, 2018. In the first tally, the result was 374 for unionizing and 376 against, a union loss. But that didn't count three voided ballots and 44 other ballots that had been set aside because of legal challenges over whether those workers were eligible to be in the union. When the challenges were resolved, the result was 384-383, a one-vote win for workers who wanted union recognition.

Then Providence appealed,

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Congress to debate further COVID relief

A months-long impasse in Congress over a next round of COVID relief is threatening workers, businesses, state and local governments, and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

Though unemployment declined to 11.1% in June, 12 million Americans who lost their jobs since March remain out of work, and the \$600-a-week enhanced unemployment insurance benefit that Congress passed in March is set to expire July 31. State and local govern-

ments are reeling from current and projected revenue losses, and have laid off almost 2 million public employees. And USPS is slated to run out of funds in September, endangering the jobs of 600,000 workers.

Led by Democrats, the U.S. House passed a \$3 trillion second-phase relief bill in a 208-199 vote on May 15. Known as the HEROES Act, it would extend the enhanced unemployment benefit to January, provide almost \$1 trillion in federal aid

for states and cities, send out a second round of \$1,200 stimulus checks for most Americans, provide \$25 billion to keep the Postal Service going through the end of 2020, and order OSHA to mandate that businesses protect workers against COVID-19.

But leaders of the 53-47 Republican majority in the U.S. Senate adopted a wait-and-see approach, in case the epidemic faded and the economy bounced back. Up to now, Senate Major-

ity Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky) has refused to allow a vote on the HEROES Act, or to support any alternative bill. But this week, McConnell said a new round of negotiations will begin next week.

Republican leaders want a new stimulus bill to include a provision relieving businesses of legal responsibility for protecting workers and customers against the spread of the coronavirus. The forthcoming GOP bill will reportedly cost around \$1.3 trillion and will include aid for businesses and hospitals, and financial incentives to en-

courage schools to reopen. But McConnell has said he opposes extending the enhanced unemployment benefit.

Democrats oppose the liability provision and the financial pressure on schools to reopen, and are calling for \$1 trillion in state and local funding alone.

For a new stimulus to become law, Democratic and Republican leaders will have to come to some agreement.

The national AFL-CIO began running TV and social media ads in Kentucky July 14, calling on McConnell to allow a vote on the HEROES Act.