

RIVERSIDE COUNTY BARGAINING UPDATE

Yesterday your bargaining team met with the County as scheduled for negotiations.

At the meeting the County presented a new proposal. The proposal we received yesterday was identical to the proposal we had previously received, with one significant change. The new proposal did not contain a provision eliminating flex benefit cash back for existing employees, though it would still eliminate cash back for new employees. The Board has come to recognize that people rely on that money as income, and have modified their approach on this item accordingly.

While we appreciate the fact that this represents movement on the part of the County, the new proposal still contains many demands for concessions that we are not prepared to make:

the permanent reduction of the 2 step merit increase to one step, elimination of sick leave cash out at retirement, elimination of POST pay, and changing the start of shift times to disqualify people for shift differentials are just a few of the pay check gouging ideas that remain in the County's proposal.

Obviously, these are things to which we could not agree. At this point, our goal is just to get a deal that does not contain any cuts beyond those we have already endured in recent years. While we are still very far from getting to that agreement, I am optimistic that we will in fact get there. However, this modest enhancement of our sense of optimism does not mean that we are not continuing to plan and prepare for impasse. Our attorneys, organizers, Union staff, and many of our members, are all engaged in active planning and preparations to deal with worst case scenarios.

It is also important to note that there are likely competing agendas at work here. The Board, for as much as I disagree with some of them on how we should approach these issues, do, I think, genuinely want a deal that

maintains a decent relationship with labor, doesn't cause undo harm to the employees, and doesn't exacerbate the County's fragile budget situation. And, frankly, that pretty much sums up our position. We just have different ideas about how to make that happen.

The other agenda would appear to be coming from Human Resources. This agenda is being driven by somewhat different concerns than those driving the agendas of the Union and the Board of Supervisors. The HR agenda is driven by smaller, petty personal ambitions that don't have anything to do with what's good for the County. And they certainly have nothing to do with what's good for us. Much of how the Board reacts to a proposal depends on how it is presented by their staff during closed session. We trust that the members of the Board will be able to separate the facts from the HR hustle.

And, let's not forget about the dream team consultants currently enjoying corpulent contracts with the County. The agenda of most consultants is simply to attach to the host, and suck as much blood as they can before buzzing off to drain the next victim.

Of all the interested parties, I truly believe that the Union and the Board of Supervisors are the only ones who really do have interests that coincide with what's best for the County. Now that the Board seems interested in engaging actual bargaining, I believe that at least the possibility exists that we can get there.

Our next bargaining session is scheduled for July 12th, after which we will post an update. We also have our County membership meetings next week, during which we discuss these issues in much more detail. I look forward to seeing you then.

In Solidarity,
Stephen Switzer, Business Manager