

Grocery Coalition Launches Door-to-Door Campaign, Seeks "No Shop" Pledge From Public in Case of Strike or Lockout

On May 16 community and religious leaders joined more than 100 grocery workers and union members in launching the "Walk for Respect" campaign, a massive public outreach effort designed to help restore good jobs among the supermarket industry's top three chains.

In the coming weeks, thousands of volunteers across Southern California will blanket neighborhoods around stores with pledge cards asking consumers not to shop at Ralphs, Vons or Albertsons stores in the case of a lockout or strike. The program will continue until the three chains agree to once again provide decent wages and affordable health insurance to their employees.

Grocery workers at Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons stores are currently locked in contract negotiations for the first time since the bitter four-and-a-half-month strike and lockout in 2003-2004. That contract expired March 5, and the stores have dragged out negotiations with a series of extensions in a bid to get further concessions from employees, despite record profits and declining non-union competition.

"Grocery workers haven't had a wage increase since 2002, yet the markets are making billions in profits," said Chris Zazueta, a veteran employee of Ralphs. "New workers have to wait up to 18 months to even become eligible for benefits, and 30 months to get health care for their kids. No wonder turnover among new employees is as high as 85%."

As community leaders, supporters and members from numerous Los Angeles labor unions gathered for a rally in front of an Albertsons store in Burbank, the frustrations with the stores' tactics and the effects on workers and local communities became clear.

"Grocery workers have historically been pillars of communities across Southern California. For decades, the supermarkets provided jobs with decent wages and health benefits, located directly within our neighborhoods," said Reverend Anna Olson, Deputy Director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). "But times have changed. Now the markets are in a race to the bottom, undermining good jobs and our communities in the process."

Of the 44,000 workers hired since 2004, less than 3,800 have health care, and less than 80 have coverage for their children.

Insurance Surveys Indicate Payroll Deduction Option

The 2007 Insurance Surveys have been reviewed by the Insurance Committee. Bargaining Unit members have indicated a preference for payroll deduction to pay for the 2007-2008 Insurance Fund shortfall. The MTA member of the Committee will continue to meet this summer in an attempt to come to an agreement with the CSEA and AMSA members regarding the cost of the premiums. The goal is for Risk Management to get open enrollment information to members in August. Open enrollment continues through the month of September. Payroll deduction and/or plan design changes would begin in the fall.

SB 840 Passes Senate Floor

The California Universal Health Care Act, SB 840, which establishes a single payer universal health care system in California, passed the Senate Floor by a vote of 22-14 (final vote of 24-16 expected) and now heads to the California State Assembly.

SB 840 covers every California resident with comprehensive health benefits, contains the growth in health care spending, and provides patients with total choice over their doctors and hospitals.

"California is leading the nation on health care reform with passage of SB 840," stated Senator Kuehl. "This is the gold standard for health reform and the only way to achieve the kind of health care system that Californians want and deserve".



Intermediate Director Julian De La Torre (EAI) lobbies Senator Ron Calderon for Health Care Reform.