

SEIU Local 721
President's Report to the Executive Board
March 10, 2010

Organizing

OC Conference of Cities

On February 26, SEIU 721 held a conference for city employees at Cal State Fullerton. The conference, *Navigating Tough Times Together*, united Local 721 members with city workers who are not yet part of SEIU to discuss strategies for dealing with the difficult economic conditions that are creating significant challenges for all public employees in Southern California. Workshops were presented on privatization, the growing threat to public pensions, and the ongoing state budget crisis. Despite heavy rains the conference drew 75 participants and evaluations were very positive.

Recognition in Ventura County

The Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD) won recognition for a bargaining unit of physicians employed at ten of the County's satellite health clinics. The County contracts with the clinics to provide services, but PERB ruled that the County was still a joint employer. The victory for UAPD may have significant implications for our efforts to organize publicly-funded clinic employees throughout the region.

Bargaining / Budget / Secure Retirement Campaigns

City of Los Angeles Budget Crisis

Privatization: On February 17, SEIU 721 members spoke out at City Hall against threats to public services, including a proposal to contract out tree-trimming services. Workers addressed the City Council meeting in the morning and a meeting of the Public Works Committee in the afternoon.

Toxic Bank Deals: Hundreds of SEIU members, community allies and Los Angeles families packed a hearing room in City Hall today to speak out in support of legislation setting new standards for banks the city does business with. Following the hearing, community members marched on local Wall Street banks to demand banks take immediate action to help solve the city's budget crisis and end toxic derivative deals that cost the city millions each year. "Banks' actions are hurting our communities and directly standing in the way of a recovery. Instead of slashing parks and neighborhood services, it's time to talk about what really caused this crisis and how we can fix it," said SEIU 721 President Bob Schoonover.

With Los Angeles facing a \$212 million budget gap and Angelenos facing cuts to parks, public safety and neighborhood services, taxpayers demanded that city money only be invested in banks that step up efforts to help fix the financial crisis they created. The action could save the city \$10 million immediately and help break the cycle of home foreclosure, small-business failure and record unemployment that has drained city revenue for services.

SEIU Local 721 members will be turning out in force on March 5 to support the legislation when it goes to a full City Council vote.

Action at Mayor's House:

On March 6 SEIU 721 members and members of other LA City unions will hold a protest rally at the home of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Ventura County Contract

On February 17 SEIU 721 members in Ventura County overwhelmingly ratified a new one-year agreement. The contract includes many advances on non-economic issues, but also includes the discontinuation of a 3% retirement cost “pick-up” that effectively results in a pay cut for bargaining unit members. The County was facing a projected \$14 million budget shortfall in 2010-11. As part of the agreement, SEIU 721 members had an opportunity to offset the pay cut and protect family incomes by discontinuing an add-on retirement benefit (2% COLA). However, by a roughly 3-2 margin, members voted NOT to discontinue the 2% COLA.

Ventura County Secure Retirement

In the month of February, SEIU 721 members led union coalition delegations in individual meetings with four County Supervisors and the Chief Executive Officer. The meetings were aimed at persuading the County to support funding changes at VCERA that would significantly reduce the County’s costs to fund the retirement system over the next 7 years. SEIU 721 members and coalition partners will be testifying at a March 15 VCERA meeting in support of funding policy changes.

The Ventura County union coalition has commissioned a poll of voter attitudes about public pensions and related matters to help guide our efforts. The poll will be out in the field March 9-11.

Santa Barbara County

Like Ventura, Santa Barbara County is facing significant budget shortfalls due in large part to sharply rising retirement system costs. The County is meeting with sister SEIU Local 620 to discuss the need to layoff 390 employees. SEIU 721’s benefit consultants, *Rael and Letson*, prepared a memo outlining funding policy strategies that could produce significant cost-saving. SEIU 721 members leaders and coalition partners attended a February 23 Board of Supervisors budget meeting in Santa Maria to present our consultants’ findings. 721 leaders have begun to meet with individual County Supervisors to win support for such changes. Members will be attending a March 24 SBCERS meeting where funding policy changes will be discussed.

Riverside County: Recognition

Four County Supervisors have now pledged to recognize the CIR Doctors who are requesting to be part of SEIU 721’s Professional Unit.

Riverside County: Bargaining

SEIU 721’s bargaining committee is working toward an agreement with the County. In exchange for a commitment from the County not to open the PERS pension article, the union would agree to other limitations on the subjects of discussion in this year’s bargaining.

Riverside County: Secure Retirement

Working with the majority of the County Supervisors, SEIU 721 has secured support for the establishment of a new Pension Reform Committee. This will include all the unions, unlike the present Executive Office controlled committee.

Representation

Competency Testing, Los Angeles County

The Union has received the Hearing Officer’s decision in an unfair practice charge against DHS. The Hearing Officer found that the DHS was required to negotiate over the discipline component of a new system-wide competency testing program for RNs and other related classes. The decision is now before ERCOM for final action.

IHSS Audit

The County has been conducting an audit of County employees who are receiving IHSS funds for providing care to another person. In several cases, the employees may not have disclosed this outside employment or exceeded the maximum amount of hours. This has produced a significant number of cases over the last six months.

Politics

SEIU Town Hall for CA Statewide Offices

On March 20, hundreds of SEIU members from multiple locations across the state will be teleconferenced into an endorsement town hall meeting for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Insurance Commissioner, and Secretary of Education. SEIU members will hear from leaders who are vying for our endorsement and ask them the tough questions about how they plan to move rebuild CA.

Town Hall teleconference locations have been established in: Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange County, and Riverside.

Electing One of Us: Reggie Jones-Sawyer for State Assembly

On March 2, SEIU Members from the 47th Assembly District met at Lucy Florence Coffee Shop in the Leimert Park to discuss how we can fix our state by electing 721 Member-Candidate Reggie Jones-Sawyer to the California State Assembly. SEIU 721 members will be engaged in a variety of activities to help Reggie win.

Fix Our State: Elect 721 Member Nick Karno

On March 11, SEIU 721 member candidate Nick Karno (AD53) will host an exclusive meeting in Torrance for SEIU members. Members will get to meet Nick and hear about his plans to fix Sacramento.

Inland Area SEIU 721 Inland Members Endorse Benoit

SEIU 721 Inland Members voted last week to endorse John Benoit in the upcoming election for Riverside County

Board of Supervisors District 4. SEIU 721 members interviewed Benoit and challenger Gary Jeandron. Members voted to endorse John Benoit because of his strong commitment to securing 721 members' retirement.

March for California's Future

On March 5th, the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) and a diverse coalition of labor, business, education, and faith groups embarked on a 48-day "March for California's Future." Along the way marchers will join with communities fighting for a chance at the California Dream.

Together, we will visit legislators, hold teach-ins, Town Halls, register voters and call for:

- Quality public education and public services for Every Californian
- Government and Economy that serves us all
- A fair tax system to fund California's future

On April 21st thousands will join the marchers in Sacramento for a major rally with one key message: Fight for California's Future!

South Los Angeles: Community Health Forum and Food Bank Kick-Off

On March 27, Local 721 South Region Parks and Recreation Leadership Council, United Way LA, and the Center for Public Accountability are partnering to host a community health forum and food distribution at Bethune Park in South Los Angeles. 721 members and community participants will be learn more about how to improve health services in South Los Angeles through higher health standards and increased state funding. Participants will also receive hunger and nutrition assistance in the form of groceries.

SEIU Local 721 Republican Mixer

On Thursday, February 25 Republican members of Local 721 in the Reseda area attended a special mixer with Local President Bob Schoonover and Mark Reed, a candidate for Congress. Participants discussed the need to put political differences aside in order to work together in these difficult times.

Los Angeles Democratic Party Central Committee

LA County 721 members are signing up to run for the Los Angeles County Democratic Party (LACDP) so they can help guide local endorsements and official party policies. The LACDP is the official governing body of the Democratic Party in Los Angeles. By running to serve on this governing body 721 members can help influence elected leaders to stand up for working families and public services. The filing deadline to turn in 20-40 signatures in March 12 at 5PM

Secure Retirement and the Gubernatorial Election

Billionaire GOP candidate Meg Whitman announced she wishes to eliminate defined benefits for new hires and has signaled that this will be a prominent issue in her campaign for Governor. There is concern that she may fund a measure to reach the November ballot, although a future initiative is more likely if she is elected.

LACERS Board Election

Recently retired LACERS Commissioner Shelley Smith campaign for retiree seat has been kicked off. Ballots were mailed March 12. Endorsements have been secured, letters and emails to retirees written, and mailing lists are being compiled.

Other Notable

Executive Board Election

A total of 96 candidates qualified for the ballot in the upcoming SEIU 721 Executive Board election. Ballots are at the mail house and are scheduled to be in the mail March 8 or 9. Candidate statements were due on March 3 and are now posted on the SEIU 721 website. Hard copies will be printed and distributed at worksites.

The election is being conducted by True ballot, a professional election service provider. The ballot count is scheduled for March 26.

Building Search

A Letter Of Intent was submitted in February to purchase (or lease with an option to buy) an eight-story 108 thousand square foot office building at 1545 Wilshire Boulevard. The owner has responded to the LOI and we are now engaged in a negotiations process in an attempt to reach a purchase agreement. If such agreement is reached, we will enter an escrow / due diligence period during which we will investigate the property in greater detail before finalizing a deal.