

New Year, New Challenges

The new year is here, and I've started thinking about what's ahead for Local 721 members.

One positive trend is that the economy is finally picking up and that means we're seeing more money in our contracts. In the City of Riverside, Oxnard, Santa Barbara, Santa Ana, LA County and elsewhere, SEIU 721 members have negotiated strong contracts that include raises.



Looking ahead, we've got a tough contract fight coming up with the City of Los Angeles. LA City members make up the second largest bargaining unit in our union, and they're gearing up to negotiate a contract that looks beyond the recessionary policies of the past.

We're also looking at important elections in 2014. Governor Brown is up for re-election in November. Two LA County supervisor seats will turn over. (SEIU 721 members have already proudly endorsed Hilda Solis for one of them.) And we may face some

anti-worker propositions on the ballot, including one that would devastate secure retirement in California.

Through all of this, I know we will stand strong, united and dedicated. Which is why I look forward to working with you all in the new year.

Happy New Year!

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Representing Our Membership

News From Around the Local



LA County Members Close in on Agreement

The LA County Contract Campaign has been hard fought. I'm proud to say SEIU 721 members are close to a final settlement. Here are some highlights:

Individual Tables: All LA County units, including Children Social Workers and Social Services units (DPSS), have now reached agreement on non-economic contract language.

Healthcare Premiums: In bargaining, the County agreed to increase their contribution toward the cost of health insurance. On December 17, because of the extraordinary hard work of the Bargaining Policy Committee, the Board of Supervisors adopted the negotiated 7.2% increase

in the Options contribution and directed the Auditor-Controller to implement the necessary payroll changes so that the increased Options contribution will appear on the January 15, 2014 paycheck.

Retro Pay: The Bargaining Policy Committee has not finalized an agreement with the County on the timing of raises. We hope we can resolve this issue in the first week of January.

Other economic enhancements: Economic enhancements including a \$250 options payment cannot be implemented by the County until the Union contract has been adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

We can't finalize a ratification schedule right now, but we expect to begin the process in late January and plan to have economic enhancements, including raises and options payments, appear in SEIU 721 members' paychecks starting in late February or early March.

Bargaining Begins for Riverside City Solid Waste Unit

The SEIU 721 City of Riverside Solid Waste Unit bargaining team presented contract proposals to management on Tuesday, Dec. 10. Members have prioritized three areas for their negotiations: salary increases, pension security, and improvements in working conditions

Bargaining sessions start on January 6.

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SEIU 721 Members Give Back

Holiday spirit is alive and well at SEIU Local 721. Last month, members from across Southern California organized and participated in toy drives, food distributions and hospital visits for children and families in need.

In Los Angeles, SEIU 721 held its 33rd annual LA-area toy drive for underprivileged and foster children this month. It culminated in a big event on Dec. 18. Hundreds of children and their parents came to the celebration, which featured food, music, a toy giveaway, and a special appearance by Santa. Special thanks to State Sen. Ricardo Lara and Compton Mayor Aja Brown for their help.

Members and allies with People for Community Improvement also brought joy to children at UCLA Children's Hospital in Santa Monica on Dec. 12. They spent the day passing out gifts to hospitalized kids, providing entertainment and spending time with the children and their families.

In the Inland Region, the Regional Council donated clothing to the Youth Opportunity Center's Adopt a Family program. Members Frank Corral, Riverside City Chapter President, and Sammie Luna-Farias, Riverside City Utility Customer Service Representative II, delivered the gifts to the Youth Center on Friday, Dec. 13.

Just one day later, Inland Region members and their families, along with hundreds of community members, honored fallen troops by laying wreaths at the Riverside National Cemetery, during the national Wreaths Across America event.

And in the Tri-Counties area, the African-American Caucus collected non-perishable food items at various worksites in Ventura County. The food and gift card donations went to United Farm Workers union members who were recently displaced after their mushroom farm worksite closed.

I'm extremely proud of the generous work our members did for their communities.

Victory for Ventura County Hospital Lab Workers

On Nov. 19, SEIU 721 members at two Ventura County hospitals finally got some positive news from management—the County will address staffing shortages.

Workers in Ventura County Medical Center and Santa Paula Hospital were feeling the pressure from staffing shortages, so they stood up to improve their labs. They launched a "Save Our Labs" campaign, got dozens of signatures in support and held informational meetings.

Management agreed to add an additional 11 positions and to review compensation for recruitment and retention reasons. They also agreed to engage a consultant to review the labs' workflow. An SEIU 721 member will be part of the interview process.

All hospital members were a part of this victory. There were several actions throughout the campaign, including sticker actions, and purple tape and banner signing days. Hundreds of workers also committed to participate in informational pickets.



Inglewood Members Tell Mayor, 'Don't be a Scrooge!'

Dozens of Inglewood city workers and their neighbors held a candlelight vigil outside Inglewood Mayor James Butts' residence on Dec. 11. Butts and the City Council are pushing to layoff city workers and slash their retirement benefits. It's an attack on workers' jobs, families and the whole community.

City Workers have earned retiree health benefits through decades of hard work serving the people of Inglewood. Inglewood needs to keep good, middle-class jobs with the promise of retirement security.

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Santa Barbara County Members Win New Contract with Gains

SEIU 721 Santa Barbara County members voted overwhelmingly to approve a tentative agreement with the County in early December. On Tuesday, December 10, the County Board of Supervisors also approved the agreement.

The agreement includes a 2% increase in salary, restoration of merit increases and a 1% additional increase, effective July 6, 2015. It also includes improvements in vacation, sick leave and tuition reimbursement.

Monterey Park Workers Win End to Furloughs

This year, Monterey Park City Workers got a special holiday surprise: an end to furloughs. After nearly three years, SEIU 721 members and other city workers convinced the City Council to end furloughs nine months earlier than expected.

At the Dec. 4 City Council meeting, Mayor Teresa Real Sebastian and various City Council members thanked city workers for their sacrifices over the past years. They acknowledged that city workers took action to keep Monterey Park solvent.

About this report: The President's Report covers the President's activities in major areas spelled out in the SEIU 721 bylaws. It is presented each month to the Executive Board.

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From the Chief of Staff

In early December, at the height of our LA County Social Services strike, the Los Angeles Daily News published an editorial titled "Uneven economic recovery fueling growing unrest." You'll find a copy of it at the end of this report on page 4.

The Daily News is usually thought of as a conservative paper. And yet the paper's editorial board publicly supported the two strikes that our Local was driving.

First, the Board said that children's social workers can't do their jobs when social worker-to-child ratios are so high that some of them are juggling 60 cases at a time.

The Editorial Board also supported the thousands of fast food workers who went on strike for decent, livable wages and some dignity in their workplaces. As I hope you know, we at SEIU 721 have supported these low-wage workers every step of the way. We did it because we can't just focus on public-sector workers. Our mission must be to lift up the middle class in all industries and stamp out the rampant inequality that is crushing working people across this region and this country.

So read the editorial and then pass it on to your friends and neighbors. Because as this editorial shows, the media and the public are noticing something very important: SEIU 721 members are making history by changing history.

In Solidarity,

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Daily News

Uneven economic recovery fueling growing unrest: Editorial

12/06/13, 2:46 PM PST

If not quite formally winter, it is the December of our economic discontent. Though the sky is bright in places — jobs, housing market — storm clouds bloom like bruises on the horizon.

Here in Southern California, what is most clear five years after the nation's economic near-collapse is how very uneven the recovery has been. You can take heart, as the stock markets did late last week, in the news that unemployment levels dropped to 7 percent for the first time since 2008. But drill any deeper and you find how almost meaningless that figure is for so many workers and families. Plenty of people who had been looking for a job, including many older, laid-off workers, have simply stopped trying; they thus disappear from the statistics. And so many of the jobs that have been created are low-wage, low-benefit positions. It's nice that our hospitality industry is on the rebound, catering to the Chinese and German tourists here to take in Disneyland and the Hollywood sign, but those new desk-clerking jobs are not exactly a career at a Raytheon or a Boeing.

And Californians, at least, know the recovery hasn't benefited everyone equally. A survey by the Public Policy Institute of California released last week found that more than two-thirds of them believe the state is divided into haves and have-nots (and, even more tellingly, more people thought they were on the have-not side).

That belief is certainly underlying two labor strikes by very different groups of workers here last week.

Fast-food employees whose minimum-wage work makes possible the almost absurdly cheap hamburgers and fries central to perhaps too many Angeleno diets joined a nationwide walkout. It was part of a movement demanding an increase in the minimum wage. Is \$15 an hour the perfect level to lift workers into the middle class? Hard to say, but restaurant owners say it would instead result in massive layoffs and faster implementation of computerized counter menus replacing workers. Whichever economic theory you subscribe to, the strike indicates a new concern about increasing income inequality in America.

To Adam Smith-ites: This isn't about growing an illogical compassion. A shrinking middle class is the worst trend for any consumer economy. Note the latest political push by California conservative activist Ron Unz, who created the infamous ballot initiative in 1998 eliminating bilingual education in the state; now he backs a big hike in the minimum wage. Not as high as \$15 an hour, but to \$12 by 2016 — a 50 percent hike over today's \$8.

The other labor action last week was by government employees who are already in the middle class, most of them with master's degrees, and it wasn't about wages and benefits. Los Angeles County children's social

workers walked off the job in protest of workloads that force many to juggle 40 or more cases each week of neglected and abused children rather than the 14 clients state guidelines recommend. They don't want more money — they want more social workers. So do we all, if we care about the future of those children and thus the future of Southern California society. County officials keep saying they have allocated more money to hire more social workers — and then not doing it.

The rise in caseload is surely connected to the steep rise in Southern California kids living in poverty. The planning group Southern California Association of Governments reported Thursday that between 1990 and 2012, the share of residents in the region living below the federal poverty level rose from 13 percent to 18 percent. Worse is that more than a quarter of all children in the region are now living in poverty.

You can confront this bleak economic landscape — in which the rich are getting richer, making those all-cash buys of homes just down your block, while more go homeless — by volunteering in the soup kitchens and the homeless shelters or giving to charity.

To rebuild an economy that will lift up all ships, not just 70-foot yachts, it will take cold, hard fiscal logic. "There are so many very low-wage workers, and we pay for huge social welfare programs for them," Unz told The New York Times last month. Raising the minimum wage "would save something on the order of tens of billions of dollars. Doesn't it make more sense for employers to pay their workers than the government?"

The U.S. economy teeters toward oligarchy at our peril. Poverty costs us all. Invest in people and we will reap a return.

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