

Bob Schoonover – Remarks prepared for 8/31 LA County Health Agency Town Hall:

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here standing before the caregivers at the forefront of a groundbreaking partnership – one that is both magnificent and to be honest, at times a bit crazy.

Our labor-management partnership has placed us in uncharted territory. Everyday, it challenges us to trust not just one another but our shared vision.

A vision that will have a lasting impact on the work we all do – as health care providers, administrators, management and labor representatives.

Whether you're a doctor, a tech, a nurse, a labor organizer or a top manager, when you sit down around these partnership tables, you leave your title and hierarchies at the door, to work as equals towards a shared goal.

And that, my friends, is easier said than done.

Trust in this partnership, like trust in any partnership, has to be earned. But you cannot earn it, and you cannot allow the other person to earn it if you don't give that partnership the space to exist, to struggle and ultimately to learn to work together.

Labor and Management working together, in councils, committees, working groups is where that fundamental trust is being built.

Building that trust requires us to come to the table with our feet firm on who we are and our minds open to what we will create.

SEIU 721 is a labor organization. We are a union, we exist to raise up all working people. "Kicking ass for the working class" is in our blood. We're still bargaining and enforcing contracts, handling grievances, and raising our voices in defense of the communities we serve. And we are diligently fighting for the dignity and value of our day-to-day work.

That said, at the end of the day our Union is made up of dedicated individuals who go to work, not because of a clause in their labor contract – but because of their personal devotion to caring for those in need.

I never for one second forget that our SEIU 721 members give a piece of themselves every-single-day, to make sure someone's pain is lessened and to deliver compassion in the face of sorrow.

Yes the pay and the working conditions, the benefits, and career ladders are all very very important, but the devotion to other human beings is paramount.

Our members do this work because they believe that health and wellness are inalienable

human rights.

And this is the reason why our Local dove into this partnership with both feet in.

Our union understands that our vision to become a provider of choice can only be a reality if the voices of those on the frontlines are leading the way.

It's frontline voices that know how to order and manage the supplies needed to run a hospital. It's the frontline voices who know how to reach folks in the communities where they live, and how to get their various needs met through DHS and DMH, when their first point of contact is Public Health.

Our motto at SEIU has always been "Stronger Together." And this partnership is truly the proof.

Already, our Labor-Management working groups made sure 10,000 LA County workers benefited from a customer service training model that had *both* management and frontline workers in the same room, both getting coached and both learning how to talk to one another to get it right.

We know that there will be moments when we don't see eye to eye. But we also know that it is in these moments where we will find the opportunity to grow and strengthen our partnership.

If it were easy, everyone would be doing it. But it's not easy. It is hard work. It is time consuming. And it doesn't always move at the pace we want it to. But when we succeed, boy do we succeed.

Our recent anti bully campaign is proof of that success. But make no mistake, the success has been possible because of this partnership. Because instead of coming together to argue about what was or wasn't a problem, we came together to talk about how to solve that problem.

No matter how uncomfortable some of those conversations got, we knew that we both had to be equally committed to cultivating a safe and just culture in the workplace.

I want to personally thank management for their leadership in continuing to build the trust needed to strengthen this partnership.

We look forward to continue working hand in hand with the County.

And I personally look forward to even more SEIU 721 members joining the work groups that are creating a health care agency where whole person care is front and center.

Thank you.