

Point-by-Point Response to Recent Steel Worker Union Leadership Statements

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Union Leadership Statement #1: “Today the hospital sent out a blast regarding losing health benefits.”

RWJUH Response: RWJUH nurses deserve the truth and full information.

Union Leadership Statement #2: “Yes, it was *our duty to plan* once a strike was authorized.”

RWJUH Response: The hospital believes nurses are the face and heart of our organization. Based on this principle, we offered a very generous package, in terms of wage, benefit and staffing standards that would result in the hospital’s nurses being the highest paid nurses in the history of New Jersey. That was our plan. What is the union leadership team’s plan? It is not clear. Union leaders talk publicly about staffing but privately keep asking for more money. Union leaders say it’s not about money but the MOA contains staffing standards that the union leaders wrote.

Did union leadership inform members that, just like the Federal government and 48 state governments across the country, the hospital would never agree to California like unqualified ratios? Your leaders have known that since April. That’s why the hospital negotiated this issue in good faith with union leadership resulting in the staffing standards contained in the MOA.

Did union leadership inform members that they rejected offers from the Federal Mediator to help explain the MOA to the membership?

Did union leadership inform members that the MOA terms built in significant strike avoidance concessions, and that the MOA could change if there was a strike?

Did union leadership inform members that it is *highly unusual* to combine contract approval and strike authorization in one vote, meaning that a vote to reject a contract is a vote to strike?

Did union leadership inform members that they never responded to the counteroffer the hospital submitted two days before the strike started?

Did union leadership inform members that the hospital pleaded with them to delay the strike so we could continue to negotiate?

Did union leadership inform members that in an effort to avert a strike the hospital offered to have a Board of Inquiry and/or have an independent arbitrator determine what the settlement would be, two very pro-labor moves hospitals rarely, if ever, agree to?

Union Leadership Statement #3: “We did not have definite information about the health benefits until we asked the Human Resource Department on 8/24 about the loss of benefits. At the time, we asked and it was confirmed.”

RWJUH Response: Union leadership knew all along what would happen with health benefits. It is a basic employment standard that people who are not working don’t get paid compensation or receive benefits. There is no excuse for this breakdown in member support and communication.

Union Leadership Statement #4: “As many remember in 2006, our medical benefits were maintained and not stopped. So this time we had to ask.”

RWJUH Response: Union leadership should not have orchestrated a strike based on information and assumptions from 17 years ago.

Union Leadership Statement #5: “COBRA, the USW plan, spousal/parent plans or an open market plan are all options.”

RWJUH Response: This basic information should have been clearly communicated by union leadership to members in July. Union leaders have a duty to fully educate members on the consequences of a strike.

The hospital remains on standby to assist any member with COBRA. If you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us at 877-837-5017.

Union Leadership Statement #6: “The union is ready and able to meet at any time the mediator calls us back-we want to return to our jobs- but at the present time we have no new date to negotiate.”

RWJUH Response: The union leadership team made the decision to strike. We did not. The hospital pleaded for more time to negotiate before the strike started. Union leaders refused. The hospital offered to avoid a strike by having a Board of Inquiry. Union leaders refused. The hospital offered to avoid a strike by going to arbitration. Union leaders refused. The hospital has never refused an opportunity to negotiate. We look forward to our next session on Thursday.

Union Leadership Statement #7: “We will continue to advertise and have the public know our side of the story. Continue to call the Governor and public officials.”

RWJUH Response: Many nurses are seeing through the union leadership team’s misinformation and so does the public.

Union Leadership Statement #8: “Patient safety is a must.”

RWJUH Response: The hospital’s quality and patient satisfaction scores have been rising steadily over the last 18 months. Our nurses have been an important part of that success and we thank them for their contribution. Union leaders make anecdotal allegations about safety. But the facts tell a different story. The hospital provided safe, patient centric care before the strike, and continues to do so during the strike.

Union Leadership Statement #9: “We need to Stand Strong-our nurses and patients deserve it.”

RWJUH Response: The public sees behavior on the picket line that is incompatible with any notion of concern for patients. The hospital supports free speech, but patient care should not be interrupted and interfered with by horns, drums, music and fireworks. Is union leadership’s goal to make patients complain, because many have, so that the hospital breaks? Is putting patients in the middle pro-patient?

Fortunately, this behavior appears to be exhibited by a small, isolated minority of nurses. We hope the public understands this as well.

Union Leadership Statement #10: “The hospital is trying to break us”

RWJUH Response: Who is trying to break who? How can that be said about a hospital that offered a very generous package, in terms of wage, benefit and staffing standards that would result in the hospital’s nurses being the highest paid nurses in the history of New Jersey? That was the hospital’s plan. Union leadership clearly had a plan to lead its members into a strike.