



Words from Our Chapter President

Brothers and sisters,

This last bargaining session has brought a lot of changes to our chapter. After hearing week after week that the county maintained its 0% offer, you literally took to the streets and rallied your coworkers and you made your presence known at the Board of Supervisors meetings. These actions served to get the county to finally place a modest offer on the table. When it came time to ratify the tentative agreement between us and the county, you came out in force, making this vote the largest in our six year history. We have come a long way, but there remains more to be done.

Halfway through this year, we added the craft/trades unit (Bargaining Unit 2) to our chapter, making us the largest county employee chapter effectively representing more than half the county workforce. The disparity in benefits between Unit 2 and the rest of our units is glaring and is something that we will all need to force the county to equalize. The week after the board ratified our contract, the bargaining team for Unit 2 has begun meeting with the county on a successor MOU for Unit 2 that will address the disparities in the short term. As a chapter, we are strategizing on the long term goal to uplift all of our units. I and our brothers and sisters in Unit 2 are counting on the rest of you to remain steadfast in applying pressure to management to move us forward at the table.

We have finally begun to realize our collective potential. Keep stoking those fires. We have won a battle, but the struggle for respect continues.

Remember, we are stronger together.

In Unity,
 Greg Gomez
 Chapter President

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Letter: Supervisors - 'Get It' or 'Get Out'

Posted on August 21, 2014 by Kermit Wullschleger



I was a member of the team that negotiated our recent contract along with other county employees and SEIU staff. We represented Units 1, 3, 6 and 7. This letter is a response to Board of Supervisors Chairman Phil Cox who made comments in the August 7 edition of *Valley Voice* regarding his assessment of the recently concluded negotiations between Tulare County HHSA and members of the negotiating team.

For months, we kept asking the Tulare HHSA what their counter-offer was. We had asked for 8.74% over a three-year period. They stated they had the ability to give us a raise but no willingness and they continued to offer 0%. For Chairman Cox to imply that they were always going to offer 3% brings up a lot of questions. If that were the case, they could have saved the taxpayers of this county a whole lot of money.

Chairman Cox stated in the August 7 edition of *Valley Voice*, "It was a well-orchestrated plot to discredit the supervisors and I'm not a conspiracy theorist." In response to his comment: I'm not a conspiracy theorist either;

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Get It or Get Out

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however we did not discredit the Board of Supervisors. They discredited themselves.

For Mr. Cox to imply that paying for uniforms for animal shelter workers, providing employees to pay for health care premium with a \$1000 deductible and sick leave buy back was the economic offer that was on the table is a ridiculous notion. We were clearly discussing an equity adjustment for about 3000 Tulare County Employees who had not seen a raise since 2008. As for Worthley and Vander Poel, we had made it clear to *Valley Voice* reporters that it was our understanding that they had said no to the first raise. According to Mr. Cox, that wasn't the case. Both Worthley and Vander Poel later took the raise they had initially refused.

Chairman Cox made statements about the negotiating team being ill-prepared and acting like children. What does Mr. Cox have to back up those statements? Our lead negotiator, Jo Ann Salazar, was always well prepared. We did what a negotiating team is supposed to do: work hard to get fair compensation for the thousands of citizens of Tulare County that have gone without a pay increase since 2008.

Chairman Cox stated there was dissent between union staff and union members. We had standing room only at our last general membership meeting to address progress we had finally made during negotiations. I do not recall one hard word that I or any other member of the negotiating team had with each other. If anything, there was a lot of mutual respect. As for SEIU staff, Jo Ann Salazar, Mark Araiza and Courtney Hawkins are some of the finest people one will ever meet. They have so much integrity. They are devoted to their families, friends and their community.

Mr. Cox and other Board members voted to give the County Administrative Officer, Jean Rousseau, a 10.6% raise in 2012. Since that time they too have received raises totaling almost 9%. How does the Board justify \$250,000 life insurance policies for themselves, which equals 25 times the amount given to a majority of the rank-and-file? It seems that Chairman Cox and the other Board members are used to the status quo. They go on about county business with little or no accountability.

Chairman Cox and other Board members need a reminder that they are public servants and are elected to serve the people of Tulare County. Chairman Cox and other board members should be apologizing and stating they will not take another raise until they offer the rank-and-file the same raise.

Fellow board member Pete Vander Poel stated when he was running for the board seat, "The responsibility of government is to serve the people. The individuals we elect to government offices to represent us should be in it to represent interests of their constituents and not their own." Did Board member Pete really mean this or was this just an empty campaign speech?

Chairman Cox, the other board members and CAO Jean Rousseau are willing to draw the line for a majority of county employees to such an extent that a majority of county employees have inferior health insurance, wages, etc. to adjacent County Kings County. On the other hand, Cox and the rest of the BOS and their anointed CAO in Tulare County are obsessed with making sure their own compensation package is far superior to the BOS in Kings County. Tulare County deserves better.

We the People deserve better from our Board of Supervisors and we will keep reminding them of what their roles and responsibilities are until they "get it" or they "get out." The ball is in your court, King Cox.

Kermit Wullschleger – husband, father of three, Tulare County Employee since 1989, and member of The Catholic Church of Visalia

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Letter: Supervisors Disingenuous

It's disingenuous for the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors to publicly state that they had always intended to increase their investment in the community.

We spent four months bargaining with them and they spent the first three months offering 0% — no one goes to buy a car from a dealer and starts negotiations with: "I'll take it for free." Sounds to me like a waste of the taxpayer's money, if indeed there was willingness to offer increases from the beginning.

The more important thing is that the Board finally did do the right thing for the people of Tulare County. It doesn't matter if they did it because they always meant to or if it was a result of the endless media coverage shaming them and calling out their hypocrisy.

We need investment in county services and in the people who provide them. We also need more interaction between Supervisors and the community. Kermit Wullschleger, one of our bargaining team members, tried to make this happen and didn't get very far. We still hope to convince them that they have always intended to do this too.

Our other hope is to change the conversation in Tulare County. Why are we spending time and energy to decide whether or not we should invest in our community? We should instead look at how we begin to build the county we want our children to inherit. SEIU has a Community First vision for Tulare County that eliminates waste and focuses our resources on those things that provide a return for our county.

Quality public services are one of the best ways to do that. It's going to take all of us to support this change, but I believe that we are ready.

Greg Gomez is the Vice-Mayor of Farmersville and the President of the Tulare County Fair Board.

Contract Negotiations Ongoing for Tulare County's Bargaining Unit 2

Posted on August 21, 2014

Not all Tulare County rank-and-file employees got a signed contract at the end of negotiations in July. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Bargaining Unit 2, comprised of more than 200 county maintenance, construction and custodial staff, is still working without a contract.

SEIU bargaining units 1, 3, 6 and 7 just finished five months of negotiations that concluded with a one-year contract at a 3% raise.

Employee negotiators Lena Case, Greg Gomez and Tina Thiltglen sat down with county representatives and their lawyer, Shelline Bennett, on August 18. Instead of asking for a raise, the employees asked for a onetime bonus of \$1,200. In a reoccurring theme, the county countered with a 0% raise and no bonus.

The county's reason? The drought.

Wells are going dry and farmers are fallowing fields but that is mostly going to affect Tulare County's budget next year. Last year, Tulare County was on a financial upswing as evidenced by the county's total gross agricultural production of \$7.8 billion, an increase of 26%, making us number one in the nation in agriculture. In fact, revenues were up in almost all financial departments. The employees are cognizant of the fact that the county feels uncertain about the economy's future and that the county doesn't want to sign long contracts with raises. That is one of the reasons why the union employee negotiators asked for a onetime bonus.



SEIU Union employee casting her vote on the employee contract negotiated in July.

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Negotiations

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Last year, the county offered Bargaining Unit 2 a 3% raise but refused to give a raise to any of the other rank-and-file employees. Why did the county not offer all employees the same thing?

“That’s a very good question.” said Joanne Salazar, an SEIU organizer. Bargaining Unit 2 was not represented by a union last year, just like management, who also received a raise. In May of this year, Bargaining Unit 2 joined SEIU Local 521 and is now represented with all the other bargaining units.

In next year’s negotiations, for matters of efficiency, SEIU wants all units combined when negotiating for a new contract. Even though it will save the taxpayer money, the county has expressed an interest in keeping them at separate negotiating tables.

During the recession and its aftermath, the board of supervisors successfully pulled Tulare County through a very difficult economic time. When many counties were operating in the red, the board of supervisors kept this county in the black.

But when the board of supervisors gave raises to management, and themselves, the county employees felt like the BOS pulled Tulare County through the recession on the backs of the rank-and-file workers.




Meet Our New Internal Worksite Organizer Jo Ann Juarez-Salazar

Jo Ann is a local Central Valley lady. She grew up in the Central Valley, left to get an education, and returned to the valley in hopes of making a difference. She is wife to John who is a wonderful baker; a mother to great teens; a step mom and grandma in a beautiful family circle.

Jo Ann has worked with unions for approximately 12 years. As a member leader she served as a job steward and bargaining team member with California Schools. She then worked as staff with SEIU Local 1000 and CSU Employees Union. Prior to working with labor, Jo Ann taught communication courses at the community college for 13 years.

Her personal mission involves awakening hope, challenging misperceptions, and helping shape a new public narrative for unions in the Central Valley.



Working People Standing Together

By Mark Araza, Internal Worksite Organizer

The SEIU stewards have been very active in reclaiming their workplace! Department Stewards Sabina Ramos, Rosemary Ruiz, Ryan Wilson, Rita Ramirez, and Michelle Jones have been hard at work petitioning the County of Tulare for change and all their hard work has paid off. They were able to organize current and past employees of the

department to demand better working conditions. “Changes were implemented which include allowing employees to use utensils at their desk, allowing dress shirt/top to be worn with jeans on Mondays and Fridays, tattoos no longer have to be covered as long as they are not offensive and staff my now wear capri pants,” says Ryan Wilson, Chapter

1st Vice President and CSO III. Small changes like these go a very long way in improving morale in the department. Jean Rousseau met with the stewards and he assured them that this is just the beginning of making the Department of Child Support Services a better place to work! We are very grateful for his response and dedication to

listening to department employees and making long overdue changes quickly. We look forward to more change, continuing the cooperative effort and investing in COMMUNITY FIRST.



SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION, CTW-CLC

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AND VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE

Wednesday
September 24th
5:30 pm - 7:30 pm

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Bring Your Kids!

Blain Park
3101 S. Court Street - Visalia
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FREE Hamburgers, Hotdogs,
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Working People Standing Together!



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