

CWA STATE BARGAINING UPDATE

Notice to CWA Members from the CWA Bargaining Team

Negotiations Update - March 11, 2011

CWA met with the Christie Administration for the first day of bargaining our new contract. We met all day and covered several areas. We exchanged some of our proposals and we received a large package of mostly non-economic proposals from the State.

For the most part, the State wants to eliminate previously-bargained language, side letters of agreement, and other hard-won provisions from previous contracts. We have a lot of work to do.

CWA took the lead in tackling health benefits, which will be one of the most important areas covered in the new contract. We discussed priorities and principles for containing and sharing premium costs. We also want to tackle the rising cost of prescription drugs and lowering costs through encouraging generics and mail-order. In short, the Union recognizes the importance of this issue and we wanted to make it a priority in bargaining. CWA's health benefits proposal would save the State 20%-22% of the premium, which is a significant move.

Unfortunately, the Governor made it clear that he intends to strip health care out of the bargaining process – a direct assault on the same collective bargaining that the Governor has claimed to “love.” The State made no proposal on health care today and instead admitted that the Governor intends to “legislate” healthcare, in contradiction to the law and years of precedent in which changes to public worker health care are only enacted by Trenton after they are agreed upon at the bargaining table. We were told that the State will not even respond to a health care proposal from CWA unless it “needs” to because the Legislature doesn’t enact his healthcare plan.

We were repeatedly told that the Governor intends to legislate all health benefits issues and will refuse to put a proposal on the table. If legislation doesn't happen, only then would the State actually negotiate over healthcare at the table with the Union.

When asked if the State understood that healthcare is negotiable, we were told health benefits are negotiable “at the present time” but the State still refused to commit to put a proposal on the table.

CWA also proposed a state-wide table comprised of public sector unions to bargain health benefits together and reach an overall agreement with the State. Bargaining together would save time and enable all parties to reach a global agreement on behalf of all employees.

The Christie Administration is trying to remove healthcare from negotiations and make it a non-negotiable item. They will not take healthcare negotiations seriously as long as the Legislature is seriously considering legislating health benefits. Therefore we have to stop legislation to ensure health benefits are bargained, as they always have been.

There are two Lobby Days scheduled – March 14 and March 21 – to try to stop harmful legislation that would give the Governor exactly what he wants and take negotiations of health benefits off the table. Contact your Local to sign up for Lobby Day and to stay informed about negotiations.

CWA State Bargaining Committee

Check your Local's website and cwanj.org for future bargaining updates