

Hello everyone, thank you again for coming. We find ourselves in a very difficult position this year with respect to negotiations with the County. All of the Associations are finding themselves in very similar positions, which is why we all decided that we need to work together and ask all members to help. We realize how frustrating everyone must feel that no contract has been settled, but hopefully this update will help you understand the problems that your Associations are facing and motivate you all to take a stand with us.

The first aspect of the negotiations that I want to address is the delay. Already half way through November, and it seems as if no end is in sight. We want to assure you that the delays are not coming from the Associations. The County has engaged and continues to engage in numerous delaying tactics. First and foremost, no negotiation meetings were scheduled until late in the year, even though the County was aware of its budgetary issues very early on. For the WCEA, our first meeting was held on July 19 – already past the contract date. Other Associations have dealt with several cancellations from the County. In addition, the County has delayed the release of pertinent information that Associations have requested. A good example of this was the 10% reduction plans that the County requested from all Departments. The County postponed the release of those until late in September. Many Associations felt that it was difficult to truly negotiate without knowing the details of those plans, and any recommendations that Management would be making. It is unclear why the County continues to delay negotiations, but again, the delays are not on the part of the Associations, even though the County continues to imply this.

During negotiations, the County has taken an extremely aggressive stance with all Associations. Many would argue that they are not really negotiating at all. The most extreme tactic that has been used is what is being referred to as “regressive” bargaining. During the budgeting process, the County revised its target concession levels after the Incline Village judgment. Deciding that it would use some funds that were targeted towards funding the retirement health account, the County reduced the amount of monies that they were seeking from Associations. However, the offer was made with the conditional statement, that if their terms were not accepted in full, then they would revert to the original targets set by the County. The threat also includes retroactivity for those targets, meaning that employees would have to not only take a staggering pay cut, but that the cut would be increased for any months that the demand was not met.

Their “recommended” package includes numerous benefit reductions, for both current and future employees. Items that have come under attack include longevity bonuses, merit increases, and health benefits. The County has also suggested setting up different benefit packages for new employees, dividing the membership and potentially reducing the quality of future hires. One of the realities of these items is that they really have little or no impact on the actual budget deficit picture. These benefit reductions being sought are in actuality such a small piece of the budget picture that it makes one wonder what the purpose of attacking them is.

It seems that the County is following the pattern being set in many other states, and using the economic downturn to change the nature of collective bargaining and benefit packages. Most of you are aware of the major changes that were sought in both Wisconsin and Ohio. In both cases, there has been a shift away from these types of restrictive approaches – in Wisconsin the Supreme Court ruled against the changes to collective bargaining restrictions, and in Ohio, the voters overturned the new law. It is important that we make a stand on these issues here as well.

Let me be clear about one thing – the approach of the County, led by the Board of County Commissioners has made one thing very obvious – this is not about asking employees to help with filling the projected budget deficit. Your Associations have reached out to the County to help them reach their targeted numbers – *as we have done every year there has been a budget deficit*. However, the County has repeatedly turned down these offers, refused to give anything for their take, and continued to insist on changes above and beyond meeting the numbers.

All of this raises question of what the real intent of the County is. County negotiators continue to imply that negotiations are at an impasse, even though the Associations continue to produce new proposals to try and break through to a deal. The threat of the County is that they will simply implement their desires without negotiation or any input from the members of the respective Associations. Perhaps that is their goal. Perhaps they desire a political “victory” where they can show how tough they were against the unfair Associations. Or perhaps, they desire to make such draconian reductions that they are able to break the Associations completely by making the membership lose faith in their representation. While it is unclear exactly what the real intent is, it is clear that we are all under attack together and must stand together.

The Associations of Washoe County have always stood up to help the County when they have asked, usually in return for reasonable requests such as furloughs – as most other agencies have offered in return for concessions. I hope that this presentation has helped you all understand the way the County has been engaging the Associations this year in return for the Associations help during other tough years. It is more important than ever that each of you as members step up to help your Associations fight against these types of unfair bargaining tactics, and stand for what is fair. Carla will be talking to you about some steps that you can individually take at the end the presentations, and we all thank you for your support.

Thank you.