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THE VOICE OF UNIONS AT KAISER PERMANENTE

COALITION OF  
KAISER PERMANENTE  
UNIONS

APRIL 27, 2012

Update from  
National Bargaining



## THE MOST RECENT SESSION of national bargaining

was held from April 24 – 26 in Pasadena. As the sessions began, leaders of the five subgroups reported to the 140-member Common Issues Committee (CIC) and several hundred observers on their activities at previous negotiating sessions. They educated participants about each issue, and explained mutual interests and options the subgroup developed to address those interests. Four of the five subgroups presented joint recommendations. The fifth subgroup, which focused on the growth of KP and the unions, did not agree on joint recommendations, but reported to the CIC on the substantial progress made in its negotiations. The options explored by the subgroup will likely be discussed by the full CIC.

The recommendations to the CIC covered only the highest-priority, agreed-upon interests and were the result of dozens of hours of meetings, brainstorming, caucusing, and discussion. The five subgroups are benefits, growth of KP and the unions, improving and enhancing the Partnership, total health, and workforce of the future. To date, none of the recommendations have been accepted or rejected by the CIC. In accordance the steps of interest-based bargaining, recommendations to the CIC will not be disclosed at this point in the process.

“We can’t share all the details because it could turn on a dime,” said Joan Mah, a member of IFPTE Local 20 and first-time observer of bargaining. “It is all hearsay until the final words are in the final contract.”

“Sitting here and listening to these reports, I just want us to take stock of what’s been accomplished,” said John August, executive director of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions. “To see the commitment and the reflection and the development of every single one of the subgroup participants, it’s just astounding.”

“Every time I come to a bargaining session, I’m impressed with how labor and management come together and express themselves and

## OUR UNION STRATEGY: TIME TO WALK THE TALK!

A message from John August

Our unions have a lot to be proud of—and a lot more we can do, together. Our organization is providing better quality and service than ever, and our financial position is strong. We’ve achieved market leadership in service, quality, affordability and best place to work. Now is the time to invest in KP’s future, and in the proven strategies that have gotten us here.

One fact is clear. The cost of health care is too high. We have a responsibility to do something about that, and we have a powerful strategy to do that, without cutting quality or service for KP members, or benefits for KP workers. The best scholars and practitioners of health care improvement—like Don Berwick, the outgoing head of Medicare—say that the

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*Bargaining Update continued*

seek solutions in a collaborative fashion,” said Greg Adams, Kaiser Permanente Northern California region president. “It’s one of the most powerful things we do. It’s truly an amazing experience.”

Parties spent the remainder of their time in management and labor caucuses, evaluating each recommendation in anticipation of further discussion with the full CIC at the next bargaining session.

“Our group worked very hard,” said Jean Melnikoff, senior director of human resources for Southern California and a member of the workforce of the future subgroup. “At times it was frustrating, but it was also really interesting to see how the interest-based process really led us to options we could work with.”

“Things went well in our group and management understood our interests very clearly,” said Tamara Rubyn of OPEIU Local 29 and a member of the benefits



subgroup. “Kaiser brought high level decision makers to the table, and that helped get things done.”

In order to make the national bargaining process transparent, hundreds of observers attend each bargaining session. They are then able to go back to their co-workers and explain how interest-based bargaining works and how the negotiations are progressing.

“It’s a good experience,” said Julio Rivera, a member of SEIU-UHW and growth subgroup observer. “We’re reaching out to management to help them understand where we’re coming from. That

makes a great communication and helps enhance the growth of Kaiser and the unions. We can express what is on our minds and in our hearts for our members and for Kaiser.”

“It’s extremely informative and truly collaborative,” said Deirdre Kirkwood, a UNAC/UHCP member and bargaining observer. “I am so glad we get to do it. It’s the way it should be for everyone who works for a living.”

The next bargaining session takes place on May 8 – 10 in Los Angeles. For more information, see [www.bargaining2012.org](http://www.bargaining2012.org).

*Our Union Strategy continued*

only way to really reduce cost is to make health care safer and more efficient. That’s what our UBTs are about, and our UBTs have already saved millions of dollars while making care better.

Another powerful strategy is our health campaign. Getting ourselves and our communities healthy will not only save lives and eliminate unnecessary preventable suffering. It can also save hundreds of millions of dollars in worker health care costs!

Total Health is a critical part of KP’s brand, of our future, and of

the future of the communities we serve—and it can’t be just talk. Union members are ready to act. It’s time to walk the talk!

We’ve made it very clear to our management colleagues: the way to reduce cost is not on the backs of workers. We are calling on management to support the efforts of partnership, growth, quality, safety and health. This is a strong message we believe in wholeheartedly—all of us.

“We are going to stay on the high road,” Ken Dietz, president of UNAC, told the union caucus just before we left Pasadena on Thursday. “We will stick to our

message and our agenda with our members and the community, we will get a successful agreement, and we will continue to do the best work we can for KP and the members that we serve.”

Dave Regan of SEIU-UHW sounded a similar note. “We are calling the organization to stay on a high-road strategy. We will stay on the high road with partnership and total health, and we’re not giving into low road strategies to cut our benefits.”

In a word: We’re going to **Walk the Talk!**

*John August is the Executive Director of the Union Coalition.*

## THERE'S NO SIDELINING THESE OBSERVERS



**National Bargaining** is a huge, coordinated effort that involves hundreds of staff, facilitators, and CIC members. It also involves another few hundred union observers—and they do so much more than sit on the sidelines.

Several hundred Kaiser Permanente workers representing Coalition unions throughout the organization gather at bargaining sessions to receive training in interest-based negotiating—the negotiation method used throughout National Bargaining—and to bear witness to the decision-making of the Common Issues Committee (CIC).

What is helpful for observers, said Joan Mah, member of IFPTE Local 20 and a first-time observer, is the opportunity to learn.

“We have been privy to a great deal of education and training on the issues,” said Mah, an optometrist at San Rafael Medical Center in the Northern California region. “You go in well-informed.”

Georgette Bradford, an SEIU-UHW member and ultrasound technician at Point West Medical Center in Sacramento, has been

an observer in the subgroup working on issues affecting unit-based teams.

“It is interesting to see the inner workings of the LMP,” Bradford said. “It gives us confidence that it can work.”

“It’s going to be a transformational contract,” Bradford said. “Not just for us, but for all unions in the United States because we are a model.”

Deirdre Kirkwood joined nearly 200 UNAC/UHCP members who attended en masse the Pasadena session, close to the Southern California medical centers where many of them work.

“I am so glad we get to do it,” said Kirkwood, a registered nurse in the NICU at Riverside Medical Center. “It’s the way it should be for everyone who works for a living.”

Mah said she was impressed by all the UNAC/UHCP members who took time to come support the bargaining session in Pasadena.

“They deserve a big shout-out,” Mah said. “It was a massive showing of solidarity.”

Even though observers do not have a formal thumbs-up on agreements, they still bring great questions, ideas and comments to the caucuses—and the union caucus listens closely to their input.

Nancy Anderson, an SEIU-UHW observer, said she found bargaining enlightening.

“I felt really good when management joined us and to see their willingness to partner,” said Anderson, an LVN at the Morris Avenue Medical Center in Sacramento.

“That’s not who I was expecting to walk into our room. I was expecting an adversarial stance.”



### Union Strategies for 2012 and Beyond

1. **CONTINUE** to improve quality, service, affordability through our UBTs
2. **GROW** KP and our Unions
3. **IMPROVE** the health of our workforce
4. **IMPROVE** the health of our communities