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# MAINLINE

**The Official Publication of AFSCME Local 444**

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## What's the Union done for me lately!?!

Are you still unclear what the Union does for you and your family? At the last negotiations and I'm sure at the next negotiations; the Union will be fighting for your Health Care Rights. The District wanted, (and still does), to offer high Deductible plans paid for by the workers, in a special HS account. So, workers get to pay for the medical plan, somewhere around \$3500.00 to \$8700.00 per year, plus the high deductible. The High Deductible plan would not only be paid for by the employee, the deductible, usually \$10,000, would have to be paid before the District's medical plan kicked in.

Let me explain, I was diagnosed with cancer on Dec 17, 2013; between the 17<sup>th</sup> and Dec. 31, 2013 my medical expenses were more than \$40,000.00. From Jan. 1, 2014 through Dec 31, 2014 my medical expenses were more than \$300,000.00. That would have meant that I owed \$10,000.00 for both 2013 and 2014. I don't know about you but I don't have \$20,000.00 available if a dreaded medical emergency pops up. Believe me it did.

It wouldn't have ended there; I would have still been responsible for all the copays for visits, medicines, and rehab.

I came to work at EBMUD partly because of the benefits.

Pay attention! The District has been strategically putting in place the steps necessary to promote high Deductible Health care plans. Haven't you ever wondered why the District

is choosing different vendors for our present Health Care cards? The \$905.00 they presently offer could just be shifted easily now to HAS's. That will allow workers to save their own money to pay for their own health care. What a deal!

Do you have a spouse's whose ill? Do you have children? Can you really afford to pay for your own medical insurance?

**That is one of things the Union tries to protect –earned benefits. That's what the Union does!**

Cheryl Franklin; Chief Steward

## **Contracting In**

By Eric Larsen

### **Pipeline Construction Work:**

Over a year ago we first started hearing of the "10 to 40 Plan". When management told us "our infrastructure is failing and we have to fix it but we don't know how, this is all new and we don't have enough forces, so we're going to have to do some pilot projects and contract this work out." They promised to keep our pipeline crews fully staffed, but they told us we don't have the capacity to do the ramp-up, there's no way to train that many plumbers, we have too many retirements to keep pace with hiring, there's just too much for us...and we said "HELL NO!!"

We passed a resolution condemning contracting-out the 10-40 work. We brought it to the Board, and we have fought management at every turn as they continued to try to contract-out pipeline renewal projects. We worked with our attorney on language and

strategy, and we elected a new Board member. Gradually the process and the language changed.

As of the last budget cycle the Board approved additional positions to hire two new pipeline crews and an additional paving crew, as well as staffing up additional support staff. And the notifications from management of the intent to contract-out pipeline work have become rare. Still, when they do come up, we pull them, demand to bargain and have continued to preserve the work in-house!

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### **Foodwaste:**

Management at SD-1 have long had a vision of bringing large-scale foodwaste feed-stock to the digesters for additional bio-gas production. They, with the blessing of the Board have entered the political arena in the City of Oakland trash-hauling and garbage politics. They have negotiated to be a sub-contractor to Waste Management (WM) for disposal of 100 Tons per day of source separated foodwaste, even though the pilot scale food-waste facility at SD-1 has been of limited success and wrought with mechanical and operational problems.

Nonetheless, the train is coming and the Board wants it, even though it may be a train wreck. In come Harvest Power. "In order to limit the liability," according to management, "we will contract the foodwaste pre-processing (and post-processing) to Harvest Power so they will take the technology risk." The truth is, management doesn't know how to do it, and the post-processing (said as an after-thought) included dewatering and gas-handling – THAT IS OUR WORK!

If we're going to do this and it's our work, *IT IS OUR WORK!* We were ready to concede the trash separation – the preprocessing of the food and trash that would come to SD-1. We don't have the classification and we don't know how to do that, but running centrifuges, belt thickeners and belt presses, polymer systems and cake pumps, gas compressors and clean-up skids, that is our work, we do it every day and we weren't about to let it go. We told management and the board at every turn, but management's tune was not changing, save it to say "we *hear* you." So we went back to our attorney and wrote a demand to bargain letter, we met with the Directors and explained the

project as we see it and our concerns. We worked tirelessly after-hours and on our days off.

Then came the Board meeting at which management needed the Board to give the green light to the project, sign contracts with WM and authorize an MOU with Harvest Power. One after another, each of the Board members told management: we want this project; we think this is a good project, BUT you MUST have 444 on-board. If this is a meet-and-confer issue, *you must* meet-and-confer with them. If it is their work, it's their work. President Mellon even reiterated that they have been unanimously directed to do so!

Management came to us the following week and told us they needed an 18 month start-up period in which Harvest Power will put the system on-line, then we will be trained and at 24 months we will operate and maintain all of the post-processing equipment.

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This is a big success and a small measure of **what your union is doing for you: protecting your jobs, your paycheck, your benefits and your working conditions.**

Late note: at the last Retirement Board meeting the discussion of the retirees Health Insurance Benefit (HIB) - \$550/mo. which has not increased since 2004, was front and center. The discussion turned to negotiations and the suggestion that, you guessed it, a Health Savings Account (HAS) would be a good opportunity to increase the HIB!!!

More to come on this next time,

From YOUR AFSCME 444 officers.