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MAINLINE

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Pres. Briceno, 2nd V.P. Tyrell Jackson, Plumber III Dwight George, and Sec. Eric Larsen gave comments to the Board of Directors over concern about on-going and apparent increase in Contracting-out, especially in pipeline construction. Briceno reminded the Board of the Civil Service rules and Government Code that require the District to hire staff “sufficient for the regular operations and maintenance” of our system; Tyrell gave them specific instances of concern, noting the proposed contracting of relocation work for AC Transit stations on International Blvd that have been known for two years; Dwight explained the reality that the work is the same whether you call it “infrastructure renewal” or

“relocation”, and Eric reminded the Board that low-bid contracts often result in cut-corners that require District forces to return to fix problems down the road.

The Board responded by acknowledging that contracting-out is a concern, and instructed staff to agendize the issue for discussion at a future Board meeting including an analysis of how often we have had to come in behind contractors to fix their mistakes – Some of this will be hard to demonstrate, but it gives us solid ground to push back against the contracting out of our work.

On the same day, during the Planning Committee meeting Laura Johnson presented an informational report of efforts to ‘streamline’ fleet by

collaborating with an East of the Hills agency (either Walnut Creek or Central San.) to 'share' facilities, i.e. help pay for the construction of a new garage and have some right to use it, or *maybe* even contract with the agency for services! To my surprise, Director Coleman asked if any of the labor unions had been consulted about this. (Of course, we have not.)

Management is also holding budget workshops with the Board to explain our finances. While on the one hand, we are continuing some financing through debt, Finance Director Eric Sandler (I think) is doing a good job of 'de-risking' that debt by getting away from variable rate bonds and all of the derivative products associated with them, and shifting that debt to fixed rate bonds that we all can understand. They are also doing much more funding with cash rather than issuing more debt.

That said, the FY15 budget does not request any increase in staffing. This is the time we need to push them. We need to start hiring up now to fill vacancies from the hiring freeze and to staff up for on-going infrastructure

renewal and reinvesting in our company. This is what the 10 to 40 plan is about and if we start it by letting them do their 'pilot' ramp-up with contractors we will not be able to stop them.

We have to say No! to contracting out our work. We have to tell the Board they need to start by reinvesting in our internal infrastructure (new equipment and workers) before they can have infrastructure renewal.

10 to 40 Plan:

Many of you are aware that the District owns and operates a water distribution system with aging and deteriorating infrastructure. Management seems to be becoming *just* aware of this. By way of some background, for those of you who don't know, Pipeline plumber crews in the Pipeline Construction & Equipment Division (PCE) lay new pipe and do pipeline replacement (infrastructure renewal). The Distribution Maintenance and Construction Division (DMC) primarily do leak repairs and new

construction as well as some relocations.

Currently the units replace about 10 miles/yr. But, as our system ages – much of it beginning to reach its life expectancy of 100 years, the rate of repair and replacement naturally increases; yet our numbers stay the same and even decreased during the hiring freeze. Suddenly, Management has realized that we have to ramp up our rate of replacement from 10 mi/yr to 40 mi/yr to keep pace the aging infrastructure before it fails.

With this realization, Management approached all the unions to begin a ‘discussion’ about how to carry out the 10 to 40 Plan before they began presenting their plan to the Board. They are doing this very carefully under a guise of collaboration in order to present to the Board a plan to contract-out our work without objection.

Their report is very smartly laid out and coded. It begins with a discussion of the problem: near-term ‘peak needs’, high priority Asbestos Concrete pipe that is likely to

catastrophically fail and a back-log of Cast Iron pipe, and the long-term need for replacement of aging infrastructure.

The near-term (5yr) increases the work-load by 40% (10 to 14 mi/yr) and the long-term goal (20yr) is an increase by 400% (10 to 40 mi/yr). Management proposes to do this with a “blended-approach” of using both contractors and District forces – this is where the double speak starts to come in to play.

They lay out the need to higher an additional 7 pipeline crews necessary to get the work done, then go on to say that is impossible to do anything more than hire just enough to keep up with retirements, and present a budget with no funding for new positions!

As it turns out, the ‘blended approach’ means keeping the pipeline crews at the same number, maybe add one TC crew and do the rest of *our* ‘near-term’ work by contractors during a ‘pilot study’. Then, after the 5 year pilot study, determine if they need to increase staffing – but it takes 5 years to train a plumber (their words)! So, if

they go down this path, it will be more than 10 years before enough plumbers can be trained to actually increase the number of crews replacing our pipe. All the while, contractors will be doing our work, and once that train leaves the station it will be very hard to slow down.

Oh, but they'll need to hire a few more engineers to manage the contractors and check the drawings. They also want to allow the engineers and inspectors to get D1 licenses to put the contractors' pipes into service (certification currently only held by experienced plumbers).

At the May 27 Board Finance Committee workshop, Sec. Larsen told the Board of the need to increase staffing on the pipeline crews, and pointed out the contradiction of the budget and the Plan. Director Mellon seemed to acknowledge this when he told Management that a lack of short-term productivity may be "the price we have to pay" for the hiring freeze, and instructed them to get the Plumbers Academy back on line. But when Director Linney asked Management when we will start to

talk about the costs, GM Coate responded that we need to start the study so they can have an "informed" FY-16 budget.

A Resolution protesting contracting-out for the 10 to 40 Plan was passed at the May 29 Membership Meeting. The Resolution is posted on our website (www.AFSCME444.com) under the NEWS tab.

Plumbers – you can support the fight to keep our work in house by coming to the next Board meeting (June 10, 1PM) where the Resolution will be presented to the Board of Directors.

Please note that you will need to do this on your own time – vacation or otherwise.

E-mail afscme444@gmail.com for a copy of the Draft 10 to 40 Plan.

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Finally, AFSCME 444 and all of the Crew at Wastewater mourn the loss of Brother Thieme who passed away this month. A friend, a mentor, a fearless fighter and fisherman; Brother George Thieme will be missed by all who knew him.