

Stewards Learn Power of Unity at Region 4 Conference



Stewards from UFCW Locals 75, 227, 951 and 1059 attend a workshop at Region 4's Unity Conference where members discussed the similar issues they face working for the same employer.

Close to 400 UFCW stewards who work at the Meijer grocery chain came together for the Region 4 Unity Conference to discuss a coordinated approach in working for their same employer. UFCW members from Locals 75, 227, 951 and 1059 attended the one-day meeting in Bowling Green, Ohio, on May 12.

“It was gratifying to see such a big turnout of stewards and find out they are fighting the same fight I am, no matter the distance. We really felt the strength in numbers as workers of the same employer,” said Dixon Kelley, a Local 951 steward and four-year Meijer Frozen Food Clerk. “Our leadership in the region has really been dedicated to working together. When this happens at all levels, our union feels much more cohesive and everything fits together.”

Stewards attended workshops that dealt with a collaborative approach to issues they all face as Meijer grocery employees. For example, stewards met to discuss “cashier productivity,” Meijer’s standard of

Memorial Day is observed Monday, May 25. The next edition of *OnPoint* will be in your inbox on Wednesday, May 27.

measuring how many items front-end clerks must scan per minute—something that has become a major grievance issue for many stewards. Another workshop allowed stewards to talk about discipline procedures and strategize for contract enforcement company-wide.

The Unity Conference was the first multi-local, single-employer steward seminar for the region, and UFCW Local 951 President Marv Russow said he was pleased it gave Meijer stewards the opportunity to see the bigger picture of how they are all in this together.

“The conference allowed stewards from different stores and different locals to talk about the common issues we have with Meijers so that we can come up with common solutions. Working for the same employer, we face familiar challenges that we have been addressing individually,” Russow said. “But we can do a much more effective job meeting our challenges with a unified approach.”

Kip Michela, a 24-year journeyman meat cutter at Meijer and Local 951 steward, said the conference was valuable for UFCW members to see how coordinating with each other is more useful than going it alone. He added, “The conference also gave us a much better outlook of what’s happening in our industry, all across the nation. That helps us prepare for our future and the next generation.”

Region 4 is planning more unity conferences to work with stewards from other common employers. **OP**

U.S. Lags in Paid Sick Leave for Working Families

The world outbreak of the H1N1 flu prompted President Obama to urge people suffering from flu symptoms to stay home, but a new report shows how that may not be possible for millions of American workers. The Center for Economic Policy Research report reveals that the U.S. is the only one of 22 rich countries that does not

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guarantee sick workers some form of paid sick leave. U.S. labor law does not require short-term paid sick days or long-term paid sick leave, and relying solely on voluntary employer policies has left tens of millions of U.S. working families without paid sick days or leave. As a result, millions go to work sick, lowering productivity and exposing co-workers to their illnesses.

The report coincides with legislation that is being reintroduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) that would guarantee U.S. workers up to seven paid sick days a year. **OP**

Unions and Community Protest Unfair Firing of Two Food City Workers in Tucson, Arizona



Lucia Paz speaks to the camera at a rally protesting the unfair firing of her and another Food City worker.

More than 75 union and community supporters turned out to protest the firing of two Food City workers in Tucson, Ariz. The UFCW organized a rally on behalf of the grocery workers, who had worked for the Bashas'-owned grocery chain for a combined 35 years before being terminated for their union support.

Both workers had been speaking out for the rights of workers on the job, but Lucia Paz was fired soon after

speaking out publicly to the local ABC News affiliate at a May 1 rally for immigrant and workers' rights. Food City told her she was fired for breaking store policy, but she says she has never been told what that exactly meant.

"They don't want to lose the power of running their store and doing whatever they want," said Paz. **OP**

Health Care Reform Must Include a Public Plan

Health insurance companies and other big businesses are working to eliminate the measure for a public health insurance option from health care reform. Here's why:

⇒ **A Public Health Insurance Option Will Lower Health Care Costs.** A national public health insurance plan will have enough bargaining power to ensure providers are giving quality, affordable care.

⇒ **A Public Health Insurance Option Will Promote Competition.** The lack of competition has let the private insurance industry set its own prices. A public option, coupled with a more structured and robust private insurance market, will break the stranglehold a handful of companies have in each insurance market.

⇒ **A Public Health Insurance Option Will Provide a Guaranteed Back Up.** While private insurance companies can close, merge, leave your community, or lose your employer's contract, the public insurance option will be there.

⇒ **A Public Health Insurance Option Will Care for You When You Are Sick.** Private for-profit health plans have a legal obligation to put their shareholders' financial interests ahead of their members' health care needs. To them, paying for your health care is a loss of profits, and they try to keep their medical expenditures as low as possible. A public plan doesn't have that profit incentive.

For complete information on the public health insurance option, go to

<http://www.ourfuture.org/healthcare/public-health-insurance>. **OP**