

**TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION  
MONTHLY MEETING – February 19, 2003 (12 noon – 1 p.m.)  
Meeting Summary**

*Board Members Present:* Ken Madden, President  
Patty Overby, Secretary

**Discussion and Vote by Wastewater Employees on the County's Proposed Medical Benefits Package as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding**

Ken explained the process of how TEA got the County's proposal. The County submitted what it termed was their last, best and final contract offer to the Wastewater Negotiating Team. This offer included the County's medical plan. Jim Cline, TEA's legal counsel, has noted otherwise. The County said it was not worth anything else to sweeten the deal to get Wastewater employees to accept the medical plan.

TEA objected to imposing the medical plan on wastewater employees – employees had already gone through an open enrollment process and signed up for a plan. TEA filed for mediation from PERS to participate in continued negotiations. PERS assigned a mediator and on January 9 the County agreed to mediation, but sent another letter that it was imposing the medical benefits on wastewater employees. Information was sent to employees informing them the County was imposing the health plan and members must re-pick. An open enrollment was held on-line this month. Cline had advised employees to sign up for a plan in this open enrollment process. In the meantime, TEA was considering various options: file a ULP, a suit with King County Superior Court and take a more active role in raising politicians awareness of the situation.

The Negotiating Team wanted to find some middle ground between TEA and The County. The Team met several times to consider proposals and counter proposals. Some members of the team planned to attend the Council's Labor Committee meeting to present the issues involved with the County's imposing health benefits on Wastewater employees. Ken noted that they instead had a discussion with Councilmember Constantine, Chair of the Committee, in addition to speaking with Executive Sim's staff labor person. As a result of these discussions, the County came up with an offer of additional vacation days. The Negotiating Team proposed 10 days; the County countered with 4; Ken told the County that the minimum he would take to the membership was 5 (based on prior discussions with the negotiating team).

The current proposal gives eligible employees 5 days of vacation leave to be used by the end of this calendar year for accepting the medical benefit

packet. The County wanted a decision last week but the Negotiating Team wanted the membership to vote on this at today's meeting – so TEA was able to get a week's extension on the County's proposal.

Speakers addressing the issue pointed out the following:

- Employees are voting for a number of things other than medical benefit proposal. We are beginning to fragment the contract – voting for this proposal sets a precedence – what's to say the County won't keep coming back to employees offering additional days for other things. See this as piece-mealing, which is illegal. Encourage a vote against.
- Is 5 days vacation leave the most important thing in the contract, or is it Class Comp? Think about this when you vote.
- What is going on with Transit and their medical benefits package? (Ken noted that Dave Crippen is sick today. The County has delivered what they are terming a "what if" proposal that the Transit Negotiating Team is reviewing. There is an article in this proposal which would put transit employees under the same medical benefit package proposed for wastewater employees.)
- Have the other unions accepted the plan? (Ken said the plan was imposed on non-represented employees. The JLMIC, composed of representatives from some of the County unions, negotiated and agreed to the new County medical benefit package. TEA is not part of the JLMIC and it is doubtful that TEA will be allowed a seat.
- The County says that having wastewater employees take the County's medical benefit plan saves them money, is this really true? (Roger Browne said the Negotiating Team was told it cost \$50,000 to switch over the plan unless there are penalty for buyouts. He said there is a rumor that the other unions are upset and have threatened a lawsuit against the County if TEA is allowed to continue with the old plan.)
- What happens if the vote is no? (Ken said TEA would consult with Jim Cline and take actions outlined before: file a lawsuit in King County Superior Court, file a ULP with PERS, and turn up the heat politically. Jim has suggested keeping track of deductible costs paid by members thus far because TEA would present this to the Superior Court as damages incurred.)
- Vote no – County is trying to divide and conquer.
- Is there a recommendation from the Negotiating Team? (The team is split and wanted to come to the membership to get a final vote. The team does not know the impact this will have on the two remaining big issues: class comp and hours of work. Ken said he thought this was a doorway to

better negotiations. The starting point for negotiations was very poor in terms of relating with the County. See this as an opportunity for both to give and take.

- Have there been any discussions with TEA's legal counsel? (Ken said he had spoken with Jim Cline just prior to today's meeting about the pros and cons of accepting the County's proposal. Jim said he thought TEA does give up some leverage, but gains something of tangible value. Jim thought it unlikely TEA would get something of tangible value for medical benefits if it turned down the proposal today. Ken said he asked Jim the changes of TEA's prevailing in Superior Court. Jim's response was 50%-70%. With regard to filing a ULP with PERC – Jim said this venue has been fairly ineffective.)
- Will mediation continue? (Ken said yes)
- Think employees should vote for the proposal. By the time something is filed and decided by Superior Court or a ULP is filed, it will probably be long after the settlement of a contract.
- How much did other unions get by accepting the medical benefit package?
- Is the 5 days vacation leave for all wastewater employees? (Ken said no – just full-time employees).

The meeting was adjourned at 1 p.m. Ballots were turned into the secretary who counted them with David Kingsbury, Victoria Beach and John Phillips.

The results were as follows:

145 Total Ballots (including proxies):

**108 voted for**

36 voted against

1 abstained

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Patty Overby, TEA Secretary