When the union team gathered together at 8:00am on October 14, we started by reflecting on the membership vote last week. Our members overwhelmingly rejected both CRMC options and a strong majority of all three bargaining units voted to authorize a one-day ULP strike if needed. We take that responsibility seriously and reflected on the stories and conversations we had with members, some of whom are struggling to afford healthcare coverage, some of whom are impacted by CRMC’s mandatory shift proposals and so many other issues. Thank you again for sharing with us.

This morning, CRMC management joined our team for a joint bargaining session at 9:30am. For the first time, CEO Kyle Bauer joined the management team. It was the union’s turn to offer a comprehensive proposal and we were prepared to do so, but before we could, CRMC attorney Grant Collins expressed CRMC’s disappointment in the results of our vote last week. CEO Bauer also shared his thoughts and implied that we were being “self-serving”. This really upset the team, especially as many of us have long respected him and his leadership. He also assured us they would bargain in good faith and offer some improvements to its proposals. Both were very defensive. For our part, we let them know our members provide excellent care and that we are here to get the contract we deserve.

After listening to the employer’s perspective, the bargaining team introduced ourselves to Kyle, shared a little about our work and then expressed our own disappointment in the lack of progress from CRMC. We encouraged them to view the vote as a show of our members’ determination and our feeling that we are not being appreciated. We deserve a contract that rewards our hard work and works to catch us up to other healthcare workers in the state.

We are substantially behind on wages, health care and other standards compared to St. Joseph’s in Brainerd and other similar-sized health care facilities. We are 8% behind on wages (on average), we pay three times as much in health care premiums for single coverage and almost double what SEIU members pay at Essentia, Allina, HealthPartners and many other Central Minnesota employers for dependent coverage.

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Meanwhile, CRMC’s proposals for a .5% wage increase this year is a mere 6 cents an hour for our lowest paid members.

The team expressed our firm commitment to achieve a contract that helps us to catch up on wages, health care and retirement plans and presented a comprehensive proposal on all outstanding issues. One team member presented market data on long term care pay comparisons and another team member presented a PowerPoint making the case for a market adjustment for lab techs. We spent time on all outstanding proposals and shared comparison data on health care premiums and benefits to show cost comparisons for the H.S.A plan compared to others.

For a full copy of our 4th comprehensive proposal—please review the website: seiuhcmn.org/crmcbargaining2019.

We had another full hour-long discussion later in the morning and the CRMC management gave us a new economic proposal at 3:00pm. You can view their new proposal on our website as well.

CRMC did finally make a nice move on their wage proposal, improving their offer. The proposal, however, still presents multiple options. We believe this is an attempt to get our members to bargain with each other instead of CRMC, which is inappropriate, but we still thanked the management team for making progress. The proposal does include an option that would provide .9 FTE employees with the same full-time benefits for Dental Care and Long-Term Disability coverage as 1.0 employees, but it did not make progress on Health Care premium affordability or retirement plans.

Later in the evening, CRMC management presented a set of proposals to respond to our non-economic items which are available on our website. On several proposals CRMC made significant progress, but slight disagreements remain. Those include the Grievance and Arbitration Article, the Health and Safety Committee, and language on the signing of union documents.

The employer also dramatically expanded its proposal on mandatory shifts from being just focused on 2nd shift at the Care Center and Heartwood, to apply to everyone. And instead of addressing the Heartwood issue, their new proposal holds Heartwood bonuses hostage to an overall agreement allowing mandatory shifts throughout CRMC. We view this as a disappointing step backwards.

At the end of the day, we felt that we were still making enough progress that we agreed to add another bargaining date on Monday, October 28. We still have not received information on what to expect for health premiums next year and feel we need that information before we can reach an agreement. We want to make sure the wage increases members receive are not mostly eaten up by health care cost increases.

Thank you for your continued support! It’s making a difference. We are making progress and getting closer. Over the next two weeks, please talk to your bargaining team member about the union’s proposals and what is most important to you as we approach our next bargaining session.

In Solidarity,
The Union Bargaining Team

PS: Congratulations to member Michelle Burgstaler and son Tom on his winning the union’s fall college scholarship essay contest this fall! Congratulations and best of luck in school!