

Scapegoating County employees won't solve budget crisis.

Concessions will not solve County's structural mess



In a press conference on July 13, King County Executive Dow Constantine announced a wage freeze, including no cost-of-living or step increases, for his entire staff for 2011 and he urged the labor community to follow suit. Constantine said these measures are necessary to address the \$60 million deficit facing the County.

Your Local Union understands the gravity of the budget crisis at the County and, as it has done in the past, is prepared to work with the County to help contain costs. Last year, County employees agreed to pay more for their health care, a gesture that will save the County \$37 million over the next three years. County employees also agreed to take 10 furlough days in 2009, which amounted to a pay cut for thousands of County workers. Several County programs were eliminated entirely in 2009 and many employees lost their jobs. To suggest, as the Seattle Times has done in numerous editorials over the past several months, that County employees have not made significant sacrifices during this economic downturn is simply untrue.

It is also important to recognize that nickel and diming County employees will not solve the ongoing structural problem at King County that has led to expenditures outpacing revenues over the last several

years. County employees did not cause this problem, as the media and some politicians incorrectly suggest. The problem exists as a result of an increased demand for services, misguided Eyman-style voter initiatives, and State law that hamstring the County from implementing progressive tax reform. Although the economic crisis the country is facing has exacerbated our predicament, an uptick in the economy will not make the underlying problem go away.

Fixing structural problem important first step

We need to fix the structural mess. A first step in solving the problem would be passage of the sales tax measure that has been proposed by the County Executive and endorsed by law enforcement advocates, such as King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg and others. Your Local Union will be asking for your support in working towards voter passage of this initiative should the measure get on the ballot in November. Other steps toward structural reform at the County may involve Union members meeting directly with their representatives in the State Legislature in Olympia.

In any case, your Local Union is committed to helping the County solve its structural problem. But

most importantly, we are committed to working with the County as a part of the collective bargaining process to negotiate a fair contract for all Local 117 members at King County.

Given the uncertainty at the County, your engagement as we move closer to negotiations is more important than ever. There are lots of ways to get involved. You can attend Union meetings, contact public officials, or write letters defending County employees to the Seattle Times. In preparation for bargaining, members of Local 117 can also volunteer to serve on two committees: a Communications Committee and a Political Action Committee. Members who serve on the Communications Committee will form a 'speakers' bureau' to speak out at media events, while members on the Political Action Committee will form lobbying teams to meet with elected officials and participate in other political action activities. Local 117 will provide training for members who want to serve on these committees.

In the meantime, be sure to monitor the King County section of your Local Union's website and the King County blog for ongoing developments. To sign up for the Communications or Political Action Committee, talk to your Business Representative or sign up online at www.teamsters117.org.