

Loud and clear

Grocery workers say health benefits are worth fighting for — even if that means going on strike

You spoke — and Southern California is hearing your message loud and clear.

At special meetings in Bloomington, Perris, Victorville, Rancho Mirage and El Centro, you voted decisively to reject the latest contract proposals from Albertsons, Ralphs and Vons.

You were not alone in taking your strong and principled stand. As you voted, you joined grocery workers at six other UFCW local unions who attended similar meetings throughout Southern California.

Across this vast region, our UFCW sisters and brothers voted by more than 90% to declare that our health benefits are worth fighting for — even if that means going on strike in the near future.

The companies insist their offer would protect current standards of health benefits.

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This is not true.

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Within 18-20 months, the fund that pays for the medical benefits of 62,000 grocery workers would run out of



By Bill Lathrop

money.

The only alternative at that point would be to cut your benefits drastically *and* raise your out-of-pocket costs — your premiums, deductibles and co-pays — through the roof.

Many of our members still recall their experiences from the 2003-2004 supermarket

strike and lockout that brought the industry to a standstill for 141 days. The companies lost an estimated \$2 billion in sales during that labor dispute as shoppers refused to cross our picket lines.

One strike veteran said at one of our meetings: “We don’t want another strike, but we need to protect our health benefits for ourselves and our families.”

We have been meeting with management for eight months, trying to reach a fair labor agreement that both sides can accept. It’s time to bring the process to a positive end.

From the beginning, we have been ready to negotiate around the clock to bring you, our members, a fair agreement you can endorse.

You have spoken. Now it’s time for the companies to pay attention.