

L.A. GROcery **W**orker and **CO**mmunity Health Coalition

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Grocery Coalition Launches Door-to-Door Campaign, Seeks “No Shop” Pledge From Public in Case of Strike or Lockout

Faith, Community Leaders Rally Volunteers to Walk Neighborhoods
Around Los Angeles in Support of Grocery Workers

Coalition Asks Consumers to Support Good Jobs by Pledging Not To
Shop At Albertsons, Ralphs or Vons in Case of a Strike or Lockout

Los Angeles—Community and religious leaders today joined more than 100 grocery workers and union members in launching the “Walk for Respect” campaign, a massive public outreach effort designed to help restore good jobs among the supermarket industry’s top three chains.

In the coming weeks, thousands of volunteers across Southern California will blanket neighborhoods around stores with pledge cards asking consumers not to shop at Ralphs, Vons or Albertsons stores in the case of a lockout or strike. The program will continue until the three chains agree to once again provide decent wages and affordable health insurance to their employees.

Grocery workers at Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons stores are currently locked in contract negotiations for the first time since the bitter four-and-a-half-month strike and lockout in 2003-2004. That contract expired March 5, and the stores have dragged out negotiations with a series of extensions in a bid to get further concessions from employees, despite record profits and declining non-union competition.

“Grocery workers haven’t had a wage increase since 2002, yet the markets are making billions in profits,” said Chris Zazueta, a veteran employee of Ralphs. “New workers have to wait up to 18 months to even become eligible for benefits, and 30 months to get health care for their kids. No wonder turnover among new employees is as high as 85%.”

As community leaders, supporters and members from numerous Los Angeles labor unions gathered for a rally in front of an Albertsons store in Burbank, the

frustrations with the stores' tactics and the effects on workers and local communities became clear.

"Grocery workers have historically been pillars of communities across Southern California. For decades, the supermarkets provided jobs with decent wages and health benefits, located directly within our neighborhoods," said Reverend Anna Olson, Deputy Director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE). "But times have changed. Now the markets are in a race to the bottom, undermining good jobs and our communities in the process."

The contract imposed on workers following the lockout and strike severely curtailed benefits and wages for new employees, and denied any wage increases to veteran workers.

"The erosion of middle-class jobs impacts all of us," said Rabbi Haim Beliak of Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace. "Our communities don't need more people living one paycheck from the edge. We don't need more uninsured families forced into emergency rooms and free clinics. The markets are making record profits. It is time for them to give back to the communities that make their success possible, or the communities must withhold their support."

Of the 44,000 workers hired since 2004, less than 3,800 have health care, and less than 80 have coverage for their children.

A recent UC Berkeley study estimated that 20,000 fewer children have access to health care because of the changes since the strike and lockout.

"Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons need to understand they are part of our community," said Manuel Hernandez, a community organizer with AGENDA. "They need to act like a good corporate citizen. That means providing fair wages and healthcare for their employees. They can afford it, and it's the right thing to do. We need more good jobs in our neighborhoods."

Immediately after the rally, volunteers walked door to door in the surrounding neighborhoods and stood in front of the store to gather pledges from consumers not to shop at Ralphs, Vons or Albertsons in the event of a lockout or strike.

The Walk for Respect program launched simultaneously across Southern California, with volunteers walking in communities from Bakersfield to the Mexican border.

"We'll keep this up until we the stores begin to treat us and our communities with respect," said Sharlette Villacorta, a longtime Albertsons employee on leave to work on the contract campaign. "The employers are making billions because of our hard work. They need to do their fair share and provide good, middle class jobs that nourish our communities."

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