



Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As you know, we began our unfair labor practice strike on Feb. 1 at nine locations. Since then, we have expanded it to 15 locations and nearly 7,000 members. In the past few days, some companies have taken to writing letters to our members. These letters spin their positions about the negotiations and the offers they have made.

## **Safety is Paramount**

During this round of negotiations, the union has made many proposals to address the safety and well-being of our members. While the companies have regurgitated some of the language of these proposals in their letters to employees, thereby giving the impression that they are actually bargaining over these issues, they have, in fact, only agreed to “meet and discuss” them. They have, up until now, adamantly refused to bargain in good faith over these critical matters.

The union has made specific proposals about how safety issues need to be assessed jointly with the local union and our safety committees and professionals. We’ve made proposals on how vacancies need to be reviewed and filled; on the way overtime and exceptions to the fatigue standards need continuous monitoring; and how we can insure safe staffing levels in the operations without undermining the bargaining unit. The company’s response has been to shut down any such discussion and to refuse any good faith bargaining over such issues.

The companies downplay our safety concerns. They seem to forget that not long ago seven of our co-workers were killed in a gruesome fashion at the Tesoro Anacortes plant. The companies may forget about this, but we cannot. In recent years, 27 oil workers have been killed on the job. This is a dangerous industry. We all know that, but we don’t have to run unnecessary risks every time we come through the gate.

## **We Do Dangerous Work**

We’ve seen more recent fires and explosions, just like the recent one in Torrance, California, for example, and now the companies are trying to operate these facilities with people who are unfamiliar with the processes and equipment. In many cases, they have never done such work in their lives. Attempting such operations is arrogant and dangerous, and a threat to our communities.

We shouldn’t be expected to work long hours for weeks on end without a break. We shouldn’t be expected to work in places where, on average, we have a fire every week of the year. We shouldn’t be expected to work in places where equipment is old and in need of maintenance, but the company considers too costly to take off line and fix properly because it might slow production.



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We shouldn't have to sacrifice quality time with our families by working shifts and schedules that never end. We end up too exhausted to do anything other than grab a few hours' sleep before heading back to work. We have the right to insist on better conditions.

## **We Know Best How to Keep Our Facilities Safe**

On the particular issue of doing routine day-to-day repair and process maintenance work within the gates of the refineries, we have met the same stonewalling. The union has proposed a one-time comprehensive review of that work, conducted by the local unions and our knowledgeable craft members at the plant level. Our proposal includes specific time limits for completing the review and a process by which the parties can agree to develop a plan to assign it to our bargaining unit. It includes the flexibility to have certain of that work remain in the hands of contractors where that is suitable and where that makes sense for the local unions at the refinery level. Remember, this isn't about outage, turnaround and new construction work that we are talking about unless we are currently doing some of that work. This is the day to day maintenance and repair work that is crucial to our ability to conduct ourselves as a union. The local union and company would jointly develop a plan and timetable for that day-to-day work to be performed by the bargaining unit. Furthermore the USW and the North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU) have reached an understanding regarding the types of work the USW is defending in our strike and the Building Trades have pledged their members will refrain from performing that struck work. The oil companies cannot whipsaw us against each other.

It also includes a provision for rebuilding our internal bargaining unit maintenance forces where necessary through recruitment, training of new hires and the assignment of these jobs for our bargaining unit. This is where these jobs belong! Our proposal also includes an enforcement process whereby we can insure our bargaining unit work is not diminished any further, and that, indeed, the day-to-day bargaining unit maintenance work we have lost will be recovered.

This provision enrages the company. They have intentionally allowed our skilled maintenance forces to erode over the years, and they very much like the arrangement. They refuse to replace retired members, rejecting any proposal that would include a mechanism for the local unions to have a real voice in the daily work done inside the refineries or who is performing that work. This situation as it currently exists has been allowed to go on for too long.

While it was well-intentioned many years ago as a means to supplement our workforce on a temporary or as-needed basis, it has been extremely abused by the oil companies. In many cases, our craft forces have been cut in half or more. We have a right to protect and defend our work.

## **Industry Greed Should Not Shortchange Us**

We have tried to have discussions about the cost of health care benefits. In particular we want to discuss the huge out-of-pocket expenditures for a single person or a family. The company has refused to even consider such a change. These companies can well afford a backstop for families that incur such high costs in a year so that they run up against their out-of-pocket maximums. We have been asking for a minor reduction in that maximum level that is not even pennies on a dollar, but they insist they will

not budge on this matter. This treatment from a multi-billion dollar industry is mean-spirited and unnecessary.

Wages have not been the center piece of these negotiations, and while we note the companies' references in their letters to current oil prices, we also note the billions of dollars they have earned over the term of our last labor agreement. While we have issues that must be addressed, we expect a fair and honest economic offer.

We also note that while gas prices have declined at the pump, the costs of inputs to the refinery have as well. The spread of the value we add to the product has become even greater. We are an efficient and productive workforce and that needs to be recognized.

### **Our Issues *are* Important**

This round of oil bargaining is different than some of the past. There is no question about that. The National Oil Bargaining Conference, which is made up of all our oil local union leadership, unanimously adopted this agenda in October of last year. The USW bargaining team and the Oil Policy committee have worked hand-in-hand throughout this set of negotiations.

We are committed to bargaining a fair contract that we can insure gets implemented. There is a history of the companies' settling agreements by promising to address critical issues, but ignoring them after bargaining has concluded.

They "meet and discuss." That's it. They have not bargained with us in good faith. That's been the case with our health care committees and the fatigue standards that they abused. We can't accept more open-ended promises. We need to be able to enforce all aspects in our contracts, and if the company means to do what it claims, then they should not be afraid of that idea.

### **Be Informed**

To keep updated on our fight, opt into our daily text alerts (text oil to 47486), look for our regular bargaining updates or go to [www.oilbargaining.org](http://www.oilbargaining.org).

In solidarity,

**Leo W. Gerard**  
International President

**Thomas M. Conway**  
International Vice President  
(Administration)

**Gary Beevers**  
International Vice President

**National Oil Bargaining Policy Committee**  
Jim Savage, Steve Garey, Larry Burchfield, Mike MacFadden, Larry Sinclair