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# THE VOICE

United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals

Volume 36 - Number 1

WWW.UNAC-CA.ORG

Spring 2009

## UNAC/UHCP Activists March for Employee Rights



PHOTO BY KARINA LEON

**RNs Deirdre Kirkwood, Minerva Aller-dela Fuente, Helen Bouman, and Carol Westerman joined other UNAC/UHCP members to march in support of the Employee Free Choice Act**

**A** little rain – okay, a downpour – did not dampen UNAC/UHCP activists’ enthusiasm for the freedom to form unions. More than 20 activists joined with hundreds of fellow union members on February 5 for a 10-mile march through Los Angeles in support of the Employee Free Choice Act.

UNAC/UHCP member Deirdre Kirkwood, RN, told KPCC radio about her experience of being fired during the union organizing campaign at Parkview Community Hospital. “It’s against federal law to fire someone for forming a union,” Kirkwood said. “But there’s not really much justice attached and that’s one reason why we need to pass the Employee Free Choice Act.”

As health care professionals, our first priority is our patients. Our patients count on us to be their advocates. Because we have a voice on the job through our union, we know we can speak out without putting our livelihoods at risk.

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# THE VOICE OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS



A publication of United Nurses Associations of California/  
Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP)

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*Design/Layout by Russell Miller*

# Take Action!



**T**he Employee Free Choice Act would create a fairer process for union organizing by:

- ▶ allowing employees to form unions by signing cards authorizing union representation;
- ▶ establishing stronger penalties for violation of employee rights when workers seek to form a union, as well as during their first-contract negotiations; and
- ▶ providing mediation and arbitration for first-contract disputes.

The Employee Free Choice Act would restore fairness to the union organizing process by offering legal protections for workers who otherwise could be putting their jobs and livelihoods on the line because they choose to advocate for a voice in the workplace.

**Tell Senator Dianne Feinstein to co-sponsor the Employee Free Choice Act!**

Call **1-866-207-2060** and follow the prompts. When you are connected to a staff person, say you are calling to urge Senator Feinstein to stand up for workers' rights by co-sponsoring the Employee Free Choice Act!

# Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

## Former CVMC RN Sandy Reynolds Speaks Out

“ People really started wanting a union when management announced they were going to stop paying extra for in-house registry, bonuses for extra shifts, and extra pay for advanced certifications.

Because of the nursing shortage, the in-house registry is a way to make shifts available to the nurses who already work at the hospital. If you were a patient in the hospital, it would be better to have someone who already had a vested interest in the hospital and the community. It's about providing continuity of care.

There were a lot of other arbitrary changes. When they found out we filed for a union election, they started holding what they called 'National Labor Relations Board meetings,' making them seem like some sort of government meetings.

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PHOTO BY LAUREN LAZAROVICI

Sandy Reynolds, RN, wanted a union at Chino Valley Medical Center where she had worked for five years

## NLRB Trial Set for Parkview

**U** NAC/UHCP filed several Unfair Labor Practice charges on behalf of Parkview RNs after hospital management decided to make multiple unilateral changes to working conditions without first negotiating an agreement with the nurses' union representatives.

The NLRB sided with the union and has scheduled a hearing before an administrative law judge, to be held April 13 to April 17.

## NLRB Judge Rules Against CVMC

**O** n January 16, 2009, an administrative law judge recommended that the results of the union election be set aside and a new election held, finding **that the hospital had violated federal labor law** by inferring that regularly scheduled merit raises might be withheld during contract negotiations if nurses voted for the union. The judge also said the hospital president's email comparing the unionization campaign to infidelity was a violation of the law. **The hospital has appealed the judge's decision**, so the case will be presented in Washington D.C.

# Closing in on a First Contract



PHOTO BY EVE ROJAS

Lt. Gov. John Garamendi said that having the right to organize is a basic American right

**P**arkview Community Hospital Registered Nurses won a voice in the workplace in February 2008. Since then, they have diligently pursued a positive relationship with hospital management as they negotiate their first contract.

Surrounded by chanting supporters and buoyed by a rousing speech from California's lieutenant governor, Parkview RNs rallied and marched in December, calling on hospital administrators to stop stalling and finish negotiating their union contract.

"It is possible to work out a contract that works for both sides," Lt. Gov. John Garamendi told rally goers, "so let's get on with it!" Garamendi also noted that other hospitals in the area have constructive working relationships with union nurses at their facilities. "Workers have the right to organize and negotiate a contract," he said. "That's a basic American right."

*Continued on next page*

PHOTO BY RUSSELL MILLER



Father Benjamin Alforque prayed for Parkview nurses and their ongoing contract negotiations

# UNAC/UHCP Hires New Political Director

**O**n March 2, Jimmy Gomez became the new Political Director for UNAC/UHCP. Gomez will develop and manage the overall direction of the union's political program, including introducing and monitoring legislation, maintaining relationships with elected officials and key staff, and directing the UNAC/UHCP Political Action Committee.

"Now more than ever, it's vital that elected officials heed the voices of health care professionals when making decisions that affect our society," said UNAC/UHCP President Kathy J. Sackman, RN. "We made that clear when our union successfully mobilized for safe staffing ratios, and we're thrilled that Jimmy is going to help us amplify our voices in today's crucial policy debates."

Gomez brings to UNAC/UHCP more than a decade of political experience in Washington, D.C., and California. Most recently, he has been California's political action representative for AFSCME.

He has also worked for the National League of Cities, the Democratic National Committee, L.A. City Councilman Michael Feuer, and new U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis while she was a member of Congress. Gomez graduated from UCLA and earned a Master of Public Policy degree from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"Year after year, polls show that the public holds nurses in high esteem when it comes to integrity," says Gomez. "It will be my job to make sure that legislators know when they listen to nurses, they are listening to the voices of their constituents."



PHOTO BY EVE ROJAS

**Jimmy Gomez is the new Political Director for UNAC/UHCP**

## Closing in on a First Contract

*...continued from previous page*

In January, Parkview nurses, clergy and UNAC/UHCP staff gathered together for a prayer service focused on their continued commitment to a peaceful and productive resolution to their contract negotiations.

"I'm inspired by the support we got today and hopeful we're going to get a contract signed," said Cynthia Pama, RN, in Parkview's Telemetry department. "It was important to come together today to show we are united."

"The Catholic Church supports the rights of workers to organize," Father Benjamin Alforque of St. Catherine of Alexandria told the nurses gathered at Hunt Park, a block from the hospital in Riverside. "It is part of your human dignity. Your work is part of God's creative work. We are with you in this struggle."

Nurses are seeking a speedy conclusion to their union contract negotiations so they can get back to their top priorities: providing quality patient care and safeguarding Parkview as a vital health care resource for the people of Riverside.

## Employee Rights

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PHOTO BY EVE ROJAS

UNAC/UHCP activists, staff, family and friends gladly braved torrential rains to support putting the power to unionize back in the hands of the employee

Choosing to join a union shouldn't mean getting fired. But employers fire thousands of working people every year when these workers try to come together for a voice on the job.

"I used to work at a hospital that didn't have a union," said Helen Bouman, RN, a UNAC/UHCP activist at Garden Grove Hospital. "The director was allowed to bully the employees. Until people see that, they don't understand how important it is to have a union."

The day before the L.A. march, UNAC/UHCP activist Asela Espiritu, an RN at Kaiser Orange County, traveled to Washington, D.C., to speak out at the AFL-CIO's rally for the Employee Free Choice Act.

Espiritu joined UNAC/UHCP through a majority sign-up process, thanks to the landmark Labor Management Partnership between Kaiser and its unions. A similar sign-up process would be an option open to all under the Employee Free Choice Act. Espiritu told ralliers that all working people should have the same opportunities she's had – to be free of coercion and intimidation and able to bargain for a better life and better conditions in the workplace.

"The Employee Free Choice Act will empower workers within all kinds of industries," Espiritu said, her words captured on the AFL-CIO blog and on YouTube. "They'll be part of the solution to the crisis we're in. As unionized workers, we have a voice with management. We're on equal footing. It helps workers, it helps our patients, and it helps our company."



PHOTO BY BILL BURKE

Asela Espiritu, RN, let lawmakers in Washington, D.C., know that there is a better way to ensure workers' rights – by passing the Employee Free Choice Act

## Why We Need the Employee Free Choice Act

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The immigrant Filipino nurses were especially scared. They were afraid they were going to get sent back or get their visas pulled. I believe they were intimidated by innuendo.

The hospital's president and chief medical officer sent around an email that said, 'Hearing about the [union] petition was like finding out that my wife had been cheating on me.' He routinely put people down and could be patronizing and demeaning. He made it personal. Administrators had the power; they had your job in their hands.

After an extremely intense anti-union campaign on the part of the hospital, we were left without a union and without an effective voice in the workplace.

If the Employee Free Choice Act were law, we would definitely have had a union. So much time wouldn't have passed and nurses wouldn't have been fed so much propaganda.

I don't work at Chino Valley Medical Center anymore; things only got worse. It broke my heart. ”

## Safe Staffing for All

**A**s health care professionals in California, we've seen what an important difference safe-staffing ratios have made for our patients and our work lives. We know that safe staffing improves outcomes for patients and helps us do our jobs better, reducing burnout and turnover. Isn't it time that patients all over the country benefited from this common-sense reform?

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky of Illinois is championing a bill in the U.S. Congress, H.R. 2123, to set federally mandated nurse-to-patient ratios. UNAC/UHCP is actively supporting this bill because:

- ▶ Providing enough nurses at the bedside is the most reliable and cost-effective way to ensure high-quality patient care, both by protecting patients and staff, and by decreasing preventable hospital deaths;
- ▶ The American public recognizes the dangers of low staffing levels; and
- ▶ Ensuring that there are enough nurses at the bedside is one of the answers to the current nurse shortage crisis.

Urge your congressional representatives to co-sponsor H.R. 2123. For more information, check out the website of "RNs Working Together," the coalition of AFL-CIO union nurses, at [www.rnsworkingtogether.org](http://www.rnsworkingtogether.org).

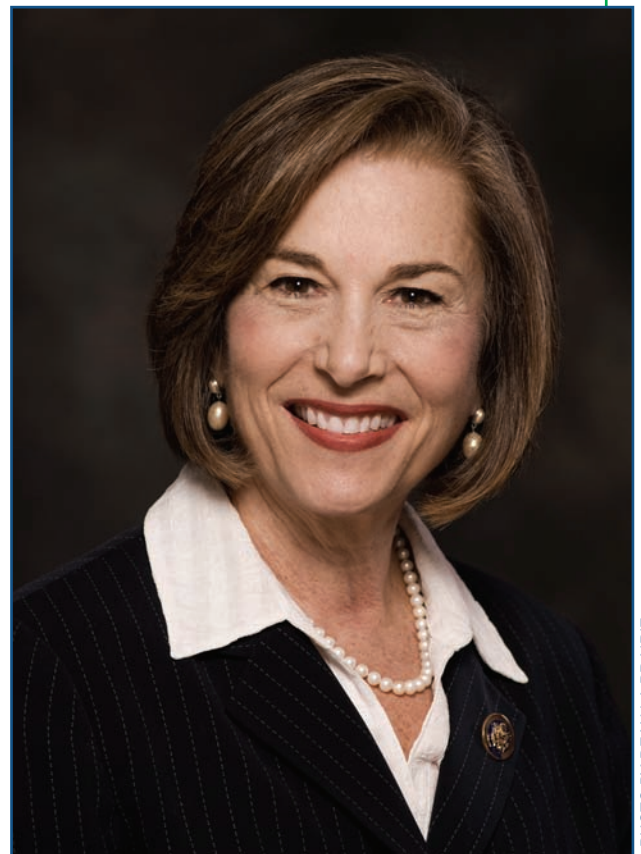


PHOTO BY DEAN LA PRAIRIE

**Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) is championing a bill to federally mandate safe staffing ratios across the nation**

# 2009 Contract Specialists



**Janet Rossi, RN**  
**Contract Specialist for KOCPA**

**K**aaiser Contract Specialists are the frontline in solving workplace issues and helping union members understand the terms of their National Agreement. This year, there are 13 new part-time contract specialists – one for each Kaiser affiliate. During their one-year term, contract specialists work closely with local union officers and staff representatives to help union members understand their contract and solve workplace issues.

By doing rounds, conducting meetings, and taking part in other membership or contract-related activities, contract specialists ensure that important issues raised by union members are addressed. The rest of their time is spent on providing quality patient care as working health care professionals.

Janet Rossi, an operating room RN at the Alton/San Canyon Medical Offices Ambulatory Surgicenter, is the new contract specialist for UNAC/UHCP's Kaiser Orange County Professional Association (KOCPA).

“I’ve been a nurse with Kaiser for 22 years now and have worked at several different facilities. Since I’m fairly new to the KOCPA affiliate and am very supportive of the union, I wanted to become a contract specialist. The position allows me to meet more KOCPA nurses and help facilitate equal treatment for them. With the support of our UNAC/UHCP Staff Representative, Suzanne Delaney, I provide assistance to union members and ensure their needs are met.

“Sometimes members aren’t sure how to access different resources or have important contract-related questions they need answered. As contract specialist, I help fill in that gap. I am also able to promote collaborative working relationships with management and other staff to increase union member access to vital information.

“I represent UNAC/UHCP KOCPA members at many different clinics and at the Anaheim and Irvine hospitals. It is worth doing rounds at each facility because I believe everyone deserves fair representation. Even if it is only a couple of nurses at one clinic, I try to make sure they all know that I am an available resource.”

## HIPAA Notification

“Nurses, who have always been advocates for patients’ health safety and rights will have to advocate more assiduously and shoulder more responsibility for patient privacy. HIPAA has thrust nurses into new roles of information gatekeepers, record access arbiters, and data gurus under HIPAA culture.  
— Joanne Kumekawa, from *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*



Federal penalties for violating patient privacy have been increased, effective January 1, 2009, and include monetary fines.

**Remember**— Patient privacy must be maintained. Do not access a patient’s medical records unless you are assigned to that patient, and do not access your own medical records, or those of a family member or co-worker.

# UNAC/UHCP Members Support Push for Nursing Ratios in Illinois

**W**hen UNAC/UHCP member Scott Byington, an RN at St. Francis Medical Center in Lynwood, heard about an AFSCME effort to unionize fellow healthcare workers at a group of Chicago hospitals in February, he jumped on a plane to help out.

“I’ve worked all over and there’s no doubt that union hospitals are better, safer hospitals,” says Byington, a 15-year veteran RN. “We sometimes see five to seven gunshot wounds a night and, if we ever need extra staff, we have the contractual right to ask for it. It’s the nurse’s responsibility to be the patient’s advocate.”

That is just what organizers at Chicago’s AFSCME Council 31 like to hear. Since 2002, they’ve been trying to unionize 10,000 workers, including 3,500 nurses, at affiliated medical centers operated by Resurrection Health Care. Unlike California, Illinois has no nurse-to-patient ratio laws, so ratios are up to individual hospitals to determine. Council 31 seeks to change that by building grassroots support for such legislation, as part of its overall campaign goals.

The California volunteers, under the stewardship of Kyle Serrette, Organizing Director at UNAC/UHCP, have played an important role in promoting those efforts. There have been several “Volunteer Member Organizer” (VMO) efforts over the years, and about 20 union nurses from across the country have participated – half of them members of UNAC/UHCP.

Labor and Delivery Registered Nurse Kelly Beringer of Resurrection’s West Suburban Medical Center is grateful for all the help. “It was great to have the VMOs from California help our campaign,” she says. “Sometimes it seemed a little surreal to hear what a difference a union contract can make, but it also gave us a big shot in the arm!”

Still, the campaign hasn’t been easy. The Illinois Hospital Association has fought long and hard to undercut the unionization efforts.

If you’d like to join AFSCME Council 31’s campaign in Illinois, email Kyle Serrette, at [Kyle@unac-ca.org](mailto:Kyle@unac-ca.org).



PHOTO BY JILLIAN PHILLIPS

**UNAC/UHCP volunteer organizers (from left) Cynthia Turner, an RN at Kaiser San Diego, Scott Byington, an RN at St. Francis, and Asela Espiritu (4<sup>th</sup> from left), an RN at Kaiser Orange County, assisted AFSCME Council 31 in its Resurrection campaign**



## WELCOME HOME

**I**t is with great pleasure that we welcome home Armin Reyes, UNAC/UHCP staff representative for St. Francis Medical Center. Armin rejoined us on Monday, March 23, after completing a lengthy tour of duty in Iraq as a Army Captain Reservist. We are very glad to have him back stateside, once again serving our members

of the St. Francis Registered Nurses Association.

We are currently looking for UNAC/UHCP members who are also veterans and are interested in sharing their stories. Please contact Armin at 909-451-0573, or [Armin@unac-ca.org](mailto:Armin@unac-ca.org) for more information.



PHOTO BY RUSSELL MILLER

Armin Reyes

## 12th Annual National Nurses Congress

May 4-7, 2009

**T**he 12<sup>th</sup> Annual AFSCME-United Nurses of America (UNA) National Nurses Congress will be held in Washington, D.C., from May 4-7, 2009. This year, AFSCME-UNA nurses will focus on the issue of health care reform, looking at reform from a number of perspectives. They will explore the history of health care reform, discuss ways to make a real difference in patient care, consider the impact of legislative reform on nurses in the workplace, and learn how to effectively lobby for change.

AFSCME-UNA represents over 60,000 nurses working in unity to advance quality and accountability in the health care setting through organizing, political action and nursing practice. The members seek to create change that will improve the field of nursing nationwide. AFSCME-UNA members are committed to improving access to health care for over 70 million Americans who are currently under-insured or uninsured.

## Union Members Provide Free Health Screenings

**U**NAC/UHCP optometrists, nurses, and physician assistants administered free eye and glaucoma exams, as well as blood pressure testing, for approximately 1,400 community members at the 39th Assembly District's 2nd Annual Family Resource Fair. The theme of this year's event was "Be Healthy, Stay Safe, and Go Green."

Sponsored annually by California State Assembly Member Felipe Fuentes, the event seeks to increase community awareness of health, safety and environmental issues.

UNAC/UHCP members provided free screening tests to local residents who might otherwise be unaware of an existing medical condition.

"It is really rewarding to be able to provide health screenings to people who cannot afford these important tests," said Dr. Julie Hwang, an optometrist at Kaiser Panorama City. "Our health care crisis impacts so many people every day because they don't have access to the medical care they need."

Daria Smith, a registered nurse at Kaiser Fontana, performed a

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blood pressure exam on one woman that showed she had high blood pressure.

“When I told the woman she had high blood pressure, she told me she’d already been diagnosed with the condition,” stated Smith. “She just couldn’t afford to pay for the medicine she needed.”

After receiving an eye exam administered by Dr. Hwang, Assembly Member Fuentes said, “Access to health care continues to be a problem. It is incredibly important to improve access to health services like these to all families, and this annual event gives members of our community the opportunity to have their families tested for illnesses and get free access to important screening exams.”



Assembly Member Fuentes receives a glaucoma exam administered by Dr. Julie Hwang, who works at Kaiser Panorama City

PHOTO BY EVE ROJAS



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## A Fond Farewell to UNAC/UHCP's Communications Director

PHOTO BY  
RUSSELL MILLER



Lauren Lazarovici has served as Communications Director for UNAC/UHCP for the past three years. Lauren has moved on to accept a position as Senior Communications Specialist with the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente, Office of Labor-Management Partnership.

Lauren has been instrumental in establishing and growing the UNAC/UHCP Communications Department. She has been integral in improving the caliber, volume and timeliness of communications with our members.

We thank Lauren for all of her contributions to UNAC/UHCP over the years and wish her well in her new position.

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