

My name is Brian O'Neill; I work for the Assessor's office for 11 years in Santa Clara County. I am the one of the Chapter Chairs for Santa Clara County SEIU Local 521 and I am the Chair of the Committee on Political Education (COPE). Under the leadership of 521, we have been to save jobs in Public and Mental Health, and in the Drug and Alcohol Departments. I have been involved in several contract negotiations and pensions and retiree health care has always been an issue with both our members and the County.

In Santa Clara County, SEIU 521 and the county have worked together to have our medical retirement pre-funded. For more than a decade the county and the union have been as creative as we could be to make sure we invested some money into a medical retirement fund. Over the last few years the county and SEIU 521 have used every avenue to make sure that quality services are maintained by our union delaying part of raise for 6 months and having modest gains in general wages. The county still needs to be competitive in order to attract the best employees.

SEIU 521 is planning for the Fiscal 09 budget process. We are going to ask the Board of Supervisors to direct the county to invest our funds for medical retirement into PERS Other Post Employment Benefit Bonds. We hope by getting a higher return on the savings account will enable the medical fund to grow faster and become fully funded sooner.

Our broken health care system is the problem. We all know our health system is broken and it needs to be fixed by the state or the feds. Universal health care is the answer in the long run and we are hoping this year some reform will happen.

The committee should endorse a plan for universal health care to take care of all retirees. My 85-year mother is a retired SEIU member from West Valley Community College. Last year she had a major back surgery. It was successful. I don't know how she could of pay for all medical cost if she didn't have medical retirement from West Valley.

The answer is not taking away of medical retirement; the answer is fixing our broken health care system!

Thank you  
Brian O'Neill