

Houston Janitors' Strike Escalating Nationwide ...

by Yahoo-Finance

Houston Janitors Setting Up Picket Lines in Other Cities Starting Tonight

Higher-Paid Workers In Chicago, DC, NY, CA Set to Stay Off the Job to Support Poverty-Wage Houston Workers

HOUSTON, Oct. 31 /PRNewswire/ -- A strike by thousands of poverty-wage Houston janitors is escalating and spreading nationwide as a group of strikers are leaving Houston this week to set up picket lines outside buildings cleaned by their employers in the Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C. metro areas. Picket lines could move into the downtown business districts of the nation's largest cities, including New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, any day.

"No family can survive on \$20 a day," said SEIU Local 5 janitor Ascension Blanco, an ABM janitor in Houston who makes the minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour and does not have health insurance. She will set up picket lines in the Los Angeles area starting this week. "We are going to other cities because we are united with the workers there. With the same employers, we have the same concerns and we will make the same fight."

Continuing their historic commitment to lifting up the living standards for janitors in America's fourth largest city, SEIU janitors around the country are saying they will honor the picket lines of SEIU Local 5 janitors from Houston. Speaking about the national cleaning firms and their clients, the national building owners and property managers, Patricia Cabral, an ABM janitor in Chicago and member of SEIU Local 1 says, "If they can get away with paying \$20 a day in Houston, it puts our families at risk in Chicago." Cabral makes \$13.80 an hour for full-time work and has employer-paid family health insurance. "The Houston janitors are our brothers and sisters. They need us now and we will be there for them," she says.

The first phase of the Houston janitors' national escalation plan includes setting up picket lines according to the following schedule:

- Starting Tues. Oct. 31 Chicago metro area
- Starting Wed. Nov. 1 Los Angeles metro area & Sacramento metro area
- Starting Thurs. Nov. 2 Washington, D.C. metro area
- Starting Wed. Nov. 8 All metro areas at once

Additional metro areas will be added as the week continues. Decisions about whether to maintain picket lines on an ongoing basis or having "rolling," 24-hour picket lines will be made by SEIU Local 5 and its janitors on a day-by-day basis. The picket line schedule will expand beyond next week if there is no resolution to the strike in Houston. Details about which buildings will be picketed will be available only immediately prior to picket lines being set up. More than 225,000 janitors in 29 metropolitan areas have formed a union with the 1.8 million-member SEIU (Service Employees International Union) as part of the Justice for Janitors movement.

Background:

Houston janitors seeking a shot at the American Dream put down their brooms and walked off the job October 23 to defend their civil rights and protest the failure to bargain in good faith by five large national cleaning companies. The employers have responded to the janitors' efforts to lift themselves out of poverty by launching a campaign of civil rights abuses against workers speaking out for improvements.

The strike could have national implications for hundreds of thousands of low-wage service workers, but immediately at stake are the living standards of 5,300 Houston workers and their families, who are paid just \$20 a day, with no health insurance for part-time work.

Janitors in Chicago and Los Angeles make more than twice as much as their co-workers in Houston and have health insurance and full-time work while Houston workers are paid \$20 a day, with no health insurance for part-time work. In every city, the janitors work for many of the same national cleaning firms in buildings owned by the same national commercial landlords, such as Houston-based Hines, Transwestern, and PM Realty.

Last fall, Houston janitors made the historic choice to form a union with SEIU (Service Employees International Union). Their decision capped one of the largest successful organizing drives by private sector workers ever in the Southern half of the United States. During that effort, hundreds of SEIU janitors in more

than two dozen cities and metro areas honored the picket lines of Houston janitors who were on strike over unfair labor practices.

Since forming a union with SEIU, Houston janitors have been seeking a raise to \$8.50/hour, more hours, and health insurance in a citywide union contract. For more info, visit houstonjanitors.org

Source: Service Employees International Union

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