

Meriter Nurses: To escalate fight for strong contract, including issuing 10-day strike notice if necessary

Posted on Wednesday, Mar 10, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wisc. — Dressed in scrubs and donning stickers that read “We’ve Earned Our Time,” dozens of UnityPoint Health-Meriter nurses, joined by community supporters and elected officials, gathered Tuesday to signal their determination to win a strong, fair contract. Meriter nurses announced that by a nearly unanimous vote, nurses had authorized their bargaining committee to do what is necessary to win a fair contract, including issuing a 10-day notice of potential strike, if necessary.

“We’re called heroes, but that doesn’t mean we should be treated like martyrs,” said **Pat Raes, a registered nurse who has worked at Meriter for over 30 years.** “Especially after a year of this pandemic, Meriter nurses know what we are worth, and we won’t settle for a contract that leaves out the protections, incentives and rights we need and deserve.”

Throughout bargaining, Meriter nurses, represented by their union SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin, showed up in historic numbers to advocate for themselves and their patients. With their contract set to expire, nurses were still far apart from management on key issues and voted overwhelmingly to escalate the fight for the strong contract they’ve earned.

“Nurses have felt COVID in an extremely unique way. It has been 24/7 for us and we’re worn down—physically, emotionally and mentally,” said **Joe Maginn, registered nurse in the Emergency Department at Meriter for over 20 years.** “We have no choice but to stand up for ourselves. In our contract, we are asking for fair compensation for the sacrifices that nurses and our families have made. We need protection and down time. We need our hospital to respect us and

treat us with dignity so that we can continue to show up to deliver quality care for our patients.”

During contract negotiations, nurses have united around key contract proposals — including a meaningful voice in decision making; just compensation for nurses who pick up extra shifts, which would mitigate staffing and scheduling problems; a reasonable work-life balance and sufficient paid time off that does not force nurses to use vacation days when they need sick days; and protections against the current pandemic and any future public health emergencies.

“Nurses have been here for us. It is time for us to be there for them,” said **WI State Sen. Melissa Agard (SD-16)**. “We all know that nurses have been asked to do more with less, provide care without adequate support or resources, and have not been respected as the professionals or essential workers that they are. It is vital that each and every nurse has a meaningful seat at the table when it comes to the decisions that impact them and those in their care.”

During Tuesday’s press conference, Meriter nurses also acknowledged their fellow nurse colleagues at other Madison hospitals, many of whom showed up in solidarity to the event. Meriter nurses expressed their support for all nurses to have a seat at the table and a meaningful voice in a union to advocate for themselves and their patients.

“Our contract platform lays out what all nurses everywhere, including here at Meriter, need,” said **Suzi Kossel, registered nurse in the NICU at Meriter**. “What’s different for Meriter nurses is that we have a seat at the table in our union and a voice to address our concerns. We will keep standing strong together to raise standards at our hospital, and continue to stand in solidarity with other nurses who are fighting for their own union voice.”