

## Critical Questions Answered #4



As you likely know, the Montana Nurses Association (MNA) has launched a drive to win the right to become the paid representative for registered nurses at Northwest Healthcare (NWHC).

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, the MNA's Executive Director, Robert Allen sent a letter to NWHC registered nurses. The purpose of this newsletter is to set the record straight over what we believe is misinformation and Robert Allen's and the MNA's distortions of the truth.

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### ***"The MNA is saying that they offered Administration a 'neutrality agreement' that would allow nurses to 'work on organizing without the threat of discipline.' Is that true?"***

Recently, Robert Allen, the MNA's professional organizer sent a letter to NWHC RNs. Much of what Mr. Allen shared in his letter was factually incorrect or misleading. We would like to make several points to set the record straight:

- First, it is important to note that it is the National Labor Relations Act – and not a union's proposed "neutrality agreement" – which protects an employee's right to support or to choose not to support a union. This Federal law was enacted in 1935 – long before Mr. Allen proposed a "neutrality agreement" with NWHC.
- This same Federal law also provides employers with the right to speak freely with their employees about unions and to share factual information about the union organizing process, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), or anything else having to do with unionization. Employers have these rights unless they voluntarily agree to forfeit them.
- Through their proposed neutrality agreement, the MNA wants NWHC to voluntarily forfeit our rights and agree to remain silent on the topic of unionization while the MNA tries to convince our nurses to sign union authorization cards or petitions. Under a neutrality agreement employees tend to be more likely to sign union cards because they lack the benefit of hearing the whole story, like some of the significant risks posed by unionization. Professional union organizers like Mr. Allen prefer these agreements because they make the process of "selling" people on the idea of the union a lot easier.
- According to Mr. Allen, a neutrality agreement "promotes a democratic decision." In fact, unions only seek neutrality agreements when they are having trouble signing employees up and when they want to silence the employer. We do not see anything "democratic" about the MNA attempting to prevent our nurses from having all the facts so they can think for themselves and make an independent, informed decision.
- Mr. Allen also says, that neutrality agreements "curtail what we (the MNA)...can claim against the employer in the media." In our last Critical Questions Answered newsletter (#3), we explained that unions sometimes resort to negative public image campaigns in an effort to force employers to agree to neutrality. So, what do we think Mr. Allen is really saying? It sounds like Mr. Allen is trying to pressure and intimidate NWHC by suggesting that if we sign the neutrality agreement he won't make negative claims against NWHC in the media – and if we don't, he will. Another threat!

The fact is, we feel strongly that having a union at NWHC would change our organization in some decidedly negative ways. Moreover, we respect your right to have all the facts and think for yourselves. For these reasons, we will not give into Robert Allen's veiled threats and intimidation. Nor will we give up our legal right of free speech; we will not be silenced by Mr. Allen.

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***"The union said they had a lot of trouble finding a meeting space and that this was a sign of NWHC's 'power.' How do you respond?"***

NWHC has never attempted to interfere with Mr. Allen's efforts to hold a meeting in Kallispell - period!

Mr. Allen was hired by the MNA to sell nurses on the idea of electing the MNA to be their paid collective bargaining representative. He may even have a sales quota like many other salespeople. In our view, Mr. Allen's attacks on NWHC Administration appear to be a tactic, (used by many union organizers), to reignite his organizing campaign by stirring up anger, resentment and mistrust so our nurses may be more likely to feel they "need" the union.

We know of at least a dozen hotels or other venues where the MNA could have purchased meeting space. We are uncertain why Mr. Allen's attempts to secure a donated space have failed, but (once again) please rest assured we have had no hand in Mr. Allen's difficulties in securing a meeting place.

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***"What about the MNA's claim that NWHC is engaging in union busting?"***

We could not disagree more! All we have done is share factual information with our nurses, and we will continue this process as long as necessary. Many NWHC nurses have told their managers how much they appreciate hearing the facts and information we have presented.

Mr. Allen's accusation of "union-busting" is just another attempt to stir up controversy, anger and resentment in an effort to re-energize his stalled sales campaign. Rather than making outrageous claims designed to scare and confuse NWHC nurses, we think Mr. Allen should answer some basic questions which he continues to avoid. For example:

- How can the MNA guarantee that NWHC nurses will not lose anything as a result of unionization and collective bargaining?
- Can the MNA guarantee that NWHC nurses will never be forced to pay monthly union dues in order to continue working at NWHC?
- Can the MNA guarantee that there will never be a strike at NWHC or that the process of unionization and collective bargaining will never result in quality of care being compromised at NWHC?
- In light of how the MNA has behaved toward Administration over the past several months (i.e. accusing us of unfair and unethical treatment), how would the MNA ever hope to develop a productive relationship with NWHC Administration if the MNA was ever elected to represent our Registered Nurses?

Please do not allow yourself to be manipulated by Mr. Allen's destructive and self-serving sales campaign. No one cares more about our employees, our patients, and our community than the people who work here at NWHC. This includes administrators, employees, physicians and all those who support our organization and all of our employees who each contribute to the outstanding patient care our community has come to expect.

**Remember: Your signature is valuable! A union card is a legal document.**

**Please get all the facts and do not sign a card in support of the MNA unless you are absolutely sure it is something you want to do.**

**If there was ever a vote at NWHC, all eligible registered nurses would be entitled to vote - even if they never signed a card or petition in support of the union.**