

Date: April 12, 2010

To: Sandra Speer, Personnel Director

From: Lonnie Schreiber, Local 1934 President

Re: Employee Contribution to PERS

This letter is in response to the letter you sent to our Labor Representative on February 18, 2010, asking our Association to consider paying the 9% employee contribution to PERS. I want to first clarify that our Association members do pay the 9% employee contribution to PERS. Back in 1989, the Local 1934 and the City of Redding entered into an agreement that included the City paying the 9% employee contribution in a pretaxed manner. This process was agreed upon by both parties in lieu of the City increasing Firefighter salaries by 9%, and then having them pay for the 9% employee contribution out of their checks. As in most contractual agreements involving benefits, our members have given up raises to receive such benefits. This issue has been continually misrepresented in the media, which many members feel has been for political purposes.

The City has enjoyed the benefit of this agreement for the past 20 years, by saving 14.5% in overtime costs. This agreement has saved the City millions of dollars over these past 20 years. Now the City is thanking the Firefighters by asking them to agree to reverse this 20 year agreement and start paying their 9% employee contribution directly, but without a 9% raise in their salaries to pay for that contribution.

The City has also enjoyed millions of dollars in savings by continually understaffing the Fire Department, while other comparable cities have maintained an adequate number of engines and daily staffing to handle the demands of a City the size of Redding. This has created a huge burden on the Firefighters of Redding who perform emergency operations in extreme heat, often times with only 50% of the total personnel recommended by NFPA, to be at the emergency scene. Adding to their risk is the lack of adequate fire apparatus positioned throughout the City to keep response times within the recommendation of NFPA, as well as the City of Redding Land Use Plan. Response times become even more critical for our Firefighters due to the lack of staffing on each apparatus. Longer response times and limited staffing enable fires to grow and create more dangerous conditions for our Firefighters. Despite these conditions the Firefighters have for many years, remained on the low end of the salary scale with other comparable cities used by City Management to determine competitive salaries.

Last October, the Redding Firefighters agreed to forego raises and take pay cuts totaling \$670,000, which equated to approximately a 12.5% reduction in pay. In addition, they agreed to extend their contract two years with no pay raises. The next day, City Councilman Rick Bosetti announced a ballot initiative campaign to get all city workers to pay their employee contribution to PERS, which equates to an additional 9% reduction

in pay for Redding Firefighters. Soon after, Council Members organized a “privatization committee,” to look into cheaper alternatives for the City to provide services to the public. Initially the Redding Fire Department was not cited as a subject for this committee but it quickly became the main target of this group, which was made up of several citizens from the Redding community that are heavily involved in the Development Community. The Builders’ Exchange, Redding Area Chamber of Commerce, and their lobbyist group Shasta Voice, were well represented by this committee. All of these groups have a deep seated interest in the City’s finances since they often benefit from City funds for development projects, such as the Stillwater Business Park. Kent Dagg, who heads up the Builders Exchange, has recently asked the City to consider several options to spur growth in the Community. Most of his options involve the City giving away property or funding for what many perceive to be subsidizing members of the Development Community. The Privatization Committee did determine that our Firefighters are providing the best service for the price and the idea of privatizing was dropped.

The Redding Firefighters agreed to a one year 12.5% pay cut, and days later were asked to cut their pay by 9% more by paying the employee contribution to PERS directly from their check. At the same time, they were treated insensitively by City Council who proceeded to look into cheaper alternatives to provide the citizens of Redding with fire protection. They conducted their inquiry with what was perceived as little appreciation, or sensitivity, to the Firefighters who have a lot of pride and connection to this community because of the many years of providing quality service with minimal staffing. The idea of simply disbanding the Redding Fire Department and replacing it with a private or state agency to save a few dollars was extremely hurtful to our Firefighters. It is still extremely discouraging to our Firefighters that our City Council does not appreciate the hard work, dedication, and monetary savings, this City has realized by their work. Even more disturbing is the lack of understanding some of our Council Members have for the Fire Service overall. Our Council has by its own actions given our members and many citizens, the perception that their priority is to listen to their political constituents and make development projects a priority over public safety.

Our Firefighters and their families are all sympathetic to the economic times and how important it is to maintain the minimal firefighter staffing and equipment we presently have. The idea of closing any Fire Station in this City could be devastating for citizens in need of emergency services. The last Grand Jury Report made it very clear that our staffing and response times are unacceptable for the citizens of Redding. This played a huge part in our members decision to agree to the 12.5% pay cut last October. But now, our members are being told that the City intends on violating the very agreement we made last October, and still laying off Firefighters and closing Fire Stations. After considering all of the facts I have discussed above, the Redding Firefighters voted overwhelmingly against the City’s proposal to take a further 9% pay cut in the form of paying their employee contribution to PERS directly from their checks.

Lonnie Schreiber, Local 1934 President

