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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Support BMH nurses — and demand better from
2 management

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 The hospital demands lower-paid frontline workers make
4 deep concessions to close the hospital’s budget crisis while
5 executives escape accountability

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

7 RICK COWAN asks: “Do the Brattleboro Memorial
8 Hospital (BMH) nurses understand the implications of walking off
9 the job now?”
10 The more correct question Cowan should be asking
11 would be: “Does BMH management understand the implications

12 of failing to bargain in good faith by insisting on draconian
13 takeaways from the nursing and lower-paid staff?"

14 Ask most Windham County folks how they feel about our
15 hospital, Brattleboro Memorial, and they'll say how much they
16 love the nurses, the doctors, and the hard-working staff. None of
17 the nurses wants to "walk off the job"; rather, it is management's
18 unfair demands that are forcing these heroic, essential workers to
19 take a stand.

20 Vermont's own U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders said it like it is
21 in January when he joined the picket line during New York City's
22 nursing strike.

23 "The people of this country are sick and tired of [...] the
24 drug companies ripping us off, the insurance companies ripping
25 us off, and hospital executives getting huge salaries. [...] Don't
26 tell me you can't treat nurses with dignity when you're spending
27 [...] millions of dollars on traveling nurses," he said.

28 "So, the people of New York City, the people of Vermont,
29 the people of America love and appreciate our nurses," Sanders
30 said. "And today we say to those hospitals: Sit down and
31 negotiate a decent contract."

32 * * *

33 MANY OF THE Windham County's 46,000 residents are
34 extremely concerned about the six years of BMH's jaw-dropping
35 financial mismanagement, adding up to a whopping \$14.5
36 million shortfall, according to Vermont's Green Mountain Care
37 Board, which in turn led to the departures of BMH's chief
38 executive officer and chief financial officer.

39 While rural hospitals all across the country are facing
40 structural issues leading many to close down, it is
41 unconscionable that our hospital's disastrous deficits were
42 covered up for so many years.

43 Furthermore, the hospital's management and board of
44 directors have failed to take accountability for such shocking
45 financial incompetence.

46 While management has eliminated six high-paying
47 administrative positions and cancelled bonuses for the very
48 highest earners, the hospital's strategy for digging itself out of the
49 hole includes carving it out of the hides of the much-lower-paid
50 nurses and staff.

51 After spending \$400,000 last year on a union-busting
52 law firm in a failed effort to prevent dietary, custodial, technical,
53 and clerical workers from forming a union, management now has
54 presented a long list of takeaways from nurses, frontline health-
55 care workers, and low-paid workers, including:

- 56 • No wage increases for three years.
- 57 • Cuts to differentials.
- 58 • A 4% reduction of retirement contributions.
- 59 • Forcing spouses off of family insurance (costing those
60 spouses up to a \$1,200 monthly insurance premium) and other
61 cuts to healthcare.
- 62 • Cuts to paid time off.
- 63 • Cuts to union rights.

64 The Brattleboro Federation of Nurses has said that such
65 takeaways would lead to a "hemorrhaging of BMH nurses and
66 staff" to other area hospitals.

67 * * *

68 IT IS IMPORTANT to bear in mind that lower-paid staff
69 currently begin at \$17 per hour, which, for a family of four,
70 comes close to the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Nursing salaries
71 begin at \$25 per hour.

72 Contrast that to the top three executives' salaries, who in
73 2024 were paid between \$259,000 and \$440,000. Why is it that
74 management's "solution" for their shocking, multi-year
75 mismanagement is to claw back money from the lowest-paid
76 workers while leaving the highest-paid executives with such
77 enormous pay packages?

78 And how shortsighted it is for BMH to force a strike,
79 which would incur huge outlays for paying strike-breaking
80 "replacement" nurses. Replacing just one striking nurse can cost

81 a hospital between \$1,600 and \$2,000 per day in wages alone,
82 with significant additional costs for transportation, housing, and
83 meals.

84 Now, multiply that figure by 160 — the number of nurses
85 caring for patients at BMH, nurses who would need to be
86 replaced.

87 Aside from the impact on patient care from replacement
88 nurses' lack of familiarity with BMH, it has been estimated that
89 post-strike burnout can increase permanent staff turnover,
90 resulting in costs between \$37,700 and \$58,400 per replacement
91 nurse.

92 * * *

93 AS BERNIE SAID, "Sit down and negotiate a decent
94 contract."

95 Please write and call the members of BMH's board
96 (bmhvt.org/about/board-of-directors/) and urge them to do what
97 Bernie asks: genuinely support our hospital's incredible staff.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

98 **JANE KATZ FIELD** and **JOHN FIELD** each worked for
99 many years in Brattleboro Memorial Hospital's pediatrics and
100 oncology departments. This piece is a response to a letter
101 published on March 24 in the *Brattleboro Reformer* and in this
102 week's Voices section.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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