

—Slug:.....COMM-0859.opin.view.field  
—Contributor.....John and Jane Katz Field  
—Contributor email.....jane.katz.field@gmail.com  
—For section.....Voices/Viewpoint  
—Format.....Opinions  
—Dateline.....Putney  
—Article Number:.....43411



**Notes from editor (not for publication):**



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 [Original email subject] Submission for Voices as an Op-  
2 Ed

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 In his Letter, Rick Cowan asks: “Do the Brattleboro  
6 Memorial Hospital (BMH) nurses understand the implications of  
7 walking off the job now?”

8 The more correct question Cowan should be asking  
9 would be: “Does BMH management understand the implications  
10 of failing to bargain in good faith by insisting on draconian  
11 takeaways from the nursing and lower-paid staff?”

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

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

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

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

30           \* \* \*

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

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

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

44           While management has eliminated six high-paying  
45 administrative positions and cancelled bonuses for the very  
46 highest earners, the hospital's strategy for digging itself out of the

47 hole includes carving it out of the hides of the much-lower-paid  
48 nurses and staff.

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

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

62 The Brattleboro Federation of Nurses has said that such  
63 takeaways would lead to a “hemorrhaging of BMH nurses and  
64 staff” to other area hospitals.

65 \* \* \*

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

70 Contrast that to the top three executives’ salaries, who in  
71 2024 were paid between \$259,000 and \$440,000. Why is it that  
72 management’s “solution” for their shocking, multi-year  
73 mismanagement is to claw back money from the lowest-paid  
74 workers while leaving the highest-paid executives with such  
75 enormous pay packages?

76 And how shortsighted it is for BMH to force a strike,  
77 which would incur huge outlays for paying strike-breaking  
78 “replacement” nurses. Replacing just one striking nurse can cost  
79 a hospital between \$1,600 and \$2,000 per day in wages alone,  
80 with significant additional costs for transportation, housing, and  
81 meals.

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

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

90 \* \* \*

91 AS BERNIE SAID, "Sit down and negotiate a decent  
92 contract."

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

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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

96 **JANE KATZ FIELD** and **JOHN FIELD** each worked for  
97 many years in Brattleboro Memorial Hospital's pediatrics and  
98 oncology departments.

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

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

99 0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

####BEGIN LINKS####

100

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

###BEGIN VIDEO###

101

###END VIDEO###

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

###BEGIN LOGLINE###

102

###END LOGLINE###