

# The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

Posted on Thu, May 25, 2006

## **JESSE JACKSON JOINS PICKET LINE ACTIVIST APPLAUDS EFFORTS OF SAN JOSE HOSPITAL WORKERS**

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Mercury News

San Jose hospital workers demanding additional staffing and higher pay were joined Wednesday by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who called their efforts the "high moral ground of patient care."

The civil rights leader attended an informational picket line at Good Samaritan Hospital, where throngs of workers in hospital scrubs cheered his call for greater autonomy, living wages, and respect and job security for all employees.

"So often we've found that workers who empty the bedpans and clean the patients and take care of their most private parts, when they get sick they can't afford to lie in the same bed they make up every day," Jackson said. "That's why you have a union -- so you can have collective bargaining for collective dignity."

His appearance was part of a months-long effort by members of SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West to put pressure on HCA, the parent company of Good Samaritan Hospital and Regional Medical Center of San Jose. The union contract covers workers at both hospitals, including certified nursing assistants, surgical technologists, housekeepers, operating room technicians and clerical workers. It expired in April, and bargaining sessions continue.

"We think that we should be able to come to a successful conclusion on negotiations," said hospital representative Leslie Kelsay, who expects no immediate interruption in patient care. As for Jackson's appearance, she said, "I don't see it as influencing the course of negotiations at all."

Kelsay acknowledged the event was likely very "encouraging" for union members, who are fighting to keep their existing health insurance, which they say management has proposed to decrease.

Workers also want to have a voice in staffing levels, and they criticized HCA officials Wednesday for providing care to fewer low-income patients than in the past.

In 2004, HCA closed another hospital it owned, San Jose Medical Center, which catered primarily to poor people living downtown. Regional Medical Center was supposed to absorb many of those patients, but doctors and other hospital workers say that hasn't been the case -- especially since Regional announced in 2004 it would no longer provide elective care to most patients with Medi-Cal, the state's health insurance program for the poor and disabled.

"It's ironic this place is called Good Samaritan," said the Rev. Carol Been, director of the Interfaith Council for Religion, Race, Economy and Social Justice in San Jose. "We're really concerned hospitals are not hospitable in our area."

Both sides will be back at the bargaining table next week, and negotiations are scheduled for June.

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