STATEMENT ON ANNOUNCED STRIKE BY AFSCME PATIENT CARE AND SERVICE WORKERS AT UC

Dwaine Duckett, the University of California's vice president for systemwide human resources and programs, issued the following statement today (Nov. 8, 2013) regarding an announced strike by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) at UC:

We are very disappointed that AFSCME's leadership has asked its members to strike for a second time in seven months, once again putting patient care in the middle of a labor contract dispute. The union should not use our patients and students as bargaining chips.

When she took office in late September, UC President Janet Napolitano invited local and national AFSCME leaders to meet with her. She listened to their concerns and emphasized that one of her top priorities was to get both sides back to the bargaining table and reach an agreement.

UC and AFSCME returned to the bargaining table for several days this week and resumed negotiations regarding contracts for more than 21,000 patient care technical workers and service workers. The University showed flexibility and responsiveness to the union’s concerns, proposing several packages that included significant movement on many of the key issues raised by the union, including wages, pensions and health care benefits. AFSCME rejected all of these offers.

AFSCME is alleging that UC intimidated employees during the union’s May strike at the medical centers, and the union has filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). PERB has not determined there was any wrongdoing by the University. They are simply required to hold hearings on these allegations.

The fact is that UC asked AFSCME-represented employees if they planned to come to work, as is our normal procedure, so we could adjust staffing as needed and ensure we could still care for our patients during the strike. PERB has agreed to hold a hearing to determine whether AFSCME’s complaint is valid, but has not issued a ruling or held the hearing yet.
The University has been negotiating in good faith with AFSCME for more than a year. UC implemented its last offer for patient care workers in July, and for service workers in September. These included wage increases, along with the good benefits and fair retirement packages all UC employees enjoy. We have done everything we can to end the cycle of conflict and dysfunction. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, there has been no reciprocation on AFSCME’s part, and we are still far from an agreement.

Given the hundreds of millions of dollars in state funding cuts UC has absorbed over the past five years, we must be fiscally prudent. University leaders have to be mindful that large, programmatic increases in pay and benefits for these workers drive up the cost of services they provide. We cannot – and will not – balance AFSCME’s demands on the backs of our students and patients.

We urge the union’s leadership to put patients and students first, continue bargaining with UC and show more flexibility, as the University has, so we can come to an agreement as soon as possible that’s fair for all employees.

We deeply regret the California Nurses Association’s decision to ask its members to strike in sympathy with AFSCME. We do not believe that CNA’s participation in another union’s strike while it is still bargaining with UC is in our patients’ or the public’s best interest. We have had very productive contract talks with CNA as recently as this past week, and will continue to work toward a settlement, but a sympathy strike sets up a very poor, unproductive dynamic.