



# NEWS

SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **HARTFORD OFFICE CLEANERS REJECT CONTRACT PROPOSALS**

Hartford, CT – Local 32BJ rejected cleaning companies’ contract proposals because they fall short of covering health care costs and basic raises for Hartford office cleaners, who clean more than 90 percent of downtown Hartford’s large commercial office space. The cleaning contractors put forth the proposals at yesterday’s bargaining session, the third meeting of the two sides. Negotiations for a new contract began on October 23, 2007.

“At a time when commercial vacancy rates in Connecticut’s capital have been on a steady decline, there’s no reason the hard-working office cleaners who are already struggling to get by should not be provided basic benefits and raises,” said Kurt Westby, Local 32BJ Connecticut Director.

According to Cushman & Wakefield’s market report, demand for office space in the Hartford area is expected to continue improving. Over the past year, commercial vacancy rates in the central business district have been steadily declining, putting them at their lowest point in the last two years.

“Hartford office cleaners simply cannot afford to live in a state as expensive as Connecticut without a decent raise,” said Westby. “And anything less than fully employer-paid health care could push these cleaners into the growing ranks of the uninsured.”

A recent report from The Commonwealth Fund confirmed that low-income workers are having an increasingly difficult time for health care costs. This is especially true for Connecticut’s low wage workers, like office cleaners, who are experiencing the biggest real wage decrease in the country since 2001, according to the 2007 State of Working Connecticut report. Local expenses have also been on the rise with housing, public transportation and grocery prices all increasing by eight to fifteen per cent in the past two years, the cost of gas increasing by 57 percent and the cost of electricity by more than 40 percent.

“I live outside the city to try to save money,” said Ciro Gutierrez, a cleaner in Hartford. “But I’m still having trouble making ends meet.”

Ensuring fully employer-paid family health insurance and securing a real wage gain that exceeds the inflation rate are top priorities for the new union contract. The current contract will expire on December 31, 2007, at which time more than 1,800 property service workers in Hartford could go on strike if an agreement is not reached. Local 32BJ members work for cleaning contractors at the United Technology Corporation building, the Aetna building, the Hartford Insurance Group building, the Traveler’s building, the Signa building and the Citigroup building.

With more than 85,000 members in six states and Washington, DC, including more than 4,500 in Connecticut, Local 32BJ is the largest property services union in the country.

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