

## Open Letter to the Residents of Alaska

It is with regret that the employees of the State of Alaska announce that it appears they will be forced to go out on strike in the very near future.

They do not want a strike. They have been forced into this position by the actions of Governor Steve Cowper.

The issue is not one of wages and benefits as the governor's office would have the public believe. The issue is the destruction of collective bargaining in Alaska. The employees believe it is crucial that all Alaskans know this. During the last year of Governor Sheffield's administration, employees gave up a negotiated wage increase in order to help the state through a fiscal crisis. They took leave without pay and volunteered for a four-day work week. All this was done voluntarily to help the state through rough times and done willingly.

Therefore, it bears repeating that the strike is not contemplated in order to increase the wages and benefits of state employees. It is to protect and save the collective bargaining process.

Before and during negotiations at the bargaining table with the various labor organizations, Governor Cowper announced that he wanted a 15% cut — 10% this year, and an additional 5% next year. Since that initial announcement his demands have increased.

Historically, both sides meet at the bargaining table, submit their proposals to each other and the rest is compromise on both sides until they can reach a mutual agreement. It is against all ethics of good faith bargaining for the governor to announce what he expects before negotiations have begun. This approach can only mean that he does not respect the process and even more important that he is out to destroy collective bargaining.

State employees believe strongly that they cannot allow this to happen. Collective bargaining was implemented in 1972 after a long uphill struggle. It has worked up until now. Governor Cowper has announced that he will not back down on his stance. Probably the most disturbing factor is that he won't even discuss his stance with labor officials.

The concern voiced by the majority of state employees is that a strike will create hardships for Alaskan residents. Often the public is not aware that the employees truly take pride in the work they do and the quality of the services that are available to the public.

They constantly strive not to do anything that will detract from that quality. Now they are faced with cutting off these services to the public, which is in direct conflict with their goal of providing constant and excellent service to their fellow Alaskans.

They deeply regret the adverse effects that a strike will have on Alaskan residents.

The solution is in Governor Steve Cowper's hands. He undoubtedly believes that any sign of compromise on his part will be a sign of weakness. State employees believe that it will be a show of strength if he can bring himself to compromise through negotiations — not only on behalf of the employees who work for him but for the well-being of all Alaskans. State employees have already compromised at the bargaining table. However, bargaining is a two-way street. Evidently the governor is not willing to take even one step down that street.

State employees urge the public to seek out the facts. Find out what this impending strike really represents. If they will do this, the employees believe that the public can help avert a strike by demanding that Governor Cowper adhere to the precepts of collective bargaining.

Otherwise, employees do not have a choice. They will strike with acute mingivings because of the side effects that will impact the public. Their job is to serve the public... and this is what they want to do above all else — but they cannot lose collective bargaining because their governor will not recognize their right to bargain in good faith.

**Alaska Public Employees Association**  
**Public Employees Local 71 (AFL-CIO)**  
**Confidential Employees Association**  
**Centralized Correspondence Study Education Association**  
**Public Safety Employees Association**



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