



## THE ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER REGION

Monday, July 29, 2013

**Monday, July 29, 2013**[✉ E-mail this article](#)

Number of matches found: 1

Date:8/3/2012 **Hodges: Independent nurses eager to put union experiment behind them**

McALLEN, August 27 - On July 11, nurses at the Rio Grande Regional Hospital voted to decertify their agreement to be represented by a union.

This stopped the contract process with the National Nurses Organizing Committee (NNOC), a California-based branch of the National Nurses United Union. Rio Grande Regional Hospital is one of three South Texas HCA hospitals that are currently in the negotiation phase with this union.

In a letter to the editor, the local Independent Nurses Organization claims that over the past two years, hospital staff has "been under siege by two huge Labor Unions." Because of a very strict neutrality agreement, the hospital management staff was not and currently is not allowed to answer questions or give their opinions about the unions even to their own employees.

Also because of this neutrality agreement, the hospital administration staff was not allowed to structure or limit access by the union organizers. Consequently, I am told, union representatives were given liberal access to the staff even in patient care areas and in the opinion of many nurses and other healthcare professionals, this union presence caused a destructive distraction from patient care and even created a hostile work environment in many cases.

In an effort to persuade the RGRH nursing staff to take a second look at the unions and consider a decertification election, a local group of independent nurses headed a campaign to reclaim the hospital from the California union.

I recently had the opportunity to interview Ms. Carina Hunt, a volunteer "union-disorganizer" who helped to guide and advise the local Independent coalition. Ms. Hunt is a practicing nurse and a labor relations consultant who currently lives in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and has made it a personal mission to help her nursing colleagues who want to keep unions out of their hospitals or decertify once the unions have taken over a facility. She has worked through many of the difficult challenges faced by nurses in unionized hospitals in California and regularly consults with nurses across the country. On a volunteer basis, she agreed to help the nurses at Rio Grande Regional Hospital.

The decertification campaign was successful and the nurses were able to organize and campaign for change in such a short period of time that even Ms. Hunt was amazed at what the local nurses accomplished. It was an exceptional win for independents across the profession and the local campaign has received national recognition.

In fact, the local Independent nurses led by many hard working and devoted individuals were so swift and successful in their push to reclaim their work place, the NNOC is trying to appeal the local decertification decision. The union claims Ms. Hunt was working for the hospital, which would be a breach of their neutrality agreement. Ms. Hunt, along with the nursing staff and administration, denies any validity to this accusation. A closed hearing is scheduled this week to address these grievances.

## HOME

[Border News](#)[News in Brief](#)[Editorial](#)[Letters](#)[Public Notices](#)

## Inside

[Lead Clips](#)[Border News Clips](#)[State News Clips](#)[National News Clips](#)[Mexico News Clips](#)

## Columns

[Politics](#)[Border Business](#)[Border Life](#)[Guest Column](#)[Colonias](#)[Mexico Report](#)[Veteran's Voice](#)[Cultura](#)[Public Ed](#)[Healthcare](#)[Green Guardian](#)[Higher Ed](#)[Non Profits](#)

## Featured

[En Espanol](#)[Bulletin Board](#)[ADVERTISE](#)[EMPLOYMENT](#)

I also had the opportunity to interview Ms. Victoria Glass, one of the local leaders in this campaign. Ms. Glass is a Registered Nurse and leader in the local Independent Nurses organization. She shared with me some of the issues that made a difference to the RGRH nursing staff. Ms. Glass along with Ms. Hunt and several other nursing leaders were able to organize and educate the staff on many issues where they may have been misled by the unions. The Independent Nurses organization focused on ten major points of contention:

- 1) The union's insistence on forcing every department to run the same way regardless of their specialties or variations in circumstances.
- 2) They pointed out that the union negotiated raises were, in many cases, less than what the facility had been giving each year as a policy. (I was recently told SEIU actually caused some pay cuts in other hospital departments at RGRH)
- 3) They noted that no nurse was allowed to review the union contract or vote on whether to accept the contract unless they signed a membership and dues deduction authorization card FIRST.
- 4) They also focused on the amount of the union dues and how the money is distributed. For example, the union officers were paid in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000 a year for the last several years. Ms. Glass and Ms. Hunt made a compelling case showing realistic projections of how much an individual nurse would have at the end of 5 years if she took the same amount spent on dues and invested the money in a solid mutual fund, for HERSELF instead of enriching the union executives. (approximately \$250,000 will leave the Valley in dues each year if the union stays)
- 5) They exposed several local nurses who had been paid large sums of money by the union to organize the other nurses. For example, one Labor and Delivery nurse was paid \$10,929 and another nurse in 2 East was paid \$19,624.
- 6) They highlighted the union's support of partial birth abortions as discussed during the Senate Health and Human Services Committee before the vote of Senate Bill 1827 back in the year 2000.
- 7) They discussed the fact that this family of unions brings in about 40 million dollars a year and they award approximately \$20,000 in total scholarships each year.
- 8) They pointed out many of the false and misleading promises the union representatives were making about nurse to patient ratios.
- 9) The union employees were also using scare tactics about Texas being a "right to work" state, saying that anyone can be fired for any reason or for no reason at all. In reality, corporate rules and regulations along with the requirements of un-employment insurance are very specific and extensive and are designed to protect the employee and employer.
- 10) Many nurses didn't realize that the union placed a provision in the contract stating that if a member nurse doesn't pay his/her union dues, the union could press for their termination of employment.

And the battle rages on! Even though on July 11, the nurses of the Rio Grande Regional Hospital handily won their decertification vote, the union is challenging their decision with more legal wrangling and intimidation. There will be a hearing on the issue soon. The public is welcome to attend and show its support for local nurses. Think about who wins if the Union controls our hospitals. Not the patients....Not the nurses....my guess is the UNIONS!

*Cherie Hodges writes a regular guest column for the Guardian, usually on health care issues.*

---

[✉ E-mail this article](#)

---

© Copyright of the Rio Grande Guardian,  
www.riograndeguardian.com. Publisher Amada Oliva; All Rights Reserved

---

[About Us](#) | [Contact](#) | [Reprints](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms](#)

© 2013 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
Web page and Content Management System © by [TWRI](#) All Rights Reserved  
Powered by [StoryPage](#) © TWRI

[↑ Top](#)