

Beware the “Simple” Question, They’re Usually Anything But

un•ion *n.* **1.a.** The act of uniting or the state of being united. **b.** A combination so formed, especially an alliance or confederation of people, parties, or political entities for mutual interest or benefit. **2.** *Mathematics.* A set, every member of which is an element of one or another of two or more given sets. **3.** Agreement or harmony resulting from the uniting of individuals;

If ever there was a time when I really, really wished I had that ever-elusive magic wand it is now as we face the issue presently before us. As many have pointed out, the choice we are being asked to make leaves a lot of very important questions unanswered. And as our most senior and most knowledgeable labor relations staff, Ed Purcell, said to me in one of our telephone conversations on the issue, “a good case can be made for either option.” If only I had that damn wand, I would wave it and get all our questions answered and have our future revealed to us so that we would know for sure the consequences of whatever action we take as a union.

But since I do not have and probably never will get my hands on that wand, I can only deal with the information that has been presented to me according to my personal thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. In short, I can only approach this question as a single, solitary person making a personal decision on a matter that is anything but.

As I consider this issue and all the unanswered questions and permutations of possible repercussions of any decision I make, I can’t help but think of a young woman I know. When I think of this young woman she is sitting at a table in a room in a hospital. Across from the young woman sit two or three doctors who have just told the young woman that her child has a disease that will certainly kill the child if she did not agree to allow the doctors to perform an immediate blood transfusion on the child, which in and of itself could also possibly kill the child. And even after the blood transfusion, assuming the child survived, the doctors said the child would have to go through months, perhaps years of hospitalization and medical treatments. And even with all of that, the doctors told the young woman that none of it would guarantee that her child would live to see its teens let alone adulthood.

As I think of this young woman and what she faced at that table and in that hospital, I’m sure that many would say that her course of action should be obvious: Do what the doctors say and get your child treated! As chance would have it, however, this particular young woman is also of a religious faith that did not believe in blood transfusions in particular and much of medical science in general. What the young woman was being asked to consider and do for her child flew in the face of everything she had been taught, learned and believed in her life. The “simple” medical decision was difficult enough, but this added dimension made her decision more difficult than anything I have ever had to face in my own life, and my life has certainly been anything but a bed of roses. A very real, pressing clock was ticking for the young

woman, and whatever decision she made or action she took would certainly live with her for the rest of her life. In the end the young woman approved the blood transfusion for her child as well as all the medical treatments that the doctors told her would be necessary. But despite the best efforts of the doctors and all the medical procedures and advances of medicine that they were able to bring to bear, the young woman's child died anyway, just as the doctors warned he might.

I wish I could honestly say that I know what went through the heart and mind of that young woman as she made the decision to go against her religion and everything she believed in life prior to the day that she found herself sitting at that table in that hospital. Of course, that's just not possible. But when I think of that young woman now I have a personal need to believe that she knows she made the best possible decision she could have at the time. And while she may never know and may be forever haunted by the question of whether her decision bought her another day, or week, or no additional time at all with her child, she can at least know that she did everything available to her and within her power that she could possibly do when she had the chance to do it.

So what does any of this have to do with my struggles regarding the "simple" question of voting to go to furloughs or not? Maybe everything, maybe nothing. But when we as an organization, as APC, get to the other side of this very important issue, which surely we will, I want to be able to say that when I had the chance I did everything I could to help save the jobs of as many of my APC sisters and brothers as possible. And especially during these hard economic times, when I look in the mirror every morning after whatever decision the membership makes, I don't want to be looking into the face of a person who willingly and knowingly consigned a single Unit 4 member to unemployment, let alone 329 and quite possibly more.

I support and will be voting for the CSU's furlough proposal.