

# Who is the University of California strike mediator, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg?

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*To get involved with the University of California Rank-and-File Strike Committee, email [ucstrikerfc@gmail.com](mailto:ucstrikerfc@gmail.com).*

Five weeks ago, a powerful strike by 48,000 academic workers began at the University of California (UC), the largest strike at a university system in US history. The struggle for livable wages under the weight of skyrocketing inflation is an expression of a larger desire by the working class to fight against decades of attacks on their standard of living. The walkout has pitted academic and grad student workers in a direct confrontation with the capitalist Democratic Party, which dominates the UC administration and California state government.

The strike has reached a critical turning point. On Friday, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2865 and Student Researchers United (SRU)-UAW announced they had reached tentative agreements with UC administrators, with voting by 36,000 workers set to take place next week. A separate deal covering 12,000 post-doctoral employees and researchers, under UAW Local 5810, was pushed through earlier in December.

The tentative agreements, brokered by long-time Democratic Party operative and Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg, come just as the strike is poised to have its most significant impact on grading for the semester and the university system's operations.

Based on the little information which UAW officials have released thus far, it is clear that the deal is a complete sellout of the strikers' demands for major pay increases to meet the surging cost of living.

The deal would place the majority of grad workers—who live in some of the most expensive cities in the world—at \$34,000 annually in October 2024, far below workers' demands and grossly inadequate to pay for housing and basic necessities. The agreement contains no Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) raises to protect against inflation, a demand the UAW bargaining team dropped shortly into the strike, provoking widespread outrage among strikers. The contract also substantially retreats on demands related to child care support, dependent health care, and language supporting workers with disabilities.

The regressive character of the contract proposal further exposes the role of the UAW bureaucracy—which is intimately tied to the Democratic Party—and explodes its presentation of Darrell Steinberg as a “neutral” arbiter. Bringing Steinberg into the negotiations was a voluntary move by the UAW apparatus, which

agreed to it behind the backs of the rank and file. The agreement to use mediation also stipulated that rank-and-file strikers be excluded from negotiations and that all bargaining take place behind closed doors.

Striking UC workers should organize quickly to build up support for the largest possible “no” vote on the tentative agreement—which would leave them deeply impoverished and struggling to meet their daily needs for years to come—and to join and build the University of California Rank-and-File Strike Committee. But in order for the struggle to be carried forward and succeed, striking workers must take careful stock of the political and class forces they confront.

## Who is Darrell Steinberg?

The Democratic Party-run UC Board of Regents and UAW bureaucracy tapped Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steven Steinberg, a long-time Democratic Party politician, to step in as mediator in order to accelerate their attempts to push through concessionary contracts which leave unchallenged the corporate and financial interests who run the UC system.

Beyond the immediate financial considerations at UC itself, both the Democratic Party and the UAW bureaucracy are terrified that the longer the strike continues, the greater the possibility that it will serve as a catalyst for a much broader rebellion by workers for higher wages.

Handpicked as mediator by Democratic California Gavin Newsom, Steinberg is a multi-millionaire politician and attorney who represents and serves the capitalist elite, including the UC Regents themselves, with whom he has close ties. But these ties have not been disclosed by the UAW apparatus, nor has Steinberg recused himself as a clearly biased party.

Steinberg began climbing up the Democratic Party ladder as a member of the Sacramento City Council from 1992-1998 and then served on the California State Assembly from 1998-2004. Between 2004 and 2006 he served as assemblyman in California's 9th District, and then would serve 2006-2008 in California state Senate's 6th District. He would then become President pro

Tempore of the California State Senate from 2008 to 2014, and became mayor of Sacramento, the California state capital, in 2016, continuing in that position up to the present.

Steinberg's long service to the Democratic Party, California governor and UC Regent Gavin Newsom, and former regent and Governor Jerry Brown make him the perfect selection for UC. While the UAW has painted Steinberg as impartial, even a cursory review of his political and financial ties reveals blatant conflicts of interests.

Steinberg is CEO of the Steinberg Institute, a public policy institute centered on mental health and substance abuse. Among the high-ranking business executives on the Steinberg Institute's board is UC Regent **Richard Leib**, the current chair of the Board of Regents—in other words, the top official that UC workers are locked in a struggle against.

Leib was appointed regent by former California Governor Jerry Brown in 2018. Leib previously served as a member of the Board of Governors of California Community Colleges from 1999-2005 and worked on legislative staffs in federal and state government.

Leib is not the only person tied to UC on the board of the Steinberg Institute. **David Beier**, another Institute board member, also serves on the board of UC San Francisco's Benioff Children's Hospitals. Another Institute board member, **Anne Bakar**, is listed as a trustee of the UC Berkeley Foundation, and also serves in an advisory role at the UC Berkeley School of Public Health.

The conflicts of interest do not end with the UC officials on Steinberg's board. Steinberg himself sits on UC Davis Chancellor David May's Board of Advisors, along with other elites, including John S. Watson, the CEO of Chevron Corporation, Kathy Sowa, the now retired former Bank of America Senior Vice President, and Vivek Ranadivé, the owner of the Sacramento Kings.

### Sacramento's budget-cutter

As mayor of Sacramento, Steinberg has enacted significant austerity measures, particularly in cuts to public education. This includes over \$70 million in budget cuts to Sacramento County public education that he personally oversaw in 2019. Significantly, he denounced special education funding as a burden, noting that the Sacramento County Unified School District (SCUSD) needs to "really reduce the cost curve around special education. You look at the numbers and special education is driving a significant part of the deficit." Teachers protested the savage cuts by walking off the job in protest in April 2019.

It must also be taken as a warning that Steinberg functioned as mediator in the 2017 contract between the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and SCUSD, which slashed health care benefits. Teachers were cynically told the cuts were needed as the only way to fund the hiring of nurses, counselors, and librarians, and provide funding for additional student programs.

Steinberg has overseen the massive of growth of inequality and poverty in Sacramento, with the county having a poverty rate of

nearly 15 percent, according to the US Census. According to [welfareinfo.org](http://welfareinfo.org), the poverty rate in Sacramento, California is 27.64 percent higher than the California average. Homelessness in Sacramento County has recently grown from 5,561 to 9,278, unhoused individuals, according to the 2022 Homeless Point-In-Time Count.

It is not only Steinberg, but also Governor Newsom and the entire Democratic Party more broadly who oversee the vast gulf between rich and poor, the homeless crisis and lack of affordable housing, the attacks on public education, the expansive prison system, the immigration prisons and mass deportations in the state. They have done so with the help of the corporatist trade union bureaucracies, which are themselves among their highest campaign donors.

In 2010, Steinberg's five largest contributors were from labor union bureaucrats at Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters (\$15,600), the California Building Industry Association (\$15,172), Operating Engineers Local 3 (\$12,000), Electrical Workers Local 11 (\$8,400), and the State Building & Construction Trades Council Of California (\$8,400). As in all union donations to politicians, the rank and file have no effective say over how their dues money is dispensed.

Steinberg has been falsely mythologized as a friend of the working class who helped settle the two-month long open-ended strike of mental health workers in Northern California represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) against the healthcare giant Kaiser Permanente. Steinberg had previously served as the mediator between the NUHW and Kaiser in 2015, when he helped reach a sellout agreement that led to the poor conditions that led to the 2022 strike.

But the Kaiser mental health workers contract he brokered should be taken as a warning. The strike was centered around the desperate need to hire and retain more health care providers to meet patient demands. The agreement which Steinberg helped impose, however, offered a 13 percent pay increase over four years, far below inflation, which was 8.2 percent in 2022 alone.

Not only did the agreement result in a significant cut in real pay; the contract included nothing binding Kaiser to any serious alleviation of staffing shortages.



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