



8515 Georgia Ave.
Suite 600
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-628-5118 / fax 301-628-5347

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 12, 2007

CONTACT: Ocie Helton, 304-890-0927
web page: www.UANNurse.org

Nurses Protest Violent Tactics against Picketers
Sunday Car Fire Sabotage Is Latest Attack on Striking Nurses

Beckley, WV – The nearly 700 striking nurses at Appalachian Regional Health Care (ARH), represented by the Kentucky and West Virginia Nurses Associations/United American Nurses, AFL-CIO, are speaking out to call public attention to the underhanded and violent tactics exhibited against them by the hospital during their strike, which began Oct. 1. ARH has escalated its intimidation of striking nurses from hired security guards on the picket lines who routinely harass nurses to video surveillance of striking nurses to, it now appears, orchestrating the burning of the car of one of the union staff on hand to assist the nurses.

A union representative left the picket line at the Beckley, WV, ARH facility Sunday night for his car and discovered after driving a short distance that he had a flat tire. He returned to the picket line for assistance, and when he and others returned to his car, they found it ablaze with brush that had been doused in flammable liquid. Attempts to report the incident to police were met with a response that the department was closed for the Veterans Day holiday and that the detective was not available. Nurses are demanding the mayor provide more protection for the RNs on the line—protection the police so far have not provided.

“We are stunned. Violent, threatening actions like this are beyond the pale,” said Ocie Helton, RN, who is the local president of the West Virginia Nurses Association union at Beckley-ARH. “Registered nurses who are out on this picket line to stand up for patient care are being repaid with threats to our lives. What if next time someone is in the car that is set on fire? Working women and men are literally under attack in Beckley and risking our lives to speak out for our patients.

“The word on the picket line is that this must have been the work of someone associated with ARH. We don’t have evidence yet that that’s the case, but we call on the police to make a full investigation of this and prosecute whoever the guilty party is to the fullest extent of the law. We also call on ARH to disavow this kind of criminal behavior and get rid of security forces that are harassing nurses on the picket lines.”

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The United American Nurses, AFL-CIO, the collective bargaining affiliate of the American Nurses Association, is the nation's largest RN union, representing more than 115,000 nurses and including 27 state nurses associations or collective bargaining program affiliates.