

BERNARD SANDERS

VERMONT

COMMITTEES:

BUDGET, CHAIR

ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

332 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-5141

1 CHURCH STREET, SUITE 300
BURLINGTON, VT 05401
(802) 862-0697
1 (800) 339-9834

www.sanders.senate.gov

January 20, 2022

W. Rodney McMullen
Chairman and CEO, Kroger
1014 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Dear Mr. McMullen:

I write to express my strong support for over 8,000 United Food and Commercial (UFCW) Local 7 workers at 78 Kroger-owned King Sooper grocery stores in Colorado who are on strike.

These workers are fighting for increased wages, health and disability benefit improvements, and an end to the “two-tier” structure for vacation and holidays. Given that over 1,000 Local 7 King Sooper employees have contracted COVID-19 and five have passed away and the tragic shooting at a Boulder location nearly one year ago, workers are also calling for increased workplace health and safety protocols.

After speaking with your workers, my understanding is that Kroger’s last offer would provide workers an insulting raise of as little as 13 cents per hour, make substantial cuts to healthcare benefits, give preference to gig workers, and require workers to work between departments—reducing hours and overtime earnings. This unacceptable offer would also require that the contract include an unfair, anticompetitive “favored employer” clause, which would reduce wages and benefits for workers if local contracts for other grocers are less generous. In total, your workers in Colorado could see their wages cut by as much as \$3.34 an hour after factoring in cuts to overtime and other benefits.

Mr. McMullen: During the pandemic, you received a \$6.4 million increase in total compensation (a 45 percent pay raise) and now make over \$20 million. Your company is making record breaking profits that are expected to exceed \$4 billion last year alone. Kroger has provided over \$1.5 billion in stock buybacks and dividends to enrich wealthy shareholders.

Meanwhile, according to an internal memo from your company in 2018, many of the workers at Kroger live in poverty and are forced to rely on food stamps and other forms of public assistance subsidized by middle class taxpayers. A recent report shows that 14 percent of Kroger employees are or have been homeless within the past year and 68 percent are food insecure.

This is precisely the type of corporate greed that the American people are sick and tired of.

Mr. McMullen: If Kroger can afford to pay you over \$20 million and can afford to hand out \$1.5 billion in stock buybacks and dividends for its wealthy shareholders, it can afford to provide grocery store workers – the true heroes and heroines of this pandemic – good wages, good benefits, safe working conditions and reliable work schedules.

Your workers in Colorado tell me they have worked hard and been loyal to your company. Some have worked for your stores for 15 or 20 years and earn less than \$20 per hour.

It is time for Kroger to go back to the negotiating table and reach an agreement with the union that is fair and that treats grocery store workers with the respect and the dignity that they deserve.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator