

## As I See It: We need to stand up for Stop & Shop workers

By Deb Goldberg

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With thousands of Stop & Shop workers in Massachusetts voting overwhelmingly to authorize a strike against their employer, I have been thinking a lot about families. My own family and the families of the workers who are willing to put it all on the line to stand up for a better life.

My family, led by my grandfather Sidney Rabb, were the original founders of Stop & Shop. We always believed that the workers who helped make the business a success deserved good wages and benefits for themselves and their families.

With more than 100 years since Stop & Shop began, I am now thinking about the families of the current Stop & Shop workers, who are facing cuts from the company to their health care benefits and take-home pay —cuts that are so dire, many feel their only recourse is to stand up and fight for a better life. Today, I see all that we built and believed in are being put in jeopardy because of Ahold Delhaize, the current parent company of Stop & Shop.

The three-year contract for over 30,000 Stop & Shop workers in New England, members of United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) local unions 328, 371, 1445, 1459, and 919, expired in February, and instead of offering increases that reflect how the company values its hard-working employees, Ahold Delhaize and Stop & Shop have only proposed aggressive slashes to wages, health care, and retirement security.

Last year, Ahold Delhaize saw \$74 billion in net sales, marking a strong year of growth and profit, and this year, the company authorized over \$1 billion in stock buybacks. Despite this success, Ahold Delhaize and Stop & Shop refuse to demonstrate their value for the very workers who helped them build that success.

According to data from the U.S. Bureau, Massachusetts ranks number two in the top five states, along with Rhode Island, Vermont, and New Hampshire, which have seen a decline of middle class households over the last 20 years. And now Ahold Delhaize and Stop & Shop are trying to pull the rug out from under thousands of middle class families.

Stop & Shop workers know this fight is bigger than just Massachusetts and New England. They share my family's values that hard work should be rewarded, and protecting these values is essential to building an economy that works for everyone. That is why we all must stand with Stop & Shop workers in this fight.

My family believed that our Stop & Shop workers were an essential part of the Massachusetts middle class. Their hard work strengthened not only Stop & Shop's bottom line, but the local economy across New England. I urge Stop & Shop to recognize and value their hard-working employees, who have made this company one of the top supermarket operators in the nation.

Please join me in standing with these brave women and men. Ahold Delhaize and Stop & Shop must put people before corporate greed, and respect and invest in the thousands of people who have worked so hard to make Stop & Shop a successful company. Anything less is simply misguided and wrong for these families, our middle class, and our state's economy.

- Deb Goldberg is the state treasurer of Massachusetts