WRITERS GUILD BOARD RECOMMENDS TERMS OF NEW CONTRACT AND ENDING STRIKE

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) Negotiating Committee “unanimously and unconditionally” recommends the terms of a proposed contract with studios and networks to the WGA West Board and the WGA East Council, and both bodies in turn voted unanimously to recommend it, according to the WGAW President, Patric M. Verrone. While ratification will take place “over the next few weeks,” members are also asked to vote on whether to end the three-month strike immediately and return to work during the ratification process.

If ratified, the contract, which replaces one that expired October 31, 2007, would run from “resumption of work” through May 1, 2011. Most minimum compensation rates would rise by 3.5 percent per year, although network prime time rates and daytime serial script fees would increase 3 percent per year. The tentative pact recognizes the WGA as the exclusive bargaining representative for writing for new media, such as the Internet or cellular phones. It also sets out compensation for new media programs and details WGA members’ ownership rights to material written for new media, if it is then used on traditional media, such as television or film. The agreement also spells out residual rates for Internet material and rates for “streaming” on new media of programs initially made for film and television.

The proposed contract calls for the contribution rate to the WGA health fund to continue at the previous rate of 8.5 percent through September 30, 2008, when it will drop to 8 percent through March 31, 2009, and then return to 8.5 percent for the remainder of the agreement period. Other provisions call for an increase in made-for-pay television residuals to $3,500 from $3,000 for a half-hour program, and from $5,000 to $6,000 for an hour program.