



October 30, 2019

Honourable Scott Moe
Room 226, 2405 Legislative Drive
Regina SK, S4S 0B3

Dear Premier Moe:

RE: A New Deal with Health Providers

On October 22, the day after the federal election, you issued an open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau titled "A New Deal with Canada".

In it, you issued an urgent challenge to the Prime Minister to make good on his commitments to better address the needs and concerns of Saskatchewan people.

In that same spirit, I issue this urgent challenge to you: **be fair to those who care.**

Over the past several years, your government, through the health sector employers it mandates and funds, has neglected the basic needs of thousands of workers who provide the vast majority of front-line health care services to Saskatchewan people. This strategy has resulted in chronic understaffing in the health care sector, to the detriment of patients, clients and residents. I ask you now to put care first. In ratification votes held this spring in the former Saskatoon, Five Hills, Cypress and Heartland Health regions, SEIU-West's 12,000 members soundly rejected the employer's offer of 0%/0%/1%/2%/2%. In bargaining since then, the employer, with direction from the Ministry of Health, has stubbornly refused to budge from this offer.

The sense of frustration and alienation among our members is now greater than it has been at any point since 2008, when the Government of Saskatchewan introduced essential services legislation which seriously undermined bargaining rights in the public sector—legislation later struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional.

In the Throne Speech, your government committed "to invest in important government services that provide a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people." Those are pretty words, but we need action, not words.

It's time, Mr. Premier, for a **new deal with SEIU-West health care providers.**

The Throne Speech mentions a new plan for growth, but says little about planning for the effects of growth. If, as promised, Saskatchewan's population grows to 1.4 million by 2030, its health care needs will grow as well. Do you have a plan to attract and retain the additional health providers needed to meet the growing health care needs of this larger population? Shouldn't we begin working on that plan now?

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The speech boasts of facilities built and professionals hired, but doesn't even acknowledge the need for additional health care providers in order to run these facilities. It ignores a basic fact: health care in Saskatchewan, including long-term care and home care, **depends on the hard work of tens of thousands of workers who are not physicians or registered nurses.** The wages of these workers have not kept pace with the rising cost of living. The intransigent bargaining mandate directed to the employers by your Ministry of Health offers current and prospective health care providers no hope that this will change. It is a glaring example of the lack of institutional, financial, educational and emotional support currently faced by health care provider employees. They have consistently expressed to me their overwhelming frustration at being asked by your government to take zeroes, particular when Members of the Legislative Assembly (whose pay has increased by more than 50% since 2007) are not being asked to do the same.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority's list of "hard to recruit" positions is growing. Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon--the province's major tertiary care centre, and a critical resource for the adjacent Children's Hospital—is reporting dangerous levels of overcrowding and understaffing. Many of our rural units report that the Employer simply cannot recruit Continuing Care Assistants to care for residents which leads to a fear of bed closures. How do you propose to recruit and retain health providers to work in understaffed facilities that are experiencing shockingly high rates of workplace injury and violence?

Premier Moe, if you are serious about providing a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people, here is what you could do right away:

1. Re-evaluate the staffing levels in the health care system (acute, long-term care, homecare and community services) and look at investing more in front-line staff to provide the quality hands-on care needed;
2. For example, through your Health Minister, **direct those bargaining on behalf of the Saskatchewan Health Authority that they are no longer bound by the mandate containing zeroes**, and urge them to bring to the table a more innovative offer that better meets the needs of our members who are health care providers to ensure a timely address to ongoing retention and recruitment challenges.

I am ready to meet with you at any time to discuss how we can move forward together on these issues. You have indicated that you are Standing Up for Saskatchewan. Our members are ready for you to demonstrate your commitment.

Sincerely,



Barbara Cape
President
SEIU-West