

## ***Let's Take the Politics out of COVID***

**Regina** – Today the Government of Saskatchewan announced they were introducing new public health measures to address Saskatchewan's rising number of COVID cases. The measures are a patchwork of weak rules driven more by the political needs of the Sask Party than by science or the experiences of front line health providers.

The most notable new measure announced by Health Minister Paul Merriman extended mandatory masking in indoor public places to all Saskatchewan communities with populations over 5,000 as well the named smaller communities surrounding Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert.

"A brand-new Health Minister in the middle of a pandemic should be listening to the front line experts," says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West. "Health providers of all classifications, including lab disciplines, front line care aides, support workers, nursing staff and doctors, have been calling for stricter measures, including province-wide mandatory masking. But it appears Mr. Merriman is politicizing the Government of Saskatchewan's response to the pandemic."

Cape adds, "When asked to explain the 5,000 population threshold, the Minister offered the incoherent, unpersuasive notion that only these communities are 'major trading centres' where contacts might occur. Yet later in the same news conference, Chief Medical Health Officer Dr. Saqib Shahab was strongly encouraging people to wear a mask even while getting gas at a crossroads station outside of town. Does anyone else get the sense that Dr. Shahab is facing pressure to support measures he doesn't fully embrace?"

"In essence, you won't have to wear a mask in a busy highway gas bar in Davidson or Rosetown, but will have to mask up in every little shop in Kindersley or Allan. And if you include the surrounding area, La Ronge is bigger than Melville, but isn't on the list."

The most egregious moment in the press conference occurred when the Minister was asked about the impacts on front line workers, including the public concerns expressed by doctors and 'other groups,' and whether these workers are being adequately consulted.

"The Minister stated that front line health care concerns are being listened to – yet it would appear not," continues Cape. "We have been consistent in our efforts to communicate the strain being placed on our health care providers who have been working without adequate resources for months – this over-burden to our limited capacity has put us in a crisis where understaffing, overtime, and burnout continue to prevail with no end in sight.

"Our members are exhausted and there is no real appreciation of what that impact will be on the health care system or the front line professionals."

Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) represents over 13,000 people across Saskatchewan. They include people who work in health care, education, municipalities, community-based organizations, retirement homes and other sectors. They are joined by one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit [PurpleWorks.ca](https://PurpleWorks.ca) to find out more about SEIU-West members.

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