

Political Grudge Match Ignores Fairness for Health Care

Saskatoon – This week, Premier Scott Moe confirmed the end of March as the target timeline for the vaccination of all who are living and working in long-term care and personal care homes in Saskatchewan.

“Our members are asking whether this is a pipe dream,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West. “It seems this is just another opportunity to criticize the Prime Minister’s office and the federal government for the pace of shipment of vaccines to Saskatchewan. We hope that political games are not being played on the backs of exhausted, broken and traumatized essential workers.”

This sense of skepticism comes as a result of failed leadership on the vaccine roll out plan and COVID-19 related issues since the beginning of the pandemic.

“We have been witness to a number of broken promises from Premier Moe – whether it be an increase in the number of Continuing Care Assistants to the sector or recruitment strategy within provincial lab services,” adds Cape. “Our skepticism has been reinforced when a sizable portion of essential workers continue to be denied access to the federal funds intended to be provided as a wage top-up. Does Scott Moe really believe there are workers in any health care setting who are *not* essential at this point of the Saskatchewan COVID experience?”

SEIU-West members working for the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) have been raising concerns with the Saskatchewan Temporary Wage Supplement program which was introduced unilaterally by Scott Moe last spring. At that time, it specifically excluded both hospital and home care workers from automatic eligibility. The more recent phase, announced again by Moe late last year, specifically excludes all hospital workers unless they work in an integrated health care facility (eg. a hospital and long-term care home under the same roof) and was only offered for a two month window during a devastating second surge of COVID infections and hospitalizations.

“We have advised our members that neither SHA nor the Ministry of Health have offered us the opportunity to discuss the program or influence it in a meaningful way,” continues Cape. “We know from the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report released on January 26, that the province is sitting on \$49.4 million of federal monies that were intended for essential workers.

“On behalf of our membership, I’m asking the public and Scott Moe’s Sask Party government to appreciate the incredible strength of our front line heroes working in health care and community-based sectors. They are working hard to protect our health, safety and lives, yet they feel largely abandoned by our provincial leaders,” states Cape.

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 united under one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit PurpleWorks.ca to find out more about SEIU-West members.

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