



# President's Message:

## December 13 SAHO Bargaining Telephone Town Hall Follow Up No.2

As I mentioned in our most recent update, we received a lot of questions in our virtual town hall last week...I don't want to lose sight of these questions and I want to ensure that we are responding to your questions.

Further to our townhall meeting, Dannel Pickering (CCA at Saskatoon Homecare), Shawna Colpitts (Director of Political Action & Education), and myself met with Premier Moe and the Minister of Labour, Don Morgan, to talk specifically about how workload and short staffing are affecting our members. Prior to this round of bargaining, I met with both the Minister of Health and the Minister of Rural & Remote Health, along with CUPE and SGEU, to talk about health care transformation...we have been very clear with these leaders that our members are working their asses off; that they deserve a raise; and they give their heart and soul to the patients, clients and residents of our health care system.

*Continuing from December 13 SAHO Bargaining Telephone Town Hall Follow Up No. 1:*

### **13. Can anyone touch on pensions? –James, Saskatoon.**

- a. I believe you were looking for a sense of what the impact would be with the proposed general wage increases on pensions...with our pension plan, it's a defined benefit plan that bases your benefits on your best four years of service with your employer. With any collective agreement, the wage settlement would make a difference to what is considered your best years of service. In any year where there is no general wage increase, there would be no positive impact to your pension contributions. Considering that SHEPP is a jointly trusteed pension plan there is very limited ability for anyone other than the settlers of the plan or the trustee's to make significant changes. Any unilateral changes would most likely have to be done by way of legislation or amendments to *The Pension Benefits Act*.

### **14. Are there any improvements on the table besides wages e.g. pension or sick days...? – Brett, Saskatoon.**

- a. Not in the usual sense. In the update that I provided during our virtual townhall, I listed the things that we have been able to get the employer and the government to withdraw; and the language improvements that we've seen. We have introduced new and improved language on workload under OHS; JJE language to update and improve the pay equity plan; we're working on a LOU to deal with the transition issues with the creation



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of the Sask Health Authority; recruitment and retention language to address the lack of staff in our workplaces; interpersonal violence leave language; and the massive amount of work we've put into the joint trusteeship process that will see our contribution rates remain the same while we get this in place. We have also received agreement that should SUN or HSAS or SGEU (Cancer Agency) receive greater general wage increases for any of the three years (April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2021) than what is agreed to with the Provider Unions, the difference will be added on the same year of the Provider Unions collective agreement.

- b. Sure, it's not 'whiz-bang' like the other items, but these are important achievements that our members have been demanding for quite a long time.

### **15. Why should SEIU members take less than what SUN received? – Christina, Saskatoon.**

- a. In reviewing SUN's collective agreement, for the period of 2014-2018, they received 0%/0%/1.5%/1.5%; they also received \$800 lump sum payment for the years of 2014 and 2015. In our last collective agreement (2012-2017) we received 2%/1.5%/1.5%/1.55%/1.95%. SUN is currently in bargaining for a new agreement.

### **16. Why is SEIU considering no general wage increase in any year of the collective agreement? It's always the same – they should pay us what we're worth which doesn't mean no general wage increase. –Julie, location unknown.**

- a. That is why we are coming to our members. We *want* your feedback; we *want* to know how you feel about where we are at in bargaining. We have been out to meet with the members in person and we've held a number of virtual townhall meetings; we need to get direction on what our members want and then do our best to deliver a tentative agreement you can vote on. When we first started down this path the employer was expressing a desire to see a -3.5 in the compensation. At that time in our consultations with the members many were saying that a status quo agreement was sufficient just don't lose anything. As we have negotiated our way past the negative 3.5 we understand that expectations have changed and that is why we have looked for increases in the last two years and a signing bonus upfront. You should *absolutely* be paid what you're worth...but we



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are all up against a government that won't pay us unless we put the pressure on them.

**17. Is there any talk of rolling back our benefits package? – Ted, Saskatoon.**

- a. There was talk...but not anymore. There was talk about members co-paying for their benefits, but not anymore. There was talk about the employer taking a contribution holiday, but we've ended that line of thinking by negotiating a proposal on setting up a joint trusteeship of our extended health and dental benefit plan that will have union representation providing input into the decisions made on behalf of the beneficiaries (you!) to the plan.

**18. Is the employer not offering any general wage increases so they don't need to pay retro? And is that why they offer the lump sum payment? – Lindsay, location unknown.**

- a. This is negotiating, there is a hope that you'll accept no general wage increase...and yes, then there would be no need for retro pay. The lump sum payment has been proposed by the coalition of health care unions to offset the lack of a general wage increase.

**19. If there was no general wage increase, there would be no retro, correct? And if a lump sum payment is taxable, why not enhance benefits or something else not taxable? – Audrey, Cudworth.**

- a. I'm assuming you are referring to extended health benefits. These benefits aren't negotiated at the collective bargaining table – we have members on an EHB working group who make recommendations on benefit improvements to the 'trustees' to the EHB to operationalize.
- b. But if you are referring to benefits like improved vacation or sick time or those types of benefits, I've got to be blunt with you, this wasn't the round of bargaining to advance those proposals...not when we had to get the Government of Saskatchewan to move off that -3.5% mandate.

**20. We've had a contract before with two years of no general wage increases – has that been mentioned? – Janet, location unknown.**

- a. Thanks for raising this issue. It will be brought to the attention at the bargaining table and should be noted by all in all future discussions with MLAs and government as we have now confirmed that the Hospital Agreement between SAHO and the provider unions in the period January



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1, 1992 to December 31, 1994 do contain two years where zero percent (0%) wage increase was accepted. This was done to manage fiscal restraint.

**21. *Why can't we have increases in the first half of the CBA? – Shelley, Saskatoon.***

- a. The bargaining committee considered this and the timeframe of bargaining. We put forward our proposal with the plan of getting any increases applied in the current time period – not in the past. Ultimately the membership gets to determine whether or not no increases in the first half of the agreement is acceptable. The negotiating committee's mandate is to reach a tentative agreement that is acceptable to the membership and reflects the direction provided to them.

**22. *If the employer doesn't change their last offer and they force us to vote on their 'final' offer, what happens? What happens if we vote no? Is it back to the bargaining table and we lost all that has been agreed to? –Judy, location unknown.***

- a. Excellent questions! There is a difference in *The Saskatchewan Employment Act (SEA)* between a 'last' offer and a final offer; a 'final' offer simply means the employer is getting close to the end of bargaining. A 'last' offer is covered in the *SEA* as being a trigger for a vote of the membership on the offer. At the point we're at right now – we are close to the end.
- b. If our members voted no on the offer – then we would go back to the bargaining table. However, I would argue that the items we've agreed to up to now would still be agreed-to...I'm not sure everyone would agree with me on that!

**23. *Is there a paper/electronic copy of all this information? – Tammy, location unknown.***

- a. If you go to the SEIU-West website and click on the bargaining in the 'what we do' section...you can read up on all the bargaining updates we've posted since before bargaining started. However, we are very cautious about putting the monetary proposals in black and white on these updates...so it seems like I'm being super careful in my responses...that's because I am.



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**24. *I'm a CCA, and my wages are so low its getting hard to keep up. Why aren't they being made more aware of our low wages? – Theresa, Saskatoon.***

- a. Oh, they most definitely are (see above for the meetings with leaders in the Government of Saskatchewan!) And the employer representatives at the bargaining table know exactly what our members earn per hour. My comments during our townhall were pretty direct: your bargaining committee needs you to call/email – or better yet, visit your MLA to make sure that THEY know what you do, how hard you work, and how much you make. You are skilled, educated and professional – and the politicians need to know this directly from you. They have heard this from the bargaining committee. MLA's need to know how their decisions will impact their constituents.

**25. *When we retire, can our employer pay out our banked sick hours? This could help the use of sick time. –Maryana, location unknown.***

- a. Sadly, no. Our sick time is a negotiated benefit (an 'insurance' of sorts) that keeps our paycheques whole in the event of an illness. And we have progressive disability coverage beyond sick time: both short and long-term. During every round of bargaining, members request this type of payout, but this isn't a path the employers want to go down because sick time is an unfunded bank, meaning that the employer doesn't set aside money in their budget to cover this as it's an unpredictable expense.
- b. I think it's important to point out that sick time is for use when you're sick...if you're healthy, that's great. But there are points in our life where we need to access sick time because we are dealing with an illness. And as we come into an early flu season, I would echo the comments of the provincial public health doctor and say eat well, drink lots of fluids, and if you are sick, stay home to recuperate...don't come to work sick!

**26. *What is happening with professional fees? Anything new/better? –Terry, location unknown.***

- a. In the townhall update that was posted ([http://www.seiuwest.ca/president\\_s\\_message\\_december\\_13\\_saho\\_bargaining\\_telephone\\_town\\_hall\\_follow\\_up\\_no\\_1](http://www.seiuwest.ca/president_s_message_december_13_saho_bargaining_telephone_town_hall_follow_up_no_1)), I've outlined the changes to professional fees. The amount hasn't changed, but we've made



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improvements to the effective dates of professional fees – reflecting those fees established as of April 1, 2017.

**27. When are they going to deal with seniority province wide? –Brenda, location unknown.**

- a. I would like the answer to that question as well! We've proposed a Letter of Understanding to deal with this on an interim basis; essentially, we have proposed a method to 'park' your seniority/timebanks/etc. while this gets nailed down. It's similar to the process that is already used in the former SHR Gateway system – so it's not introducing a new or different idea.
- b. On the broader question about moving seniority/benefits throughout the province, or using seniority to bid on jobs, the health care provider unions have discussed this a number of times and are more than willing to negotiate this with the employer. We want to make sure that if members are moving, that there are clear, fair rules regarding probation or trial period; we want to lock down a formula for seniority (CUPE uses date of hire/SEIU-West and SGEU use hours based). These are not insurmountable questions.

**28. Would a lump sum payment include employees on WCB or short-term disability on the date of ratification? –Patti, location unknown.**

- a. The proposal as it stands currently has only one qualifier and that is the lump sum is payable to all who are on staff.
- b. I believe it would have to – subject to the rules of those plans. It's a question of non-discrimination – people who are recovering from an injury can't be discriminated against because of ability. Also, they are still considered on staff – which would be the standard if this is accepted.

That brings us to a close on the updates for the virtual townhall meeting. We don't have any more bargaining dates set in the new year as of yet.

On behalf of your bargaining committee, thanks for the feedback – it's been really helpful and instructive. I know that people have concerns about what has been put forward...I respect that and your bargaining committee will make sure we share them with the employer.

But here's my request of you...we need you to contact your MLA which you can do here: [http://www.seiuwest.ca/campaign\\_protect\\_local\\_jobs\\_and\\_economies](http://www.seiuwest.ca/campaign_protect_local_jobs_and_economies). Your



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bargaining committee needs you to help push us over the finish line. Call/email/visit your MLA in person. This matters! When you add pressure to the elected politicians, they react and can help us get a deal you can vote on.

Have a good Christmas and enjoy the holidays, however you celebrate. For those of you working, thank you! You folks bring your 'A' game to the work every single day. We are proud of you and will work hard to get you a deal.

Don't hesitate to contact us via the website if you have other questions regarding bargaining.

In Solidarity, on behalf of the SEIU-West SAHO bargaining committee,

Barbara Cape, President