

Labour Reporter

The voice of Saskatchewan's working class since 1956



Spring 2022

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PRAIRIE SCHOOL

for union women



June 13-16, 2022
Saskatoon, SK
or online via Zoom
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Labour Reporter

Labour Reporter is proudly published quarterly by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. It is sent directly to the homes of working people and to the offices of their unions.

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SFL President Lori Jobb.

Saskatchewan workers are speaking up for safety

As we head towards the second anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic this spring, our provincial government has officially declared the pandemic over, dropping all public health orders while taking the unprecedented step of ending almost all access to public testing and cancelling daily COVID-19 updates. We've seen this happen before, when public health measures were dropped last summer, leading towards a disastrous fourth wave in the fall. Unfortunately, it seems the Sask. Party government has still not learned any lessons from the past two years, and once again are ignoring frontline workers and health experts and putting the health and safety of workers at risk.

Let me be clear: Saskatchewan's labour movement, like everyone in Saskatchewan, wants this pandemic to end. But, we also need to remain vigilant in order

“Your federation of labour, and your union, will keep fighting for you.”

to keep workers safe. The reality is that COVID-19 still remains a serious health and safety threat for workers, who are now at an increased risk of contracting the virus as mask mandates, proof of vaccination, and other measures that protected workers have been dropped.

That's why your federation of labour and our affiliates have been speaking up for safety. Over the past month, we have been demanding that MLAs start speaking up for the workers they represent, and ensure that workers are kept safe by taking action, including:

- Ensuring proper PPE for all workers

- Legislating paid sick leave for all workers
- Ensuring safe staffing levels in hospitals, schools, and public services

We've held demonstrations in front of MLA offices in Regina and Saskatoon, demanding politicians who have remained silent throughout the pandemic start speaking up for workers. We also launched a letter writing campaign, and an online phone tool that connects workers directly with their MLA and demand that they speak up for the safety of workers. Affiliate unions are also coming together this spring to work on a campaign to continue the fight for worker safety and a safe path towards recovery from COVID-19.

Your federation of labour has also urged the provincial government to return to daily COVID-19 reporting. The move of the government in February to only provide weekly reports has deprived workers of their right to know about the risks they face in their workplace due to COVID-19. Employers have a responsibility under law in Saskatchewan to provide workers with a safe workplace. This includes providing the information workers need so that they can properly understand and assess the risk

of contracting COVID 19 in their workplace. The current situation where data is only reported weekly makes this impossible. Workers' basic rights in Saskatchewan exist to protect workers, and the government's decision to not regularly report COVID-19 case numbers undermines and even potentially violates this legislation.

Workers have been on the frontlines every day in Saskatchewan, putting themselves and their families at risk from day one of the pandemic. Our provincial government must recognize this and put the necessary protections in place to keep workers and the people of our province safe. I know it has been a long two years, and frontline workers are exhausted- be assured that your federation of labour, and your union, will keep fighting for you, and for a province that takes workplace health and safety seriously.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, I am pleased that your federation of labour is returning to in-person events later this year- with safety measures including masking, proof of vaccination, and distancing in effect. We are also making several of our schools hybrid- with an option to either attend in person or online, for those who are immunocompromised, do not feel safe gathering,

or are unable to attend due to the expense of travel. I am excited that we are able to offer these options to ensure that everyone is able to participate in SFL schools and events. The CLC/SFL Spring School will be held May 2-6 in Regina, with online courses available, and our Prairie School for Union Women will be held June 13-16 in Saskatoon, also with online course options. More information on both schools can be found on our website. The SFL Summer Camp will also be held this year for the first time since 2019- stay tuned for more information coming soon!

Finally, I would like to take a moment to thank Saskatchewan NDP Leader Ryan Meili for his service to Saskatchewan. Ryan has announced he will be stepping down as Leader of the Official Opposition later this spring. He has been a strong voice in the legislature for working people, especially over the past two years of the pandemic. Thank you, Ryan. Saskatchewan is a better place thanks to your leadership.

In Solidarity,



Lori Johb, SFL President



CUPE Saskatchewan Recording Secretary JR Simpson, an education worker, at the SFL Speak Up for Safety Rally in Saskatoon.

SFL “Speak Up For Safety” Campaign demands action from MIA MLAs

The SFL “Speak up for Safety” month of action was held in February to demand that Sask. Party MLAs stop catering to extremists and start speaking up for their constituents who are demanding continued public health measures and actions to ensure safe workplaces and a path to recovery from COVID-19.

The month of action, which took place throughout February at demonstrations in Regina and Saskatoon as well as online, put pressure on Sask. Party MLAs who have stood silent as the Premier has spread misinformation and supported anti-vaccine extremists while ignoring frontline workers and the advice of public health experts.

“We all want the pandemic to end and for things to

“Workers will not sit quietly and let the Sask. Party move forward with their plans to make workplaces less safe by dropping all public health measures.”

go back to normal, but the reality is that COVID-19 remains a serious health and safety hazard for workers,” SFL President Lori Johb said. “Workers will not sit quietly and let the Sask. Party move forward with their plans to make workplaces less safe by dropping public health measures and ending public access to testing just so they can please their political base.”

Workers are demanding that the Sask. Party:

- Return to daily COVID-19 case reporting, including daily cases, hospitalizations, and deaths
- Ensure proper PPE for all workers
- Legislate ten days of paid sick leave for all workers
- Ensure safe staffing levels in our

hospitals, schools, and other public services

“These measures must be taken now to ensure workers are kept safe and we can finally end this pandemic once and for all,” Johb said. “It’s time for Sask. Party MLAs to break their silence and finally start speaking up for the workers they represent.”

Workers at risk as health measures come to an end

The provincial government’s decision to end proof of vaccination requirements has put the safety of workers at risk as COVID-19 continues to spread across the province and hospitalizations remain high.

“COVID-19 still remains a serious health and safety threat for workers,” said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) President Lori Johb. “By removing proof of vaccination requirements, workers are at greater risk of contracting the virus.”

“We all want the pandemic to end, but we need to remain vigilant to make sure that workers are kept safe,” Johb said. “Taking the steps we’ve outlined would go a long way to making sure that we are able to successfully beat COVID-19 once and for all and ensure that

our health care system is not overwhelmed.”

Johb noted that workers are also not being provided with necessary information to properly assess their risk of contracting COVID-19 at work, after the provincial government made the decision to cancel daily COVID-19 updates.

“Workers have a right to know about their risk of contracting COVID-19 while at work,” Johb said. “The government’s switch from daily to weekly updates deprives workers of their right to know about the risk of contracting a serious illness at their workplace, and we urge the government to return to their past practice of providing daily updates.”

Johb also raised concerns about workers facing harassment as health orders are lifted and workers continue to take precautions and wear PPE.

“Workers have the right to be safe at work, and should be able to have access to and wear the PPE that they need to avoid contracting COVID,” Johb said. “Both the government and employers must make sure that workers are able to wear whatever PPE they need to be safe without facing harassment from members of the public.”

Photos: Workers rally to speak up for safety







Saskatchewan workers win big as union certification goes electronic

In a historic decision, the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (LRB) has ruled workers in the province can now join a union by signing an electronic union membership card. The decision comes following an application for reconsideration of LRB File No. 092-21 from the United Steelworkers union (USW).

The USW congratulates JSN Motors Inc. employees in becoming the first workers in the province to use electronic union cards to join a union.

“The decision to allow electronic support evidence for union certification is historic and precedent-setting in our province and we are excited to proceed with welcoming the workers from JSN Motors to our union,” said Darrin Kruger, USW Staff Representative. “The electronic cards will now make it easier and safer for workers to join a union and brings them one step closer to deserving better at work.”

“The electronic cards will now make it easier and safer for workers to join a union, and brings them one step closer to deserving better at work.”

In its unanimous decision, the LRB stated that electronic support evidence addresses many concerns by “improving access to employees, facilitating the dissemination and collection of support cards, and reducing physical impediments. In some cases, electronic support evidence may provide an additional layer of security and privacy from an employer who may be tempted to interfere with the exercise of employees’ rights under the Act.”

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to hold in-person meetings to organize workers and to sign

physical paper cards became more difficult, especially while maintaining physical distancing,” said Kruger. “Electronic cards will now give workers the ability to sign their cards safely and confidentially, and it brings Saskatchewan in line with other jurisdictions across Canada.”

In recent years, labour boards across the country, including B.C., Alberta, Ontario and federally, have begun accepting electronic support evidence.

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour joins Steelworkers in congratulating the workers at JSN motors for taking on this fight. This historic decision brings union organization in the province into the modern age, and will make it easier for workers in Saskatchewan to join a union.

With files from the United Steelworkers.

SFL News Briefs

Unions, Community members come together at SFL Equity Conference

The SFL held our annual Equity Conference virtually on February 16. The conference was a great opportunity for union and community members – especially from equity-seeking communities – to come together and learn about the ongoing struggle for human rights, respect, and dignity.

This year, our conference was divided into two separate streams: one for those who are allies but do not belong to an equity-seeking group, and one for those who are part of an equity-seeking group to learn and explore together. This format allowed for everyone to participate in the conference in a safe space that brought folks together at all different levels to learn and have important and sometimes difficult conversations.

SFL Summer Camp is back in 2022!

Camp is back this year for the first time since 2019! SFL Summer Camp is all about empowering young people through active learning. Campers will learn about youth and unions, organizing, knowing your workplace rights, women and

equality, challenging and fighting racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, and other issues that affect young people and young workers. Campers will leave with a deepened awareness of social justice, new collective action skills, and new friendships.

The Camp will be held from August 5-11 at the Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim. Registration is \$550 per camper. Some SFL affiliate unions subsidize the cost of campers to attend. More information can be found online at www.sfl.sk.ca

SFL Committees look to year ahead

SFL Committees were busy planning for the year ahead at our annual All Committees meeting on February 15. Held virtually, committees gathered to meet their fellow committee members, create a workplan to address resolutions passed at our 2021 convention, and make plans to bring issues forward and engage with union members across the province. Thank you to all members of SFL Committees for taking on these important roles. Your work makes our labour movement stronger.



Partisan Sask. Party appointment at SHA puts public healthcare at risk

The recent appointment of a longtime Sask. Party political operative at the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) tasked to oversee the privatization of healthcare across the province is a clear signal the government is moving forward with their plans to take even more publicly provided healthcare services and place them in the hands of private, for-profit corporations.

“The Sask. Party has been chipping away at the privatization of public health services for years,” said SFL President Lori Johb. “First with privatizing hospital laundry services and private MRIs- none of which has improved the quality of care or reduced wait times. Now, under the cover of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, the Sask. Party is intent on further gutting

“The Sask Party has been chipping away at the privatization of public health services for years.”

our public health system and handing it over to their corporate donor friends in the private sector.”

Johb said that the appointment of a partisan political operative, with no experience in health care administration, to an executive position at the SHA expressly tasked with privatizing healthcare should be a warning to everyone dedicated to protecting and maintaining our public system.

“Those working in executive positions should have

expertise and demonstrated experience working in public health care administration. This appointment is, at best, cronyism, and at worst, proof of the Sask. Party moving forward with their plans to gut the public health system.”

Johb called on the Sask. Party to reverse the appointment and can-

cel the position of “Vice President of Enterprise Initiatives Support” at the SHA.

“The Sask. Party has done immense damage to our healthcare system- their continued refusal to listen to doctors and health experts throughout the pandemic has overwhelmed frontline work-

ers and brought our public system to its knees. It’s unbelievable that, in the midst of a fifth wave, the Sask. Party would move forward with plans to privatize healthcare instead of investing in and making our public system better. This position must be cancelled, and the appointment reversed.”

Canada’s unions stand in solidarity with Ukraine

Canadian Labour Congress President Bea Bruske made the following statement in response to Russia’s attack on Ukraine in late February:

“The world is watching with horror as Russia launches an unjustified attack on Ukraine and its people. Canada’s unions condemn this unprovoked act of aggression and stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine who now face violence, hardship and an uncertain future.

Russia’s military assault will mean a terrible loss of life and will destabilize the lives of people throughout the region. Reverberations will be felt around the world.

We are concerned about civilian casualties and a massive displacement of people trying to flee the violence. As essential public services are disrupted and civil infrastructure destroyed, the urgent need for humanitarian assistance

grows. It is vital that international agencies are allowed access so they can provide humanitarian as-

“We call on Canada to open our country’s doors to those fleeing the conflict.”

sistance to the people affected.

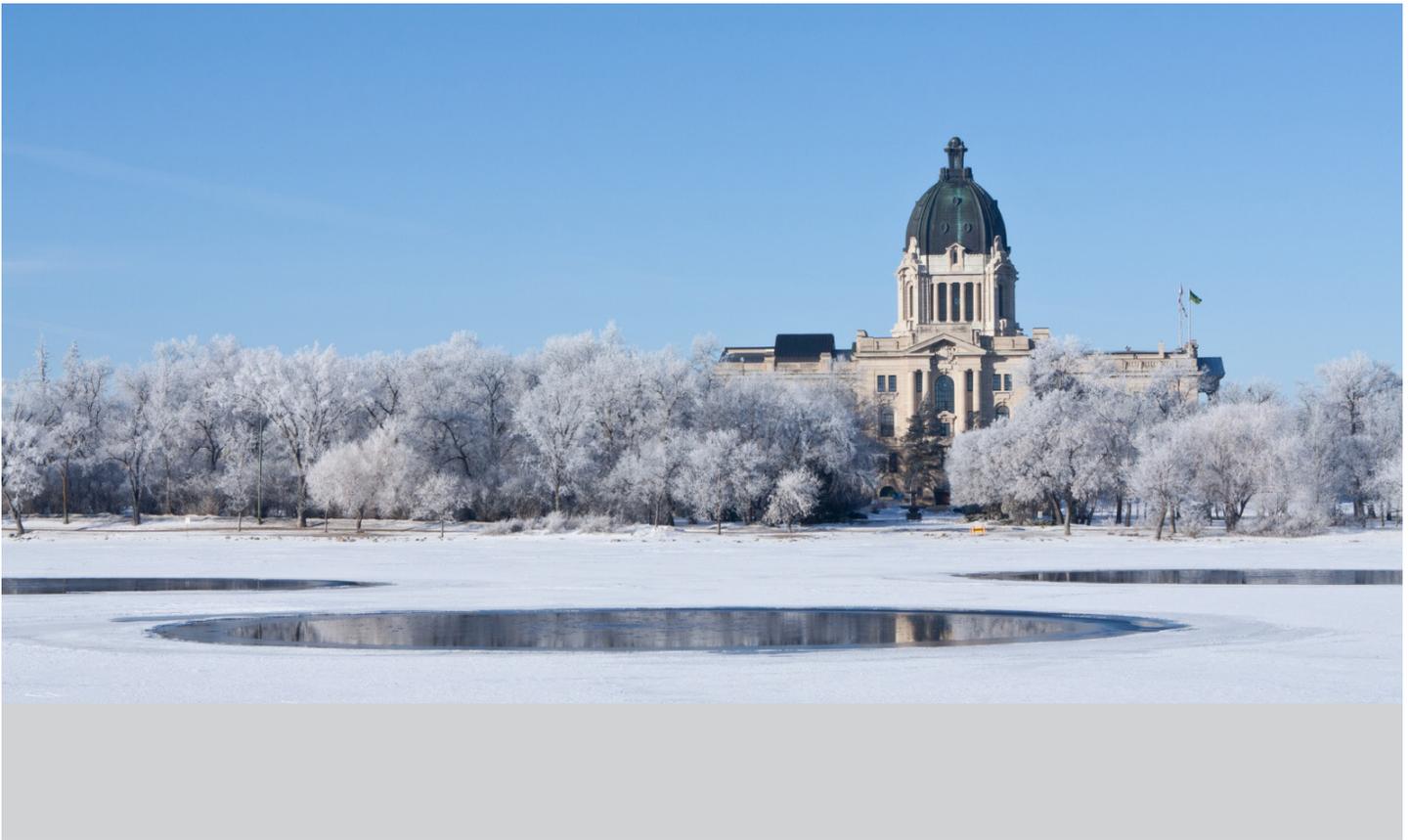
We call on Canada’s government to open our country’s doors to those fleeing the conflict, including through visa-free access for Ukrainians, and provide substantial humanitarian aid to these victims of Russian hostility.

We further urge our government to work with like-minded multilateral organizations to press Russia to end hostilities, adhere to international human rights obligations

and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy. The international community must stand united in the cause of peace for a free and sovereign Ukraine.

This attack reminds us again of the dangers posed by tyrants and autocrats to all of us who value democracy. Ukrainians are now once again being called on to defend their right to self-determination. Canada’s unions stand in solidarity with Ukrainian workers and families who want peace.

Canada’s unions also reach out in solidarity to our nation’s proud Ukrainian-Canadian community, who fear today for the safety of family and friends tragically caught up in Russia’s armed confrontation.



Five things to watch for in the provincial budget

As the Sask. Party government prepares to present a provincial budget later in March, here are five things that Saskatchewan's labour movement will be looking for:

1. Job Creation Plan - The province has suffered from record job losses and high unemployment as a result of the pandemic. As the province looks forward to a recovery from COVID-19, the provincial government must include budget funding for a plan to create good jobs for Saskatchewan workers across all sectors. So far, the Sask. Party has left workers who suffered job losses as a result of the pandemic behind and have done nothing to create good jobs for working people in the province.

2. Funding to Fix Long Term Care - The pandemic brought to light the crisis in long term care. Understaffing and outdated facilities led to a crisis that resulted in the deaths of many in long term care. Our seniors deserve better, and so do the workers who care for them. This year's budget must include funding to fix long term care and provide safe staffing levels to ensure the health and safety of both those in long term care and long term care workers.

3. Investments to Improve Public Services - The pandemic has damaged the public services we all rely on, and the Sask. Party's disastrous mismanagement of the pandemic has only made things worse. To move forward, Saskatchewan needs significant investment in our public services, particularly in healthcare and

education, where frontline workers are burnt out from working around the clock through five waves of COVID-19. Even after the province has recovered, there is a significant need for immediate investment in our public services. Waitlists for surgeries are growing, rural hospitals are being forced to close due to short staffing, and teachers and education workers are not being provided with the tools they need to be kept safe at work. Significant investments in our public services - not privatization- must be made to fix the damage done by the Sask. Party's pandemic mismanagement.

4. Paid Sick Leave for All Workers - Workers in Saskatchewan shouldn't have to make the choice to either collect a paycheque and put food on the table or go to work sick. All workers deserve paid sick time, and legislation to ensure paid sick leave for all workers should be a part of the government's budget and a priority in the spring legislative session.

5. Funding for Public Childcare Spaces. Last year, the province signed a historic agreement with the federal government that provided \$41 million in federal fund-

ing to create 28,000 new childcare spaces and ensure \$10-a-day childcare by 2025. This year's budget should provide a clear path to increase the amount of public childcare spaces available in the province, and a plan to train and hire early learning and childcare workers on a fair wage grid. This investment in early learning and childcare is vital to the province's recovery from COVID-19, and the federal funding provided to the province will significantly reduce the cost of childcare for families in Saskatchewan.



APRIL 28 DAY OF MOURNING

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FIGHT FOR THE LIVING.**



Saskatchewan
Federation of Labour

SASKATCHEWAN FEDERATION OF LABOUR

Summer Camp



**AUGUST
5-11, 2022**

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INFORMATION AT
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