

# Labour Reporter

The voice of Saskatchewan's working class since 1956



# VACCINES ARE HERE

But when will workers get them?

Spring 2021

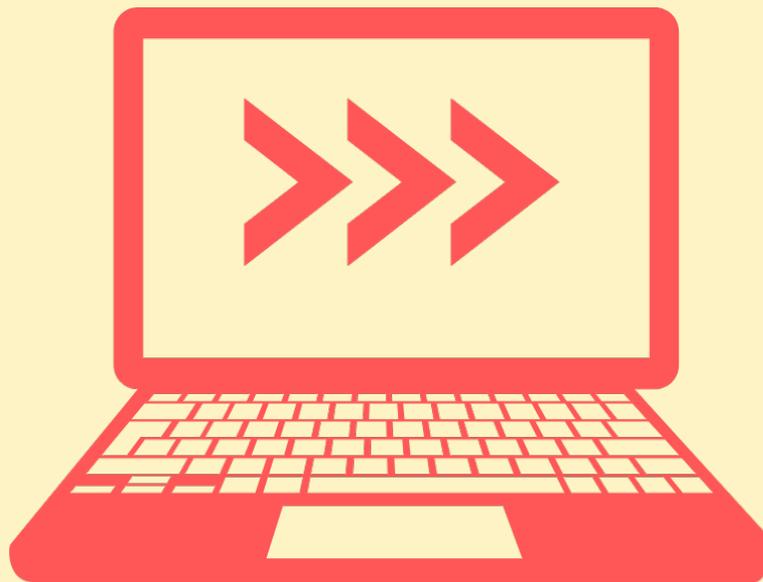
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**PUTTING  
WORKERS  
FIRST >>>>**



**JOIN US FOR OUR FIRST EVER  
VIRTUAL CONVENTION  
OCTOBER 21-22, 2021**

# 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 Johb.

## Pandemic highlights importance of solidarity

As your federation of labour, we're proud to represent nearly 100,000 working members across the province. We are Saskatchewan's House of Labour and we are where unions come together to work together.

The SFL plays a key role in building a stronger labour movement in the province, and so do you. At our last convention in 2019, we were proud to launch our "I am the SFL" campaign. The message was simple: Together, we are the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. And together, we are stronger. And if the past year has proven anything, it's that strength and solidarity are needed now more than ever.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought so many different challenges, and through it all, workers have

**"Saskatchewan needs a pandemic response and recovery that puts workers first."**

been there on the front lines- as health care workers in hospitals and long term care, as teachers and education support staff, in our gas stations and grocery stores and in the public service. For many, COVID-19 brought to light the important role that workers play in providing so many of the services that we all depend on here in Saskatchewan. We saw that early last year, when so many people across the province joined in thanking workers and showing their solidarity with those workers.

One year later, and a lot has changed. Workers are again being forgotten- and while the Sask. Party government once joined in praising workers, unsurprisingly they are once again leaving workers behind.

A slow rollout and poor communication has left many workers wondering when they will get their vaccine, a crisis in long term care is going ignored, and the government is refusing to pay wage top ups to all eligible front line workers- deciding instead to leave money from the federal government meant to help workers unspent. This is unacceptable. Our government must do better. And we must demand better.

What COVID-19 has made clear is that the status quo is simply not good enough. Even before the pandemic, Saskatchewan workers were feeling the effects of wage freezes, the rising cost of living, and government cuts to public services. If we are going to move forward, we need a recovery plan that puts workers first. We need a plan for improved access and higher quality public services in health care and education, we need to fix the crisis in long term care, we need to ensure safer workplaces, paid sick days for all workers, fair wages that

will stimulate the economy and create jobs, and we must also work to address the issues of inequality, equity, and fairness that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light.

Unfortunately, our government has very different plans for working people. In the last election, the Sask. Party campaigned on a platform that promised cuts instead of investing in health care, education, and other public services.

**“If the past year has proven anything, it’s that strength and solidarity are needed now more than ever.”**

Once again, our hard-won standard of living, job security, and public services are all being threatened by a government known for anti-worker employer practices, cuts, and bad economic policies.

We must come together again, as working people, to demand better, show solidarity, and fight for our jobs, our communities and our future. It’s a fight that your federation

of labour, is up for, and I hope you will join us. These days, it’s easier than ever for everyone to get involved. Whether it’s something small, like sharing a post on social media, or something bigger, like attending our online convention or volunteering on a committee- our labour movement depends on your help to win the fight to make life better for working people.

While we’ve had to cancel in-person events due to COVID, Your Federation of Labour is busy moving ahead with many virtual events, including an online version of our Prairie School for Union Women, and the annual SFL/CLC Spring School. Our annual convention, cancelled in 2020, is returning this year and will be held entirely online this fall as well.

We’ve also worked to expand our online presence, and we encourage everyone to follow us on social media- Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and check our website for updates and ways that you can get involved with your Federation of Labour.

Together, we are the SFL, and together in solidarity we can fight for a COVID-19 recovery that puts workers first.



## Workers left out of vaccine delivery plans

When the news came that a COVID-19 vaccine was available, workers everywhere breathed a sigh of relief. Those on the front lines, who have been risking their health and safety for months, and who have witnessed firsthand the devastating spread of the virus, could finally see the end in sight. As we reached 2021, many were feeling optimistic.

However, slow vaccine deliveries and a lack of clarity from the provincial government led to confusion among frontline workers about who would be vaccinated, and when. Despite the National Advisory Committee on Immunization's recommendations that all workers in health care settings be prioritized for the vaccine, the provincial government's vaccine rollout plan left out many health care sector work-

**“Saskatchewan’s health care unions have urged the government to change course and make more frontline workers a priority for vaccination.”**

ers who work directly with patients in areas where COVID-19 is likely to spread. Surprisingly, even workers at COVID-19 testing centres were not included as priority workers. Instead, the government prioritized workers who they deemed to be “patient-facing,” leaving out many workers who are still at a high risk of contracting the virus because of where they work.

Saskatchewan’s health care unions have urged the go-

vernment to change course and make more frontline workers a priority for vaccination. "Our members are facing the daily burdens presented by the ongoing surge of COVID in this province yet so many have been missed in phase 1 of the vaccination plan," SIEU-West President Barb Cape said in a recent news release. "It's obvious, given recent public statements from Premier Scott Moe, that our provincial government has no intention of reducing the risk to these front line health care providers by the introduction and enforcement of more stringent regulations. Now we see they will not be afforded a priority vaccine either. This is a huge mistake."

SEIU-West has since launched a campaign to "Respect Us and Protect Us," urging the provincial government to make vaccinations for all frontline workers a priority before the next phases of vaccine delivery where vaccines will be more widely distributed among age groups instead of prioritizing workers.

The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses has also been vocal about the government's vaccination plan for front line health care workers.

"As the front line of this pandemic from day one, you have given everything to your patients for close to a year, often at the expense of your own mental and physical health," wrote Saskatchewan Union of Nurses President Tracy Zambory in a recent message to members. "I hear from members daily about the enormous pressures you are under, and about how these pressures are beginning to take their toll. With all that you have faced, you should not have to worry about vaccination rollout too."

After significant pressure from health care sector unions including SUN, SEIU-West, SGEU and CUPE Saskatchewan, the government did add more workers to phase one of its vaccination plan. However, many workers are still left out. The second phase of the vaccination plan leaves out frontline healthcare workers entirely, instead shifting all remaining workers to the same age-based vaccination delivery schedule as the general public.

While front line healthcare workers wait for their vaccines, so do thousands of workers in other sectors who are also working on the front lines and continue to be at risk of exposure to COVID-19. Teachers,

school support staff, and childcare workers will have to wait until their age group is eligible to receive a vaccine, as will workers in grocery stores, restaurants, and retail jobs who deal with the public on a daily basis. These workers will remain at risk of contracting COVID-19, as the Sask. Party government has made it clear that they have no intentions of enacting further restrictions that would protect workers. Every day that a worker has to wait for their turn to be vaccinated is a day that they are putting themselves at risk.

The good news is that vaccines are arriving, and the vaccination of those workers who were included in phase one is close to complete. The government has recently announced a plan to speed up vaccinations that they claim will see every Saskatchewan resident receive at least one dose by June. If this plan is successful, it would go a long way towards reducing the spread of the virus, taking strain off of our health care system, and protect workers on the job. However, until then, our provincial government has decided continue to put those on the front lines at risk by letting workers wait.

# Labour leaders participate in virtual women's march



*SFL President Lori Johb marches with SFL staff Dionne Duff and Aimee Gordon as part of the 2021 virtual Women's March.*

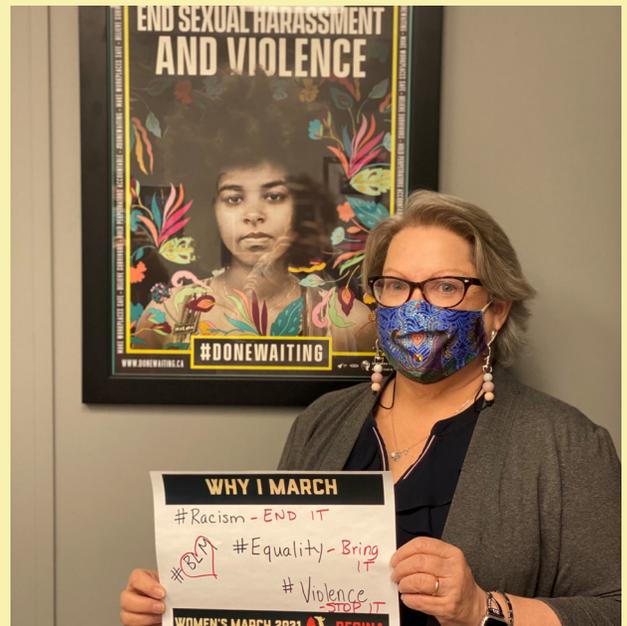
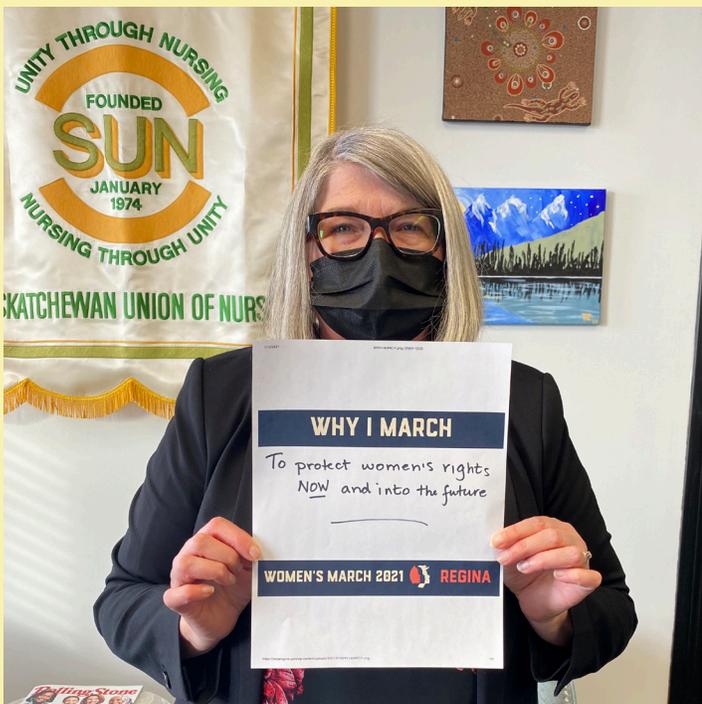
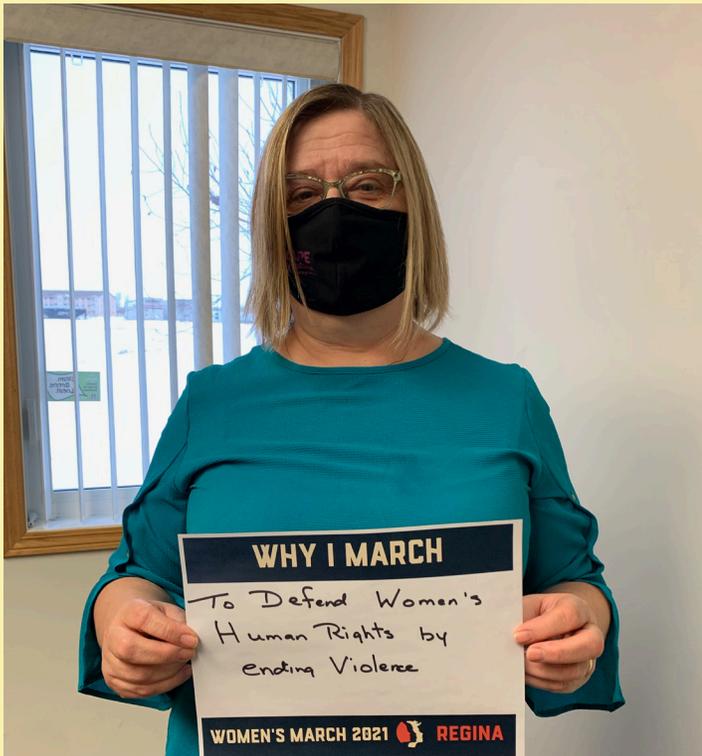
In January, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour joined YWCA Regina's fourth annual Women's March along with labour leaders, workers and community members who joined in to march virtually and move #ForwardTogether.

For the past several years, women in Saskatchewan, across the country and around the world have come together in solidarity and support for women's rights, gender equality and social and economic justice for women. Though we were unable to gather together this year, the virtual march was a reminder that everyone must continue to do the important work to advance gender equality and continue to move forward together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the many inequities women and girls face. According

to a United Nations policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women, women have been affected financially, through the health care they receive, through an increase in unpaid care work, a lack of access to childcare, and an increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic.

"Women and girls around the world face inequality daily simply because of their gender, and COVID-19 has impacted us all in so many ways," said SFL President Lori Johb. "The virtual Women's March in Regina, hosted by the YWCA, was a great way to remind ourselves and others of the work that still needs to be done to create a more fair and equitable world for women and girls."



Clockwise, left to right: CUPE Saskatchewan President Judy Henley, CUPE Saskatchewan Secretary-Treasurer Kent Peterson, Saskatchewan Union of Nurses President Tracy Zambory, SFL President Lori Johb and Saskatchewan Union of Nurses First Vice President Denise Dick all share their reasons for marching in the 2021 Virtual Women's March.



## SFL renews call for presumptive workers compensation coverage during COVID-19

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is renewing its call for the provincial government to enact presumptive workers compensation coverage for workers exposed to COVID-19 while on the job.

“Many Saskatchewan workers are putting themselves at risk so they can provide us with essential services, in our hospitals and long term care homes, schools, grocery stores and public services,” said SFL President Lori Johb. “Workers need to be assured that workers compensation coverage will be there for them when they need it.”

Johb said that presumptive workers compensation coverage would make the claims process easier for workers, and help those who become sick with COVID-19 on the job access the supports they need. Saskatchewan currently has presumptive coverage for those who suffer from psychological injuries,

**“Workers should not be forced to go through a long claims process in order to access WCB benefits.”**

where workers do not have to prove a work-related cause or link to their injury when making a workers compensation claim.

“Workers who become sick with COVID-19 should not be forced to go through a long claims process in order to access workers compensation benefits,” Johb said. “Workers have been here for us all throughout the pandemic and they deserve these benefits if they become sick. It’s time for the provincial government to act now.”

Johb also raised concern about the low number of COVID-19 claims being submitted and accepted by

the Workers Compensation Board (WCB). Numbers reported recently show that despite outbreaks and exposures at businesses and long term care facilities across the province, only 30 per cent of the 232 claims related to COVID-19 submitted to the WCB have been approved - one of the lowest rates of approved COVID-19 claims of all the provinces.

“We’ve heard of workers that have been exposed to the virus in their workplace who got sick and don’t even know that they are able to make a workers compensation claim,” Johb said.

“A strong message needs to be sent to all employers that they must inform workers about their access to workers compensation, and how to fill out the necessary forms to make a claim. Workers compensation exists to help workers who become injured or sick on the job, and that includes COVID-19. The provincial government owes it to workers to make sure they have access to this vital support when they need it.”

## SFL News Briefs

### **SFL welcomes staff in new roles**

The SFL is pleased to announce some staffing changes that have occurred in our office over the past few months.

Deena Kapacila, who previously worked in the office as the Ready for Work Coordinator, has started in a new role as Project and Education Coordinator. This new position will help expand the capacity of our office and allows us to be able to spend more time working on campaigns that put workers first.

Joining the office in the role of Ready for Work Coordinator is Taylor Apperley. Taylor has a degree in Education and was most recently constituency assistant to NDP MLA Nicole Sarauer.

Congratulations to Deena and Taylor in their new roles!

### **New SFL website coming soon**

A new [www.sfl.sk.ca](http://www.sfl.sk.ca) is in the works to be launched later this year. The new website will be mobile-friendly, and allow us to expand our online presence through new tools, including the ability to create and host online petitions. Stay tuned as we look to launch the new website later this year.

### **SFL Summer Camp cancelled for 2021**

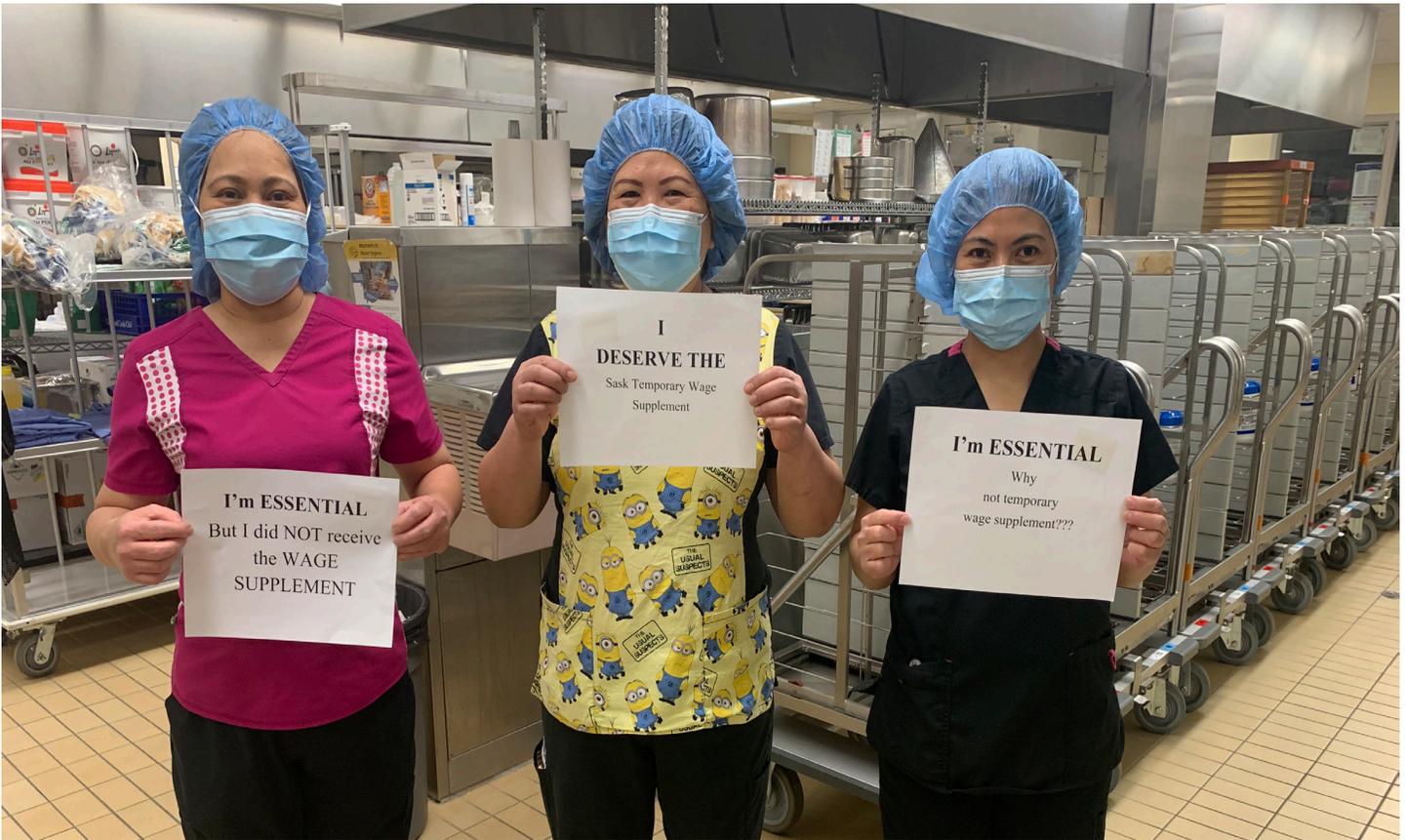
Due to the continued uncertainty created by COVID-19 and limited restrictions on gatherings, the SFL has once again made the decision to cancel our summer camp for the second year in a row. We are already looking forward to next year, and are planning for our amazing summer camp to return in 2022.

### **SFL launches Instagram account**

Better late than never, you can now follow the SFL on Instagram, under the handle @SKFedLabour. If you don’t already, be sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter as well!

### **Putting Workers First Campaign relaunching in 2021**

We’re excited to be relaunching our Putting Workers First Campaign later this spring. A refreshed version of our 2020 Election campaign, Putting Workers First will be focused on how we can make life better for working people as we look to a world after COVID. Be sure to keep an eye out on social media and in your emails as we get ready to launch the campaign in early April. You can also sign up to receive updates now at [www.puttingworkersfirst.ca](http://www.puttingworkersfirst.ca)



SEIU-West members are asking why the Sask. Party government has not made wage top-ups available to all frontline healthcare workers. Photo: SEIU-West.

## SFL calls on Sask. Party government to make 'hero pay' available to all workers

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is calling on the Sask. Party government to allocate the remainder of the money made available by the federal government to support essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While other provinces have allocated the majority of their share to top up the wages of essential health care workers, Saskatchewan has left millions of dollars on the table unspent," said SFL President Lori Johb. "With cases of COVID-19 rapidly increasing and our health care system overwhelmed, it's time the government recognize the work of our frontline heroes, and ensure that this money goes to those workers who are putting their health and safety at risk."

Earlier this year, the federal government announced a cost-shared program to support essential health care workers with wage top-ups. According to information originally obtained by the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Saskatchewan government has only spent just over half of the \$102 million the federal government has made available for the program—the second lowest of all the provinces and territories.

Johb also called on the government to stop picking and choosing which health care workers are eligible to receive a wage top up, and make the funding available for all front line health care workers, including all hospital staff and workers at Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

“It’s bad enough that the government isn’t spending the money, they are also leaving many health care workers off the list of eligible employees,” Johb said. “The Sask. Party government have joined us

in applauding front line heroes, but the reality is they are leaving many behind. Now is not the time to be cheap- all health care workers should be available to receive wage top ups, and every penny

available from this program should be spent.”

## Report shows Sask. Party pandemic response leaving workers behind

A new report shows that the Sask. Party government is leaving workers behind when it comes to their response on COVID-19, with millions of federal dollars earmarked for supporting workers being left on the table as the virus continues to spread across the province.

“The Sask. Party’s refusal to invest significant federal money on our COVID-19 response highlights the lack of leadership that we’ve seen from our provincial government throughout the pandemic,” said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour President Lori Johb. “It’s unbelievable that the Sask. Party government would leave so much money intended to support workers unspent.”

The report, released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, shows that millions of dollars made available from the federal government to support workers in Saskatchewan has not been spent,

including \$49.4 million in funds for wage top ups for frontline workers, and \$42 million for job training for workers in sectors hit hard by the pandemic.

### **“Working people in Saskatchewan deserve answers as to why this money still hasn’t been spent”**

“There is no excuse for the government to not be spending these funds,” Johb said. “In fact, it’s reckless and irresponsible. Spending this money would have recognized the risks being taken by frontline workers, prevented workplace outbreaks, and brought down infection rates. Looking at this report, it’s no wonder our province is experiencing some of the highest rates of COVID-19 infections in the country.”

Johb is calling on the Sask. Party to take immediate action and spend the federal money that is still available to get the province’s COVID-19 infection rates under control, and to support all workers who are risking their health and safety on the front lines, as well as those who have faced unemployment as a result of the pandemic.

“Working people in Saskatchewan deserve answers as to why this money still hasn’t been spent,” Johb said. “Every penny of federal money being offered should be put towards supporting workers and stopping the spread of COVID-19.”



## Federations of Labour campaign for paid sick days

Earlier this month in advance of the federal, provincial and territorial labour ministers' meeting, provincial and territorial federations of labour launched a campaign demanding that provincial and territorial governments guarantee seamless access to universal, permanent and adequate employer-paid sick days for all workers.

More than half of all Canadian workers have no access to paid sick leave. When they're sick, they face an impossible choice between making ends meet and staying home to protect public health and get better. It's a decision nobody should have to make.

Workplace outbreaks and transmissions during the COVID-19 pandemic have made it clear that paid sick leave is critical to protecting public health. Yet

**“The need has never been more apparent or more urgent.”**

the gaps in coverage are huge, especially among low-wage workers. There's an urgent need for immediate government action — especially with new, highly-contagious variants now spreading through our population.

It's a public health imperative that sick workers stay home from work, and not just during the pandemic. Illnesses like influenza cause thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in Canada every year. By curbing the spread of infectious diseases, employer-paid sick days

would protect public health while increasing workplace productivity, offering more stable income for workers and reducing health costs for governments.

The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit is a small step forward, but it falls far short of what is needed. It's temporary by design and restricted to COVID-related illness. It interrupts workers' income, making them apply and then wait for the benefit to arrive. And the benefit itself only replaces a fraction of lost

pay for many workers. While this new benefit helps, it isn't universal and permanent paid sick leave.

Initially, some level of government support may be needed to offset costs for small and medium-sized businesses that have been severely affected by the pandemic. But the ultimate goal, in every province and territory, must be to ensure that every worker knows that when they are sick, they will not pay a financial penalty for doing the right thing and staying home to protect

public health.

Public support for employer-paid sick days is strong throughout Canada. The need has never been more apparent or more urgent. Canada's Federations of Labour are calling on Canada's labour ministers to prioritize the implementation of universal, permanent and adequate employer-paid sick leave for all workers now.

## SFL Convention, schools to be held virtually

Last year, for the first time in 65 years, the annual SFL Convention was cancelled due to COVID-19. This year, we are excited to announce that convention will return, albeit in an online format. "Putting Workers First: SFL Convention 2021" will be held virtually from Oct.21-22.

While convention will be shorter than usual, it will feature many familiar events and ways for delegates to engage. Please keep an eye out in your email for the convention call later this spring.

The SFL is also partnering with the Canadian Labour Congress to offer our annual Spring School in an

online format. The school will take place from May 17-20, and will feature four courses. More information and registration can be found online at <https://canadianlabour.ca/who-we-are/labour-education>

We're also pleased to announce that Prairie School for Union Women will return this year, also in an online format. The Prairie School for Union Women offers trade union women the opportunity to learn and share in a supportive environment. The goals of the school are to develop women's personal and leadership skills and to build solidarity among women workers.

Whether you are a woman who is

a long time activist, or just starting to get involved in your union, this school is for you. This year, courses will be delivered online over several days in June. Please check your email and the SFL website for registration and course information coming soon.

After a successful online Occupational Health and Safety Conference last fall, plans are underway for another online conference in September. More information and registration will be available in the coming months.

**PAID SICK DAYS FOR ALL WORKERS.**



Saskatchewan  
Federation of Labour