

Labour Reporter

The voice of Saskatchewan's working class since 1956



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Saskatchewan
Federation of Labour

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.

Saskatchewan workers must demand better

It's been another tough year for working people here in Saskatchewan. While 2021 started out with the welcome news of vaccines and the federal government was able to ensure a rollout that allowed everyone the opportunity to get their jabs before summer, it's ending with frontline workers dealing with the consequences of a devastating fourth wave of COVID-19 that was entirely avoidable. Instead of heading into the new year with the pandemic behind us, we are instead facing a provincial government that has mismanaged the greatest public health crisis of our time, and who have completely abandoned workers that have been on the front lines fighting this virus.

Remember that this is the same government that called workers "heroes" at the start of the pandemic-

"We must keep fighting for a government that puts workers first."

but refused to pay wage top ups for frontline workers, and left federal money meant for workers unspent. They are the same government that has no problem paying workers, who have put their health and safety at risk, the lowest minimum wage in the country, and that refuses to implement paid sick leave- thinking it's okay for workers to have to make the choice to either go to work sick or put food on the table. This lack of action, and lack of support for workers, has also led to the majority of outbreaks in the province occurring in workplaces, which sadly led to workers getting sick,

ending up in hospital, and dying.

Instead of taking action, our government put politics ahead of people, and ignored the advice of public health experts who all said that dropping all public health orders in July was too soon, and that our vaccination rates were still too low. As a result, we are facing a fourth wave of COVID-19 that is pushing healthcare workers and the entire health system to the brink- just as public health experts predicted. It's shameful that so many workers across the province are still struggling, and are just as scared for their own health and safety at work as they were a year ago. To all frontline heroes, please know that your Federation of Labour stands with you, and we will never stop fighting for you. Saskatchewan workers deserve so much better, and Saskatchewan workers must demand better.

That is why we're taking the lead in this fight to demand that the government take accountability for their actions that have had such devastating consequences - to apologize to working people, to take more action to curb this pandemic and to keep workers safe. We have also started a petition calling on the Health Minister- who has made such a mess and has shown

a total lack of respect for frontline workers- to resign. I encourage everyone to take a moment to sign the petition on our website at www.puttingworkersfirst.ca. It's clear this Health Minister has no understanding of the work that frontline healthcare workers do, and the immense pressures they are facing because of his decisions. It's time for him to step aside so that someone more capable can lead us out of this pandemic.

We must keep fighting for a government that puts workers first. The next provincial election is still three years away, but we need to start laying the groundwork now to make sure this government is held accountable for their actions, and that we elect a government that listens to workers. Earlier in November, the SFL held a rally with affiliates and grassroots organizers at the Sask. Party's convention demanding accountability. This is the kind of work we must continue doing to bring workers together, and to remind the Sask. Party that their actions will have consequences at the ballot box. Together, we can work hard over the next three years to ensure that in the next election, we elect a government that puts public health ahead of politics, that will raise the minimum wage will actually implement paid sick leave

for all workers, will make workplace safety a priority, will improve public services, and properly fund health-care and education.

In the coming year, your Federation of Labour will be busy continuing to move forward with our ongoing Putting Workers First Campaign and political action activities. We have a full slate of schools and conferences, including an Equity Conference in February, our annual Prairie School for Union Women, the CLC/SFL Spring School, and the return of our SFL Summer Camp, to name a few. It will be a busy year ahead, and hopefully we will return to in-person events and an in-person convention in the fall. I also look forward to seeing the beginning of the rollout of a national childcare program, a huge victory for working people that we have been fighting for many years to bring to fruition.

Finally, I want to take a moment to thank everyone for putting their trust in me to continue to lead the SFL for another term as President. It is an honour, and I am excited to work with Secretary-Treasurer Kent Peterson, our Executive Council, affiliates and committees in the year ahead. I wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season, and please stay safe.



Johb, Peterson elected at 65th Annual Convention

Delegates at the 65th Annual Saskatchewan Federation of Labour Convention in October re-elected Lori Johb as SFL President, and elected Kent Peterson Secretary-Treasurer.

"I'd like to thank the working people of Saskatchewan for their continued support in this important role as leader of Saskatchewan's labour movement," Johb said. "The past year and a half has been challenging for working people, as so many frontline workers put their own health and safety at risk while our government refused to take the pandemic seriously and left working people behind. I am committed to continuing the fight to demand better for the workers who have kept our province running throughout the pandemic, and to make life better for all working people in Saskatchewan."

"I'd like to thank the working people of Saskatchewan for their continued support in this important role as leader of Saskatchewan's labour movement."

Since first being elected as President in 2018, Johb has made occupational health and safety one of her top priorities, successfully lobbying the government to create a fatalities and injuries strategy to reduce the number of workers in Saskatchewan who are killed or injured on the job. Over the past year, Johb has fought to ensure the safety of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Priorities for Johb in the coming year include continue to advocate for a worker-focused pan-

demographic recovery, a living wage and paid sick leave for all workers, and improving Saskatchewan's Occupational Health and Safety Legislation to ensure it protects contract and gig workers.

Johb became a Vice-President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour in 2005, representing her union – SEIU-West. In 2010, Johb was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the SFL, a position she held until she was first elected SFL President in 2018. She lives in Leroy, and is a proud healthcare worker. Johb is a

passionate workplace health and safety advocate, a trained education facilitator, and has been active on issues such as women's rights, supports for survivors of domestic violence, empowering young workers, and reconciliation within the Labour Movement.

Joining Johb as Secretary-Treasurer of the SFL is Kent Peterson. Peterson is a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) who lives in Regina, and currently serves as Secretary-Treasurer for CUPE Saskatchewan. In his new

role as SFL Secretary-Treasurer, Peterson said he is committed to ensuring the Federation of Labour has the resources it needs to invest in its education, conferences, campaigns, and political action.

Convention delegates condemn Sask. Party handling of COVID-19 pandemic

Last month, delegates at the 65th Annual Saskatchewan Federation of Labour Convention passed resolutions condemning the Sask. Party government for their mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and demanding the resignation of the Health Minister for ignoring the repeated warnings of healthcare professionals that has led to a devastating fourth wave.

"The Sask. Party government has failed working people from the start of the pandemic," said SFL President Lori Johb. "From refusing to provide wage top-ups for all

frontline workers, leaving federal funds meant to help workers unspent, and ignoring calls for paid sick days, the Sask. Party has made it clear they have no respect for the workers who have put their health and safety at risk to keep this province running. I'm not at all surprised that convention delegates voted in favour of these resolutions - working people have had enough."

Delegates also voted in favour of a resolution renewing the SFL's call for the Health Minister to resign. "As Saskatchewan faces the greatest health crisis it has ever seen, it

could not be more clear that the Health Minister is in over his head," Johb said. "It's time for the Minister to step aside so that someone more capable can step in to lead the province out of this pandemic."

Johb added that the Sask. Party's continued disrespect for working people, and their mishandling of the pandemic that has put politics ahead of people, has motivated workers and Saskatchewan's labour movement to do all they can to elect a worker friendly government in the next provincial election.

Labour movement rallies at Sask. Party convention



SFL President Lori Johb addresses the crowd gathered at TCU Place during the Sask. Party Convention in Saskatoon in November.

On the first Saturday in November, the SFL, affiliates, and workers all came together in front of TCU Place in Saskatoon during the Sask. Party's convention to demand action and accountability for their decisions that led to a devastating fourth wave of COVID-19 across the province.

"Convention Intervention: A Rally to Save Saskatchewan" was a chance for workers to come together to tell the Sask. Party how their decisions to lift all public health restrictions despite repeated warnings from health professionals have impacted our lives. Record case numbers, record hospitalizations, and the lowest vaccination rates in the country have affected so many, as people across the province are facing delayed surgeries, and frontline workers are dealing with the stresses of working in a crumbling healthcare system that has been pushed to the brink

as patients have been shipped out of province and the military has been brought in for assistance.

What's happening now is a direct result of Moe and the Sask. Party's decisions. Still, Moe and the Sask. Party are in denial that there's even a problem, and are desperately trying to change the channel instead of doing what's necessary to save lives.

Thank you to everyone who came out to make this rally a success, and to show the Sask. Party that we demand better. Your Federation of Labour will continue the fight to demand accountability from our government for their disastrous handling of the pandemic, and to work to ensure we elect a government that will put workers first and actually listen to public health experts.





Sask. labour movement pushes province to recognize September 30 as a provincial holiday

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is urging the Sask. Party government to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30th as a provincial statutory holiday.

“The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity for all of us to reflect upon the tragedy of the residential school system, to honour the victims and survivors of residential schools, and to commit to reconciliation,” said SFL President Lori Johb. “This year’s discovery of thousands of children’s graves at residential school sites across the country, including 751 unmarked graves at Cowessess First Nation, has been a wake-up call for all of us, and has caused Canadians to face head-on the horrifying legacy of the residential school system in this country.”

Passed by the Federal Government last fall after

“It’s past time for people across the country to recognize that the residential school system was a genocide of a massive scale.”

being outlined as a Call to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report, September 30 is recognized as a statutory holiday for all federally regulated employees. Several provinces and many provincial organizations have indicated they will recognize the holiday, but the Sask. Party government has said they have no plans to legislate September 30th as a provincial statutory holiday for all workers.

“It’s past time for people across the country to recognize that the residential school system was a genocide of a massive scale - a legacy of generations of

colonialism, violence, and systemic racism that is an ongoing trauma for families and communities,” Johb said.

“Making September 30th a provincial statutory holiday will provide working people with the opportunity to use the day to learn, quietly reflect, or participate in reconciliation events in their communities.”

Johb has written a letter to the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety, Don Morgan, urging the government to honour their own commitments to reconciliation and pass legislation to recognize September 30th as a provincial holiday.

“The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is committed to reconciliation and justice for indigenous peoples,” Johb said. “The provincial government must recognize the role they play in reconciliation and the importance of this day, and immediately legislate September 30th as a provincial holiday.”

SFL News Briefs

SFL welcomes new staff

The SFL is pleased to announce a staffing change that has occurred in our office over the past few months.

Lori Jardine recently joined the SFL office as an Administrative Assistant. Previously the Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Business at the University of Regina, Lori has years of experience working for the labour movement, having previously worked for SGEU. Welcome Lori!

New SFL website launches

The SFL has launched a new, updated website. The new website has been refreshed with a new, mobile-friendly design, and has new online engagement tools including the ability to create petitions and send letters to local representatives. Take a look at www.sfl.sk.ca.

Ready for Work App available for download

Last year, the SFL received funding from the WCB to design a mobile application to help young workers understand their rights when on the job. Working closely with the SFL Ready for Work Coordinator Taylor Apperley, we were able to hire a local company to complete

the design. The app launched in early fall, in time to be used in conjunction with Ready for Work presentations across the province. Download the app by scanning the QR code with your phone posted in the ad on page one of this issue of Labour Reporter.

Equity Conference planned for February

SFL staff are busy preparing for the return of our Equity Conference in February of 2022. The conference will be held in conjunction with our all-committees meeting in February. We are currently monitoring the COVID-19 situation to determine whether the committee meetings and conference will be able to be held in-person or virtually. Please monitor your email and the SFL website for more information.

“Every Child Matters” shirts raise \$17,400

Earlier this year, the SFL partnered with a local, indigenous-owned company to produce orange “Every Child Matters” shirts. Thanks to support from our affiliates, \$17,400 was raised for the First Nations Child and Family Caring Association.



SFL launches petition calling for Minister's resignation

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour has launched a petition calling on Health Minister Paul Merriman to apologize to Saskatchewan frontline workers and resign for ignoring repeated calls from healthcare professionals and dropping all public health restrictions, that led to a disastrous fourth wave of COVID-19, overwhelming our healthcare system and pushed workers to the brink.

"This situation was entirely avoidable, and is a direct result of the Sask. Party putting politics over public health and failing to listen to the science and healthcare professionals," said SFL President Lori Johb. "We called for additional measures to be put in place for weeks, and the Sask. Party did nothing but delay while the virus continued to spread. The Premier,

"This situation was entirely avoidable and is a direct result of the Sask. Party putting politics over public health."

the Health Minister, and the Sask. Party owe every frontline worker who have has to deal with the consequences of their inaction an apology. It has been clear throughout the past few weeks that Minister Merriman is in over his head, and has no idea of the immense pressure that has been put on frontline workers as a result of his government's refusal to get the pandemic under control. The Minister must resign so someone more capable can step in to lead

the province out of the pandemic.”

Since launching the petition in October, the SFL has had hundreds of frustrated and angry Saskatch-

ewan workers sign the petition. So far, the Sask. Party continues to deny there is a problem, and in fact, held their convention in person in Saskatoon while our hospitals were overwhelmed with ICU patients.

Please take a moment to sign on to the petition if you haven't already at www.puttingworkersfirst.ca, and demand an apology and accountability from the Sask. Party government for creating this crisis.

How to keep up the fight for frontline workers

Sometimes it seems that we're so used to talking about COVID-19 that we have become desensitized to the risks and challenges.

Nurses, care aides, grocery store workers, servers, teachers... there are a whole bunch of folks who keep our society running and had not much more than a mask to protect them when this whole thing began.

Now, we've learned more about how to protect ourselves, progressed with vaccines, and in theory, we should be safer. But politicians can take advantage of a situation and pander to voters instead of leading the way they ought to.

So instead of stepping up to protect those who are keeping our society functioning, they've made some incredibly risky (and frankly, just stupid) moves.

We've already asked for Health Minister Merriman to resign, but

we're also calling on the government to recognize five other ways they can support the frontline workers who support us:

“There are a whole bunch of folks who keep our society running who had not much more than a mask to protect them.”

Paid sick leave for all: When people show up to work sick, that puts everyone at risk. But what choice do people have when it means not being able to pay their bills? This is a small gesture with a huge impact.

Increase the minimum wage: The minimum wage should be a living wage. Saskatchewan has the second lowest minimum wage in the country, and many of the people who kept our economy going in the worst of times are minimum

wage earners. It's just not right that they should have to worry about making ends meet.

Higher quality services: Our government isn't one to invest in public services at the best of times, and now COVID-19 seems to be an excuse to not invest further in quality services like education, medical and public services that everyone needs to live a healthy and productive life. It's a double whammy for healthcare workers who need better funding to manage the uptick in COVID-19 cases.

Better public safety rules: By making strong protocols for cleaning and protection at workplace that include worker-input, access to the information they need to stay safe, and the right to refuse unsafe work.

It's time to come together and demand the Sask. Party government hear our voices and make Saskatchewan a better place to live for everyone.



Workers and activists gather at the Legislature to demand action on the COVID-19 pandemic fourth wave in September.

Throne speech fails workers in a time of crisis

October's throne speech from the Sask. Party government fails working people in Saskatchewan, offering no plans to fix the current COVID-19 crisis in the province that is overwhelming our hospitals and pushing workers to the brink.

"Today's throne speech shows just how out of touch with reality this government is when it comes to the current situation workers are facing in this province," said SFL President Lori Johb. "Workers are looking for some answers and accountability from this government for dropping all public health restrictions and allowing a devastating fourth wave to occur, and they are looking for a plan to be able to move past this crisis and create good jobs, boost our struggling economy, and get people back to work. Unfortunately,

"Frontline workers are looking for answers as to why the Sask. Party ignored health experts."

ly, this throne speech completely missed the mark."

Johb said the throne speech was also an opportunity for Sask. Party to acknowledge their mistakes and apologize to frontline workers for the damage done to the healthcare system that has led to cancelled surgeries, ICU patients being transferred out of province, and the need for military assistance.

"Frontline workers are looking for answers as to why the Sask. Party ignored health experts and modelling that predicted this fourth wave," Johb said. "They

want to know why the Sask. Party keeps ignoring medical advice and continues to put politics ahead of people and scientific evidence, and they want to know what the plan

is to fix the damage that has been done to our health care system. "This throne speech is an attempt to distract from that reality, and workers deserve so much better."

Exposing the truth behind minimum wage myths

The Saskatchewan government recently raised the minimum wage from \$11.45 to \$11.81 on October 1st. That's right. \$0.36. Thirty six cents.

One quarter, a dime and a penny. Heck, we don't even make pennies in this country anymore!

Saskatchewan has the lowest minimum wage in the country, with the exception of New Brunswick (\$11.75). In British Columbia, workers make \$15.20/hour. Imagine what would happen if we did that here...

Raising the minimum wage to \$15 would put money in the pockets of the workers who need it, many of which whom are the exact people who put themselves at risk in the first wave of COVID-19 and kept our province running as frontline workers.

The government would like you to think that by keeping worker wages low it's better for the econ-

omy, yet these choices are actually harming our economy and has led to us having one of the worst rates of job losses.

People tend to think there's no need to raise the minimum wage because most of those receiving it are teenagers living with their parents, working part time for some extra cash or working after school.

In reality:

- 74% are NOT teenagers,
- 38% are 35 years or older,
- 33% of living wage workers are post secondary graduates, and
- 59% are women.

(Source: Stats Canada, 2020)

This changes the portrait of the average minimum wage worker substantially. We're talking about you, your neighbours, and your friends. People with bills to pay, mouths to feed, and who keep the wheels of this province turning.

Another myth is that we keep the minimum wage low to support small business owners. . In fact, 51% of the minimum wage workers are working for big businesses. Big retail chains are one of the biggest employers of frontline workers and have made huge profits. These are frontline workers who are making big gains for their employers and not sharing in the rewards.

Our government is elected to lead for people, not corporate interests. Increasing the minimum wage to a living wage is the least they can do to support working people.

We continue to fight against the growing economic inequality, rising cost of living, deteriorating public services, and now a pandemic. It's time to acknowledge the work of hundreds of thousands of Saskatchewan workers and to ensure their needs are covered.

You knew better.

And we deserve better.



The Saskatchewan Government let the pandemic get out of hand. Again.

Workers deserve better.

Sign the petition calling on the Health Minister to resign at www.puttingworkersfirst.ca



**PUTTING
WORKERS FIRST**



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