

**News Conference Statement
Regina
May 31, 2011**

Good morning. Thank you for coming.

Saskatchewan's specialized health care professionals are calling on the Wall government to prevent **escalating** health care strikes, by agreeing to submit our current contract dispute to independent, binding arbitration.

The government has been sending **mixed messages** on this critical issue. It's time for the government to quit playing politics, and to act in the public interest.

On May 18th, Premier Wall told the online newspaper, *PrairiePost.com*, the following. Quote: *"I have not heard the union say they completely want to give up the right to strike. I guess if they do, we can talk about that."* End quote.

The Premier needs to listen. For weeks now, we have proposed to end all job action - in effect, to give up our right to strike - as soon as the government agrees to send our contract dispute to independent, binding arbitration. What labour relations experts sometimes call, **interest arbitration**.

Seeing the Premier's public statements, our union contacted his office to confirm that the government is prepared to submit our contract dispute to arbitration. **No one has returned our calls.**

This isn't the first time Mr. Wall has said one thing and done another with respect to health care services and labour legislation.

I refer you to this January, 2007 letter that Wall sent to the President of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. This was just a few months prior to the election of the Sask Party government. In this letter, Wall said and I quote:

"The Saskatchewan Party would also consider final offer arbitration or final offer selection as a means to bring both parties closer to an agreement and avoid lengthy labour disputes. Under this model, parties which deliver services which are deemed essential enter negotiations as usual. However, if they cannot resolve their differences after a specified period of time they are both asked to submit proposals, and an arbitrator chooses the one viewed as most reasonable."

Even before his government's election, Wall admitted that essential services legislation required **an independent dispute resolution mechanism** to guard against stalemated contract negotiations.

When in office he promptly ignored his own commitment, and introduced an essential services law that contains no such protection. Look at the legislation, you will find no mention of an **independent dispute resolution mechanism** in that law.

No wonder it has been a disaster in health care negotiations. No wonder our recent province-wide public opinion poll found that Saskatchewan people feel this bad law has hurt, not helped contract negotiations in health care.

No wonder that same public opinion poll found more than two-thirds of respondents - 67.5% - supported the use of independent, binding arbitration to settle the Health Sciences contract dispute.

The public sees arbitration as a reasonable alternative to avoid health care strikes, while breaking the stalemate at the bargaining table that has now lasted more than two years.

If the government and health care employers really want to settle this contract at the table, where have they been for the past two years? Why have they failed to come forward with a fair and reasonable contract offer?

It's time for the Wall government to get serious about health care negotiations, and either send employers to the bargaining table with a proper mandate or agree to the independent dispute resolution mechanism it has suggested on more than one occasion.

Health Sciences has said numerous times, and repeats here today:

We are prepared to forego our right to strike with respect to the current contract negotiations, the minute the Wall government and SAHO agree to submit our dispute to an independent third party, agreed to by both sides, who will have the ability to set the terms and conditions of a new contract.

Independent, binding arbitration - interest arbitration - has been used for years in Saskatchewan to settle contract negotiations for police and firefighters. For many years it has been used in other provinces to settle a long list of contract disputes in health care and other sectors deemed essential. Even the *Canada Health Act* requires the provinces to settle contract disputes with doctors through **independent arbitration**.

Equally important, in a number of cases in provinces like Ontario and Nova Scotia, independent, binding arbitration has been used **not** because it was required by law, but because both sides in the contract dispute **voluntarily submitted** their dispute for resolution by an independent arbitrator.

It is time for the Wall government to either send SAHO to the bargaining table with an amended contract offer or submit this dispute to arbitration.

If they fail to act, they will be directly responsible for ongoing, escalating strike action with respect to Saskatchewan health care services.