



Liberal government and BCNU work together to turn collective bargaining structure on its head, says HSA

April 15, 2013

Following a consultation process that can only be described as a sham, BC Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid - on the day before the current government dissolves - announced today the enactment of legislation that dramatically changes the structure of collective bargaining in health care, HSA President Reid Johnson said today.

"On her last day on the job, Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid orchestrated an announcement that legislation the BC Liberal government rammed through in the closing days of the legislative session has been signed into law."

"Today's announcement was all about timing to coincide with the BC Liberals' election platform release that points only to their cozy relationship with the BC Nurses Union for evidence they understand the difficult and delicate balance in labour relations," he said.

"And the legislation makes it absolutely clear that the BC Liberals do not understand either the legislation they rammed through, or the delicate nature of negotiations," he said.

"To be clear, the legislation enacted today has absolutely nothing to do with the BC Nurses Union's continuing campaign to transfer nurses from other unions to their own, as the BC Liberals seem to believe. That already happened. The BC Nurses Union was successful after five years of expensive and hard campaigning to get licensed practical nurses to switch unions. That's not the issue here. The issue here is that the delicate public sector collective bargaining structure has been turned on its head without any regard to the effect it has on the people whose collective agreement rights and conditions are covered by that structure."

In the government's news release about the enactment of the legislation, MacDiarmid says "consultations with a variety of stakeholders, including health employers and union groups, were held following royal assent."

Johnson scoffed at the alleged consultation.

"Yes HSA was summoned to a meeting. But at that meeting we expressed our need for time to be able to speak with our members, and for the need to have a proper investigation and understanding of the dramatic change in the bargaining structure. That's not consultation. That's a coffee date," he said.

"This sham of a consultation was never designed to be more than just that, after all, the process was announced only AFTER the legislation was passed."

Johnson said the most disturbing part about the legislation is that it was clearly designed for the BC Liberals to announce a victory to pander to the votes of BC Nurses Union politicians.

Last week the BC Nurses Union threatened that if the BC Liberal government did not pass the legislation, the BC Liberals "would risk losing support of those people."

The bargaining structure that was in place before today came about in the late 1990s after almost a year of extensive consultation with all affected parties - not just one union that had a promise it wanted to deliver.

"Today's announcement is a cynical political move, and Margaret MacDiarmid demonstrates, once again, why the BC Liberals' time is up. The time for governing by rhetoric and photo op is over," Johnson said.

HSA represents 1200 registered psychiatric nurses who are covered by the Nurses Bargaining Association collective agreement.

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017