

ON APRIL 1 SPEAK OUT AGAINST

# BILL 27

## AN UNHEALTHY LAW

### Bill 27 passed, details expected soon

After again using closure to cut off debate the provincial government passed Bill 27 on Tuesday, March 25. The law forces nurses and other health employees into a new collective agreement framework based on Health Regions. Much of what Bill 27 does will be contained in the associated Regulations, the details that will be made public in the next couple of days.

“Not only are they taking away the right to strike from thousands of nurses, and other health workers, Bill 27 permits the Cabinet and the Alberta Labour Relations Board to unilaterally decide everything from which contract applies, up to and including how health care unions run their internal affairs,” says UNA President Heather Smith.

Human Resources and Employment Minister Clint Dunford told UNA representatives that the law was written at the request of Health Region Employers.

Bill 27 allows the provincial cabinet to set regulations, including giving sweeping new powers to the provincial Labour Relations Board to impose bargaining units and collective agreements on health workers.

### How will nurses deal with Bill 27?

The UNA provincial Negotiating Committee has called a provincial meeting of Local Presidents to examine negotiating priorities on April 11 in Edmonton. Bill 27 will, over the next few months, force nurses into large Region-wide bargaining units of all UNA nurses, community and facility.

“The message in Bill 27—in big box-car size letters—is that there will be no separation between community and facility,” says UNA Director of Labour Relations David Harrigan. “We now have to consider how these bargaining units can work, and how, for example, to protect nurses from being shuffled from worksite to worksite.”

Bill 27 allows run-off votes to determine which single contract will apply to all the Region’s nurses. The UNA negotiating committee is preparing to bargain the terms for the larger bargaining units rather than go to run-off votes.

“Negotiations can create more rational structures than imposing one-size-doesn’t-fit-all single agreements,” David Harrigan says. “We need to clarify how things like seniority, bumping, job postings, transfers, and recall would work,” he points out.

At the UNA Demand Setting meeting, members set out positions to prepare for Region-wide facility and community bargaining units, but Bill 27 has gone much farther.

### April 1 Day of action on Bill 27

UNA and other health workers are setting up work-site events to protest Bill 27. It is UNHEALTHY legislation!! says UNA President Heather Smith. Noon hour information pickets, burial ceremonies for collective bargaining and black armbands are all suggestions for possible local activities. The purpose is to broaden the understanding of the devastating implications for ALL unionized workers in Alberta.

Edmonton nurses at the Health Link and Local 196 have already planned a candle light vigil at 7 pm in front of 124 Plaza (124 Street and 102 Avenue) and they say everyone is welcome.

## **PHAA calls for mediation at provincial table**

The Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta have requested that government appoint a mediator for the provincial table contract talks. UNA has told the government it is too early to call in a mediator, as talks have barely begun.

“This demonstrates how Bill 27 is totally undercutting collective bargaining,” UNA President Heather Smith said. “The Employers are rushing through the steps of bargaining because they have government legislation to back them up if there is no resolution. They have no incentive to negotiate at all.”

“The Health Regions appear to want to rush bargaining to an impasse and call in the government,” Smith said. “They are being deliberately provocative by refusing to really negotiate. It looks as though they are trying to push our health system into a crisis.”

UNA had asked for bargaining dates this week to be rescheduled but had not cancelled or pulled out of the talks. There have only been eight – often short – days of negotiation in the main provincial nurses’ talks so far, a total of less than 19 total hours of bargaining.

The Health Sciences Association of Alberta talks went to mediation after 25 days of negotiations. For UNA’s last provincial agreement, settled in record time, intense bargaining took longer.

## **PHAA launches massive advertising campaign**

The Alberta Health Regions and their negotiating body, the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta launched a massive PR campaign with newspaper, radio and TV advertising.

“The ads are very misleading,” says UNA President Heather Smith. “We’ve been contacted by many nurses and a number of general citizens who are concerned about the factual errors and incredible “spin” in the ads.”

UNA has published several Truth in Advertising fact sheets to clarify some of the misleading information in the PHAA advertising. The fact sheets are available on UNA Net and on the main UNA website: [www.una.ab.ca](http://www.una.ab.ca).

“We are still early in negotiations,” Heather Smith points out. “PHAA has already spent over \$1 million on PR. It’s an incredible waste of tax dollars. UNA is not going to get into that expensive game with them,” she said.

## **UNA demands Babiuk be fired**

President Heather Smith has demanded that Regional Health Authorities bargaining steering committee chair Pearl Babiuk be fired. She made the request in a letter she wrote this week to Health and

Wellness Minister Gary Mar and Lakeland Health Region Board chair Ernie Isley.

“Ms. Babiuk has been dangerously misleading Members of the Legislative Assembly and Albertans in letters and advertising that grossly misrepresent the issues in current contract negotiations with nurses,” Heather Smith said when she released her letter to Mar and Isley.

Ms. Babiuk is the Chief Executive Officer of the Lakeland Regional Health Authority and has been writing to Members of the Legislative Assembly as chair of the Health Regions’ bargaining steering committee.

“It is ethically unacceptable for a public officer like Ms. Babiuk to be making statements based on patent untruths. I understand that in a negotiation process each side will interpret the issues to their advantage, but the statements from Ms. Babiuk and in the Health Regions’ advertising go far beyond interpretation.”

“We are calling on Mr. Mar to show some leadership and put a stop to the misinformation the Health Regions are foisting on the public and MLAs. He should insist they demonstrate honesty and accountability in dealing with the nurses negotiations.”

## **Toronto nurses contract SARS**

Fourteen health-care workers, mainly nurses from the Scarborough Grace Hospital, were admitted to quarantine, negative air-pressure rooms at the West Park Health Centre a former tuberculosis sanatorium. They are suffering fevers and other flu-like symptoms associated with SARS, severe acute respiratory syndrome, the Ontario Nurses Association said.

The nurses may have been exposed to 44-year-old Chi Kwai Tse, a patient who died of SARS March 13, said ONA president Barb Wahl. An elderly man who shared a room with this patient for one night died Friday.

“Our members are fearful, there’s no question. Nurses are the front line, they put the needs of others ahead of themselves,” Barb Wahl said. “I’m holding my breath and praying that no one else has been exposed.”

## **CFNU President Kathleen Connors retiring**

One-hundred-thousand new members later, CFNU President Kathleen Connors, RN, is ready to retire. She announced to the CFNU National Executive Board recently that, after 20 years as CFNU President, she will leave at the close of the Federation’s Eleventh Biennial Convention this June. She and her husband, Cyril, plan to settle in Newfoundland.

“My goal for CFNU was to make it truly national. Now we have nine of Canada’s ten major nurses unions as members, from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia. We are also seen by the Federal Health Minister and her deputies as a critically important constituency—one that must be consulted,” Kathleen Connors said.