

Negotiations resume but HEALTH REGIONS RE-INTRODUCE ROLLBACKS

Getting rid of the protection of nurse in charge resurfaced in the Regions' demands at the resumed bargaining talks on November 24. The Regions new proposals appeared to be calculated to provoke a crisis rather than reach an agreement. The Regions have gone backward from the mediator's recommendations and reintroduced some of their earlier proposals.

The Regions new proposals appeared to be calculated to provoke a crisis rather than reach an agreement.

They also again proposed decreases to health care benefits and rollbacks to layoff & recall articles. The Regions have also revived their plan to bypass nurses for new jobs and propose to offer jobs externally without offering them to their current employees. All the rollbacks included in the mediator's recommendations, like deleting designated days of rest, plus many others from the Employers' in-going proposal are back on the table.

"It's difficult to have a lot of optimism that there's not going to be a crisis. What they did was provide us with a proposal that absolutely was intended to send a message to the members that they're looking for

confrontations," David Harrigan told the Edmonton Journal.

The Regions' proposal appears to be tailor-made for rejection. While it may not make progress towards a deal, Director of Labour Relations David Harrigan says the Employers' position was carefully crafted to avoid being found guilty of bargaining in bad faith. After the failure of the mediator's recommendations the Regions were legally able to step back to earlier proposals they had made.

They are well aware 98.8% of nurses voted against the mediator's recommendations in September. In a news release, the Health Regions said they are trying to settle issues and reduce the number that would be going to arbitration. They have done exactly the opposite.

A detailed summary of the latest proposals are available on UNA*Net and on the UNA website, www.una.ab.ca

The next date set for negotiations is December 10, 2003. Although the prospects of reaching a settlement are not bright, negotiation remains the nurses' top priority, and David Harrigan says the UNA Negotiating Committee will stick with it as long as necessary.

Minister marches arbitration ahead

UNA names nine nominees for Compulsory Arbitration Boards (CABs) Arbitration still won't settle the issues

UNA has made nine nominations to Compulsory Arbitration Boards (CABs) on provincial contract negotiations, but the nurses still say only negotiations, and not arbitration, can produce a collective agreement.

UNA was legally required to nominate to the arbitration boards, and if the union didn't, the Minister of Human Resources and Employment Clint Dunford would have made the nominations himself. Nurses still do not expect arbitration to resolve the negotiations or reach a collective agreement. Nurses have made it clear that a negotiated settlement that nurses can agree to is the only acceptable outcome.

Minister Dunford is pushing forward the compulsory arbitration process and gave UNA until November 24 to name the nominees to the CABs. The Regions said they wanted one arbitration board for all the UNA contracts in negotiations. But after the Labour Relations Board ruled that legally up to 20 separate Compulsory Arbitration Boards would be necessary, Dunford asked UNA to name nominees for up to 20 boards, but requested they be combined into one.

Under the Labour Relations Code the nurses' and Regions' nominees have up until December 4 to agree on a chairperson. If the nominees cannot agree the Minister can step in and appoint the chairperson.

Bill 27 talks

The negotiating teams also met on November 25, 2003 to begin the negotiations mandated by Bill 27. The legislation requires the parties to meet and negotiate changes to the receiving agreements. In each Region, nurses voted for one agreement to become the "receiving agreement". The negotiations would be necessary to make each Health Regions' receiving agreement applicable to all the nurses in the Region who have different contracts.

Through discussion, it became clear there are many overlapping issues between the Bill 27 negotiations and the Provincial negotiations. The Bill 27 process running parallel to negotiations creates confusing and conflicting issues that both parties must deal with.

More talks on the Bill 27 process are scheduled for December 11, 2003.

Health Regions' belligerent bargaining driving nurses away

Reports are coming in that nurses are already leaving the province as a result of the Regions' hardball bargaining and demands for rollbacks. One Local President reported four nurses leaving from just one unit recently, all taking new jobs in the U.S.

1st Birthday of Romanow report

It has been one year since Roy Romanow released the national report so many healthcare activists pinned their hopes on to protect Medicare. But not even the National Health Council, one of the most middle of the road recommendations, has been enacted. Alberta's refusal to accept the Council has been the roadblock so far. What exactly are Gary Mar and Ralph Klein hiding that they don't want a Health Council looking over their shoulder? The recent doctors' deal for primary care is just part of it.

Romanow himself sounded discouraged in media reports on the anniversary.

"I have some serious reservations about how much of what has been agreed to will see the light of day," Romanow told the Toronto Star.

"While First Ministers accepted allocating some \$16 billion over the next five years to a Health Reform Fund, we are still in the dark as to what this investment will actually achieve, what conditions, if any, will apply, or what criteria will be used to evaluate its effectiveness. Deadlines have come and gone, and we are still no closer to knowing. And trust me, this matters! Some provinces have already budgeted to use the immediate \$2.5 billion top-up that the Health Accord called for — ostensibly to address urgent priorities like reducing waitlists and improving access to care — for purposes other than health care."