

**Premier Gordon Campbell**  
**Legislation to end health care disputes**  
**August 7, 2001**

When this government was sworn into office on June 5, we inherited two health disputes that have been ongoing for a number of months. Because those disputes were creating a threat to patient care, we legislated a cooling-off period which required the employer and the two unions involved to get back to the negotiating table in the hopes that they could resolve this matter and move forward with confidence in building a health care system that people can depend upon.

We all know that patient care has suffered in the months since the negotiations began. Literally thousands of surgeries and procedures have been cancelled since January, when the negotiations got started.

Unfortunately, even during this cooling-off period, an illegal strike by the HSA threatened care and cancelled procedures for thousands of patients in British Columbia. That uncertainty has created an unfortunate situation for patients. They don't know whether the care is going to be there for them when they need it. Will they get the surgeries that have been scheduled? Should they carry on with travelling plans to go to a major centre, only to be turned away?

It has also created uncertainty for our health professionals, for our nurses and for our health science professionals. It's obviously very difficult for them to plan their futures.

We all want a resolution to these disputes. I want a resolution that works for patients first, but also that respects the work that our health care professionals do in our health care system in British Columbia. We need a resolution that is both fair and affordable.

The efforts to come to a negotiated settlement have reached an impasse. After 50 days, the parties are literally hundreds of millions of dollars apart. It is therefore our duty as a government – our responsibility – to act now to ensure that patient care is at the forefront of our health care agenda in the province of British Columbia. We have a responsibility to put patients' interests first while being fair to all of our health care professionals.

As we said during the election, it is the people in the health care system who provide the health care that we all need. To be fair and to reflect that fact, each of the unions has been offered the highest combined wage and benefit package anywhere in the country.

Let me say that again. There is no place in Canada – not Alberta, nowhere – where there is as high an offer in terms of the combined wage and benefit package to our health care professionals. We have offered and put on the table an offer to our nurses, and an offer to our health science professionals, that is the best combined wage and benefit package in Canada, bar none.

But we have reached the limit of our resources in British Columbia. As I said to the premiers last week, our health care system in its present form is not sustainable. Our health care budget in British Columbia has gone up by over a billion dollars in the last year. That means that our health care costs have gone up four times faster than our ability to pay for them.

It took us over ten years to get here, and we certainly aren't claiming that we can solve all the problems in the health care system in just sixty days – but we do want to send a clear message. We want to send a clear message that British Columbia is a good place to practice your profession if you are a health care professional.

I hope that our nurses and our health science professionals will give the offer that's there for them a good, hard look because I know they won't find a better offer in Canada. The offer that's on the table includes a 23.5% wage increase for nurses over the next three years, and up to a 14.5% wage increase for health science workers over the three-year term of their agreement.

On top of that, every health care worker involved has received a 25% cut in their personal income tax. By next January they will be paying the lowest tax rates of any province in Canada.

Our primary concern here is patient care. As was said during the Throne Speech, we are going to continue to work with our health professionals to provide training and educational opportunities, to improve workplace situations, and provide professional assistance so that we can start to improve our health care system over time with a proper plan that we work on executing together. We'll be outlining those initiatives in the days ahead.

Our duty is twofold: first and foremost, to protect patient care in the province of British Columbia; and to respect the health care professionals who provide it. Today, I am instructing our Labour Minister to introduce legislation that will end the impasse. It will let our nurses get on with their lives, it will let our health science professionals get on with their lives, and it will give patients the confidence in the health care system that they need to be there when they need it. The legislation will be tabled within the hour, and it will be passed by the end of this week.

I recognize this has been a very difficult time for all of the parties involved. But I believe if we all work together and focus on our mutual objective of putting patient care at the top of our list, and of letting British Columbians know they have a health care system that's there for them, I am confident we will be able to move forward and provide a leading example to Canada of how you can make a public health care system work for all the people that live in our provinces.

-end-