



Arnie M. Stadnick
International Vice President, Canada

November 2, 2020

Premier Jason Kenney
Office of the Premier
307 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Premier:

I write to you with grave concern over the recent passage of your party's Policy 3 (*on making Alberta a "Right to Work" jurisdiction*) and Policy 11 (*on introducing a privately funded and privately managed healthcare option*).

If realized through legislation, these policies would have dire consequences for Boilermakers — and all workers in Alberta — as well as for the stability of our economy, which is now in dire need of cooperative efforts to recover in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and the collapse of oil prices. Now is not the time to dredge up old ideological battles designed to undermine working people and conditions, suppress wages, and compromise health services.

Policy 3

An American-style Right-to-Work (RTW) law in Alberta, by making the payment of union dues an opt-in proposition, would unfairly handcuff unions' ability to properly bargain for workers' interests; would gut training and thus reduce skill levels and workplace safety; and would hamper our efforts to protect our members from unfair management practices. In the long run, unions would dwindle — along with the wages and living standards of all workers in the province, both union and non-union.

Experiences in American RTW states offer glaring proof that as union membership falls, wages stagnate — for both union and non-union workers — while the incomes of the top one percent of the population rises. This has been shown in the right-to-work states south of the border, and it is no way to maintain a satisfactory standard of living for the majority.

The oft-repeated assertion that right-to-work laws boost economic productivity is simply not borne out, and plenty of studies have illustrated this. Indeed, in 1995, the Alberta government's own Economic Development Authority's Joint Review Committee on "Right to Work" concluded that

“RTW legislation may well disrupt Alberta's currently strong and stable labour relations, and as the committee found no evidence of economic advantage to such legislation, it does not recommend RTW legislation for Alberta.... RTW legislation does not in and of itself create a competitive advantage nor would it cure a fundamental competitive disadvantage.... Labour stability is a key factor in economic prosperity.”

The UCP should heed this wise advice.

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I urge you to consider also the negative impact that RTW legislation would have on training and workplace safety. Unions pour lots of resources into training workers to do their jobs safely and well. This fact is particularly true of the Boilermakers union, whose training regimes and apprenticeship programs are amongst the best in Canadian industry — appropriate to the very dangerous and precise types of work that our members perform. Right-to-work legislation would jeopardize our ability to provide this crucial training, and workplace safety would suffer, with an attendant rise in health and legal costs. This trend can in fact be seen in American RTW states. The American Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that the rate of fatalities in the workplace is 54 percent higher in states with right-to-work laws. Does the UCP really want Alberta to join these ranks? I can assure you that my members do not.

We Boilermakers have generally enjoyed good relations with our employers, to the benefit of the province's economy. The effects of RTW legislation would introduce a potential threat to the goodwill which has marked our dealings with employers and allowed productive growth in the industries in which we work — industries that are key to Alberta's prosperity.

Under an RTW law, you would risk that highly skilled workers like Boilermakers would move out of province in order to earn their true worth in jurisdictions with fairer labour laws, further hamstringing Alberta's economy. RTW would represent a new low in the "race to the bottom."

What's more, in all likelihood any RTW legislation attempted by the UCP would be struck down in the event of a Charter challenge. Does the UCP really want to force taxpayers to foot the bill for a lengthy and costly legal fight that will ultimately fail?

As our economy strives to recover from the crippling effects of COVID-19 and the collapse of oil prices, why choose now to pick a fight with Alberta's workers?

We have enough challenges to meet on the road to recovery. Why does the UCP want to sow discord between our workers and their employers, to the detriment of the economy?

My union has praised your government when it has deserved it. We've supported your commitment to develop our energy sector to its fullest potential. We lauded you when you wisely invested in innovative carbon capture, utilization and storage technology to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions for a cleaner planet. And we applaud another of the recent policies passed at your AGM (Policy 26: *Use the abundance of Alberta's natural gas resources to encourage downstream growth in petrochemicals which could be used in the manufacturing of a vast array of plastics*).

But we must speak up when you turn to union-busting.

Now, more than ever, we — government, industry, and workers — should be seeking common ground and pulling together to build Alberta up. I urgently encourage you and your party caucus to revisit the ill-timed and ill-conceived Policy 3, and to reject right-to-work out of hand.

Policy 11

My members and I are also deeply concerned by the UCP's Policy 11, which calls for a private tier in the realm of health care. That the policy was endorsed by a scant majority of 52 percent of party delegates indicates how tone-deaf such a policy is to the wishes of Albertans.

The introduction of a private health care option would undermine the foundational principle of Canada's health system — that access should be based on need, rather than the ability to pay. Any passage of such a policy into law would be at the peril of working people and the poor in Alberta. The only beneficiaries would be the rich.

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Studies show that privatized health care siphons health professionals out of the public sphere and into the private, leading to inevitably longer wait times and poorer standards of care in public hospitals and clinics. Privatized health care in the US provides ample proof that it would lead to higher costs across the board, in the public and the private tiers alike.

In as far as a move to privatize care would violate the *Canada Health Act*, it would risk being struck down by the courts. Again, the UCP seems intent to gamble — with taxpayers money — on this wrong-headed approach to health. At the very least, the federal government would withhold much-needed funds from the province, in essence punishing the people of Alberta for your government's wrong step.

During the election campaign of 2019, you guaranteed your commitment to fully public health care. Despite this, your government has shown its disdain for a robust public health care system through your recent slashing of 11,000 jobs in the health field.

I, and all Boilermakers, ask you to do the honourable thing, avoid blatant hypocrisy, and shelf this irresponsible policy. You must not take this precarious step toward a less equitable — and more expensive — health care system.

I would eagerly welcome any opportunity to discuss these matters further. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully,



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cc: Members of the UCP government caucus