

Premier Gordon Campbell

May 2, 2004

Check Against Delivery

For all those who have been affected by the HEU dispute – especially the thousands of patients and their families who have been denied care and services – I am pleased to say that today we have concluded an arrangement supported by the BC Federation of Labour that will put an end to this dispute.

In keeping with the framework provided by Bill 37, we have come to a fair resolution that meets the employer's objectives in a way that is also fair to our health support workers.

This arrangement could have been reached last week had the union chose negotiation over confrontation.

As you know, the Health Employers have been trying for over a year now to get a negotiated settlement with the HEU. In fact, they had an agreement that was recommended by the HEU executive last May – but was rejected by their members.

Ever since then, it's been tough to get a deal with the HEU, as talks broke down and they went on strike.

The government introduced legislation for one reason, and one reason only – to protect patient care. Today I am pleased to announce that it has achieved its purpose.

Under the agreement signed by both parties, the government will meet its cost-savings objective, and re-direct those savings to improving patient care.

Four per cent of that will come from increasing the HEU's work week from 36 hours to 37.5 hours, like most public sector employees.

The other 10 per cent in cost reductions will be achieved by a negotiated arrangement that allows the HEU to use the right mix of non-wage items to reduce the impact on take-home pay.

Indeed, we put this option in Bill 37 so as to provide an alternative for the HEU to an across-the-board 11 per cent pay cut.

In addition, we have addressed the issue of retroactivity, as I indicated we were willing to do last Friday.

No HEU member will be required to repay any money they earned prior to May 1st.
Period.

The employer retains the right to contract out, to achieve efficiencies and savings that can be used to enhance patient care.

The employer has always been willing to negotiate caps on the number of employees that will be affected by contracting out – and this has been achieved.

It is agreed that no more than 600 FTEs will be contracted out in the next two years, beyond the more than approximately 1,300 who have already been served notice or those affected by current or future public-private partnerships.

In addition, we have agreed to make \$25 million in severance benefits available to HEU members who are affected by contracting out.

In short, both parties have worked within Bill 37 to put an end to this illegal strike.

Breaking the law is not an option – and it is never right – as the courts have effectively said again today.

Labour negotiations should not put patients at risk or treat students as pawns.

We have successfully negotiated 37 other public sector agreements.

I am pleased that, despite the turmoil of the past week, we have been able to find a fair and reasonable resolution that should be supported and respected by all British Columbians.

To those thousands of patients who have been hurt by this illegal action, let me say this to you and your families.

I know how tough it's been on you.

We're going to do everything we can to get you the care you deserve as quickly as possible.

And now we have a settlement that should put an end to this dispute and put patients first.”