

Health union raises concern about layoff plan

BY DAVID HUTTON, THE STARPHOENIX OCTOBER 26, 2011

The Saskatoon Health Region says there is no "hidden agenda" for health-care layoffs after the provincial election.

The Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS) said Tuesday the union is concerned about potential job cuts following a notice letter sent in early October to discuss the proposed layoff of an addictions counsellor for children and youth from mental health and addictions services.

The region refused a meeting until after the election, the union contends, putting "politics" above jobs.

"We would like the region to provide some clear indication of what's behind this, an immediate explanation for this proposed layoff and whether this is the only (layoff) they have under consideration," HSAS president-elect Karen Wasylenko said.

The health region said in a statement it didn't accept the meeting because it wants to remain "neutral" during the writ period.

The potential layoff is "an isolated example of employment changes that occur from time to time ... and is in no way related to the provincial election," the statement said.

The addictions counsellor position in question "is related to a recent arbitration ruling that required one addictions counsellor to be reinstated to a former position after resigning from Saskatoon Health Region.

As this position was no longer included in the resource plan for this department, the (health region) embarked on the standard process to discuss with unions the potential layoff of an employee as defined by the collective agreement."

The union calls the proposed layoff "unjustified" and says the health region advertised vacancies for similar positions until several days after the notice was given.

The health region responded that the vacancies are in "other service and program areas."

There is a one-month waiting list for children and youth to get a first meeting with an addictions counsellor, Wasylenko said.

Don McMorris, the Sask. Party candidate for Indian Head-Milestone, said the government has increased health staffing since taking office.

"We've increased the number of nurses, we've increased the number of doctors, that's been our record and will continue to be our record," said McMorris, the health minister.

The NDP seconded the union's call for a meeting to discuss the potential layoff.

"The government should not hide behind election timing," said Judy Junor, the NDP candidate for Saskatoon-Eastview.

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