

March 23, 2011

The Honourable Ed Stelmach
Office of the Premier
Room 307, Legislature Building
10800 - 97th Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7

Dear Premier Stelmach:

As the president of Alberta's largest labour organization, I write to seek assurance from you that your government remains committed to working with public-sector employees in the province, rather than seeking conflict with them.

Our Federation is concerned about two recent discoveries.

First, it has come to our attention that one of your cabinet ministers – Jonathan Denis, MLA for Calgary Egmont and Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs – is a founding member and director of the Institute for Public Sector Accountability (IPSA). Last week, this institute called for all levels of government in Alberta to re-examine the collective-bargaining process – following the recent example of several anti-union state governors in the United States.

Second, after examining documents recently released by the provincial lobbyist registry, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) has learned that the U.S. billionaire Koch brothers have made a move to influence politics and public policy in Alberta.

These are the same brothers who have spent tens of millions of dollars bank-rolling so-called Tea Party Republicans – like Wisconsin governor Scott Walker – who have been leading the charge to undermine workers rights and outlaw collective bargaining in the U.S. public sector. Koch Companies, of Wichita, Kan., has hired a professional lobbyist in Edmonton to pressure and influence the Alberta government on taxation, economic development, energy and resource issues.

Needless to say, we in the Alberta labour movement find these revelations troubling.

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We believe that the collective bargaining process is the best way for governments at all levels to work with their employees. Collective bargaining provides a framework for rational and reasonable discussions. It also has a long and proven track-record of positive outcomes for all parties involved – governments, workers and citizens.

Governments and workers in Alberta have a long history of working together to provide great services. We are keen for this successful relationship to continue and we seek your confirmation that your government is committed to continuing to work with employees and to honouring the collective-bargaining process that has served Albertans so well.

Albertans value the great services provided by their public sector and do not want to see the kinds of conflict here that have been so divisive and damaging in the U.S.

On behalf of the 140,000 members our Federation represents, many of whom work in the public sector, I request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss this important issue in more detail.

In the meantime, I encourage you to contact Minister Denis and demand that he officially and publicly disassociate himself from the IPSA. With literally tens of thousands of Alberta public-sector workers currently at the bargaining table, it is simply not acceptable or constructive to have a Minister of the Crown endorsing provocative U.S.-style approaches to labour relations.

I look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gil McGowan', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gil McGowan
President