



NEWS RELEASE

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Bias Hits the Front Page

Two CanWest-owned publications in Saskatchewan took the opportunity Thursday morning to prominently display a column that suggests Saskatchewan should fall behind in establishing workers' rights, in order to attract business development to our province.

Speaking on behalf of 35 affiliated unions and associated groups that fight for the fair treatment of all people in our province, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour challenged that workers' rights are not a bargaining chip in some political game. Our province's legislators, workers and business owners have made strides towards fair treatment for all. There remains much more to be done.

"The question now becomes how the government should deal with other barriers to growth in the provincial economy," reads the column attributed to Randy Burton, published on the front pages of the June 22, 2006 *Regina Leader-Post* and the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*.

Successive annual studies released by global statistics firm KPMG show that Saskatoon and Regina, respectively, are two of the most competitive cities in North America in which to run a business, and statistics also show that our economic growth as a province is quickly surpassing the number of workers available to fill positions.

"Saskatchewan's economy is growing at a rate that it may soon outpace our ability to supply it with skilled labour," said former Minister of Education Andrew Thomson, upon the conclusion of the independent Training System Review on November 18, 2005.

One of the biggest barriers to growth is the lack of qualified workers to fill growing companies. We need to increase our education and training opportunities before our economy will grow any further.

Workers and organized labour groups in this province respect the judicial authority of the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board, and feel that Burton's attack on their

credibility is inappropriate given the lop-sided analysis. Burton cites comments from Queen's Bench Justice George Baynton as the fulcrum on which the Labour Board's credibility sits. However, Burton neglects to write that Justice Baynton's ruling in the case in question was unanimously overturned, when three senior Justices of the Court of Appeal ruled that Justice Baynton had "erred" numerous times in his judgment.

Among other incorrect information provided in the CanWest opinion piece is the claim that the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour newsletter is "required reading for labour board officials." Larry Hubich, president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, not only denies that this is true, to his knowledge, but also said Thursday that Burton's claims are "outrageous and inappropriate."

Burton points out that 62 of 69 applications for workplace certification were granted in the past year. The column, however, neglects to point out that an application is not usually made until over 50 per cent of workers in a workplace, have signed a card to be certified as a union by the Labour Relations Board.

"The process is expensive and time consuming, and unions do not make frivolous applications. Under such circumstances there are few reasons why a full 100 per cent of applications should not be approved by the board," Hubich said.

The constant barrage of unfounded allegations directed at a community of people who work tirelessly to provide safe and fair workplaces for all, are mean-spirited and uncalled for. These types of statements do more to perpetuate the negative image of Saskatchewan in the "business community" than anything else.

It is our assertion that the *Regina Leader-Post* and the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* are in a position of unreasonable bias in publishing this column as well as the *Star Phoenix* follow-up opinion piece published on the same day on the broadsheet's page A8.

The *Regina Leader-Post* is currently named in an Unfair Labour Practice claim that will be heard by the Labour Relations Board. The union in that case is calling for more than \$1 million in damages, for printed material which is detrimental to an ongoing collective bargaining effort in Regina.

Any alleged bias of the Labour Relations Board claimed by the newspaper shrivels in comparison to the bias displayed Thursday Morning by these two Saskatchewan Major Daily newspapers.