

NDP RECORD ON HEALTHCARE

What did Lorne Calvert and the NDP SAY?

“The first priority of Saskatchewan families and the priority they wish their government to uphold is the priority of health care.”

Lorne Calvert, Hansard, June 7, 1988

“I want to assure you, both personally and on behalf of the government, that we will listen and act on the concerns of nurses and other health care providers. Never again will we allow ourselves to get too busy with other vital issues to fail to listen and respond.....If there are other workplace issues that also need to be addressed, I promise you that they will be addressed quickly and effectively.”

Letter from former Health Minister Pat Atkinson to the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses during the 1999 nurses' strike – April 12, 1999

What did the NDP deliver?

Rural hospital closures:

Immediately after the NDP was elected in 1991 – they closed 52 rural hospitals. Since that time, there have been reduced emergency services or hospital closures in the majority of health regions – including the communities of Spiritwood, Big River, Shellbrook, Preeceville, Canora, Kamsack, Arcola, Bengough, Coronach, Broadview, Central Butte, Vanguard, Maidstone, and more, over the past year. These closures and disruption of services puts more pressure on hospitals in Regina, Saskatoon, Yorkton and Prince Albert.

A health system on the verge of collapse:

A leaked internal memo from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region asks doctors to discharge patients early because the region is in “crisis mode” and needs to “prevent the system from collapsing altogether.” (Leader Post, August 23, 2007)

The longest waiting lists in Canada:

FACT: Saskatchewan has almost half the number of specialists as Manitoba. No wonder patients wait longer.

Surgeries are continually cancelled and hospital beds closed because of the nursing shortage.

Nursing Shortage:

One year ago, "Taylor refutes nursing crisis allegation." (Leader Post, March 24, 2006)

Marlene Brown, First Vice-President of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses said, "It's clearly evident there is no recognition of the crisis that the workforce is in." (Leader Post, March 23, 2007)

In January of 2007, another memo from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region for senior management was leaked. This memo was written on December 19, 2006 and warned of "large holes of unfilled shifts" in the system and suggests a contingency plan could involve shutting down the ER at Pasqua and redeploying staff to the General ER. (Leader Post, January 5, 2007)

Meanwhile, in Saskatoon at the Royal University Hospital, "Paramedics fill in for ICU nurses." Paramedics have had to fill in for nurses in ICU from December 2006 to May 2007 due to a severe shortage of nurses. "I think we're going to see more and more of that in all sectors of the health-care system until there is a comprehensive plan to deal with the nursing shortage in this province," said Rosalee Longmoore, President of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. (Star Phoenix, May 11, 2007)

FACT: There are approximately 600 vacant RN positions in the province. Meanwhile, nurses are continually called in on overtime to fill the shifts.

When Judy Junor was the President of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses she said, "Understaffing has reached critical levels and it is time for nurses to blow the whistle to help ensure the safety of their patients." (Canadian Nurses Association News Release, November 4, 1997)

FACT: "Romanow also admitted that his government was wrong to slash enrollments in nurse training programs. In 1991-92 more than 500 nurses graduated from the programs. By 1998-99, the number of graduates had fallen to 115. The provincial government has since increased the number of training spots in an attempt to deal with a severe shortage of nurses." (Leader Post, November 14, 2003)

The NDP's record on registered nurses graduating currently has left Saskatchewan with half of the graduating nurses compared to 1991. In 1991, there were over 500 nurses graduating in Saskatchewan. Today, there are approximately 260. And, educational institutions have three times the applicants than we have training seats.