

Labour Views  
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Probably the biggest question I get from people, both our union members and the public, is why have negotiations dragged on so long? It's a very good question.

Let me start by reminding you of who we are. In this case, public service employees are GNWT, NWT Power Corporation, and Hay River Health & Social Services. Public service employees are committed to the NWT. We raise our families here. We shop here. We contribute to charities and do volunteer work in our communities. We work hard at our jobs.

No one is looking for some grand windfall in these negotiations. Our members have been clear with me that what they want is a fair deal. They want stable jobs that allow them to stay in the NWT and raise their families here.

Increasingly, our government has moved away from creating and protecting stable jobs. Instead government has moved more and more towards relief workers, terms, and casuals. Some members tell me they have been casual or term employees for decades! That means when they go to the bank to negotiate a mortgage, or get a credit check on a loan, they can't show they have a stable and secure job. Hundreds of workers who the government relies on to do good work, but they are not being treated fairly by that same government. I have to say, just as a member of our community, this just doesn't sit right with me. And I'm sure it doesn't seem fair to most of you, too.

And I know that pay is always a hot topic in the media when a union negotiates with its employer. We all want to be able to boil down the issues to one simple number, but I have to tell you it's more complicated than that. So while I cannot tell tales out of school and break confidential negotiations, I can tell you the principles the bargaining teams have brought to the table.

Public workers have done their job and lived up to their obligations and in return, basic fairness says they should not be given a cut in pay. And make no mistake, we all know the cost of living here — when workers are offered less than the cost of living they are being offered a cut in real pay.

That's not a fair deal. Do you know who else agrees that this isn't a fair deal? Our MLAs. They give themselves a raise every year tied to the cost of living. And I agree with that, MLAs are workers, and they are our friends and neighbours also. All I'm saying is let's bring those same principles of fairness to the bargaining table when it comes to how we treat our public service workers.

Our teams take their responsibilities of representing Northern workers very seriously. We are negotiating in good faith and trying hard every day to avoid a strike. We know that negotiations involve compromise and finding middle ground, but we also know that this has to apply to both sides.

The stakes here are very high. Our territory has been blessed with lots of resources but I firmly believe that our most important resource is our people. For the future of our communities, and to make sure the next generation will be able to raise their families here, we cannot — and will not — give up on the fight to ensure good, stable, family-supporting jobs.