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Campbell flips paramedics the bird

VERNON – Premier Gordon Campbell tossed a loonie at a striking ambulance paramedic Wednesday and told him “here, don’t spend it all in one place.” The unidentified paramedic answered “thanks a lot, that’s half an hour’s pay for me.” BC Ambulance Paramedics get only \$2/hr for on-call standby.



The remarks came after paramedics confronted Campbell outside a BC Liberal candidate’s office in Vernon with questions about their meager pay rates. Campbell has said they are “already well paid....” Paramedics have been showing up wherever Campbell does to push for government action to get a mediator and return to the bargaining table.

Paramedics say they feel a growing lack of respect from the government and while Campbell claimed he has “been meeting with paramedics all over the province,” they were barred from protesting outside the Kelowna hotel where a Liberal rally was held Wednesday evening.

The 3,500 paramedics, members of CUPE 873, have been calling on the BC government to deal with the “critical condition” of the ambulance service. They have been on strike since April 1 for improved staffing levels and better response times, wage parity with other emergency responders in B.C. and a multi-year contract for stability and public confidence.

A meeting yesterday of Health Services Minister George Abbott and Ambulance Paramedics of BC president John Strohmaier yielded few new results. Strohmaier reported that the minister still refused to discuss specific monetary issues and continues to drag his feet on a mediator. “There seems no question that this dispute will end up in arbitration before it is settled,” Strohmaier said, adding “the sooner we begin the process the better - for the public and for our members.”

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