

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Abbott calls premier's behaviour a joke

VERNON – Health Services Minister George Abbott insists Premier Gordon Campbell's interaction with striking paramedics in Vernon last week was a joke.

Asked how ambulance paramedics could afford to feed their families, Campbell tossed a loonie at a paramedic outside a Liberal candidate's office advising him "don't spend it all in one place." The paramedic replied "thanks a lot, that's half-an-hour's pay for me." B.C. ambulance paramedics get only \$2/hr for on-call standby. The exchange was captured by a local radio station.

Abbott called Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier insisting the comments and coin toss were all just good-natured banter. But many of B.C.'s 3,500 ambulance paramedics, who have been on strike since April 1, say the "joke" was in bad taste and insulting. They are the lowest paid emergency response professionals in the province. They want better staffing and improved ambulance response times and say that B.C.'s ambulance service has deteriorated to the point where it is in "critical condition."

"That the premier would joke about our pay like that shows the level of disrespect we're getting from this government," said Strohmaier.

The ambulance paramedics have been pushing Abbott to appoint an independent mediator to get back to the bargaining table.

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