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## Talks slated for paramedics

VANCOUVER—Striking ambulance paramedics are set to meet with the BC Ambulance Service for contract talks June 11-12. The two days of negotiations follow a month of high-level meetings spearheaded by CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill to get the employer back to the table with CUPE 873.

The province's 3,500 ambulance paramedics have been on strike since April 1 for faster response times, better staffing levels, wage parity with other emergency responders and a multi-year contract. The paramedics continue to provide ambulance services under Essential Services.

O'Neill cautioned that while the two sides are now "close" on many issues, they have yet to discuss monetary issues. "We have moved the parties ahead and they are meeting, which is what we set out to do....now there is an opportunity for the employer to bring this to a successful conclusion with a fair collective agreement."

Provincial mediator Mark Atkinson, who was originally assigned to the dispute before the strike, will be sitting in on the talks.

CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier called the talks "an opportunity to get back to what we have wanted all along...meaningful negotiations for a settlement so we can focus on our jobs serving the public."

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