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Layoffs, privatization for ambulance service

RICHMOND – Paramedics say proposed layoffs and privatization are a major blow to the quality of ambulance service in B.C.

Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE 873, president John Strohmaier said privatization of non-emergency ambulances will only hurt the service. “We need only look to the private transfer fleets operating in Ontario and the U.S. to see the disastrous impacts that for-profit ambulances can have on patients,” said Strohmaier. “This is an ideological decision by the BC Liberals that once again ignores the critical condition of ambulance services for the public.”

CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill called it “a stumble backwards” to the dark days when ambulance service in B.C. was provided by volunteers, funeral homes and private operators with a van and a driver’s license. O’Neill added that “The BC Liberals appear to have forgotten that the province-wide, professional ambulance service we have today was created to ensure the health security of all British Columbians.”

The government announced plans this week to slash 45,000 hours from the provincial non-emergency ambulance fleet by “outsourcing” to private operators. The government admits this will cause the loss of “up to 36 full-time positions.” The fleet handles work such as transferring patients from one hospital to another and accounts for 20-30 per cent of paramedics’ work.

The Ambulance Paramedics of BC have launched a grievance against the governments slide to more contracting out.

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