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Merit Contractors Association of Saskatchewan Response to Workers' Compensation Act Committee of Review Report

PRINCE ALBERT — With the release of the long awaited report by the Workers' Compensation Act Committee of Review, Saskatchewan now has an opportunity to move forward with the modernization of the Workers' Compensation Board.

The recent Saskatchewan Throne Speech outlined the Government's plans for transformational change in our province. Reforming and modernizing the Workers' Compensation Board would be a key way to deliver such transformation change – and would benefit both Saskatchewan workers and employers.

The Committee of Review was mandated to review the Act, regulations, and the administration of both. Throughout the consultations, it became clear that many of the underlying problems that were identified with Saskatchewan's workers' compensation system all trace back to the need to reform and modernize the governance structure of the Workers' Compensation Board itself. When the Board's governance issues are fixed, many of the problems can be addressed. Other reforms and improvements can then proceed, that will ensure that everyone – workers, employers, and the people of Saskatchewan – benefits.

The Board, as it is currently structured, is inefficient and flawed. In fact, during the Committee process, WCB officials acknowledged that governance issues have been largely neglected. It is time to focus on fixing problems at the core, rather than trying to paper over ongoing issues, which are merely the symptoms of the larger problem.

Most people in Saskatchewan would be surprised to know that the WCB is governed by a Board of just three individuals: one representing the interests of employers, one representing the interests of employees, and a Chair. All three individuals work full time for the WCB, in the very same building as the WCB headquarters, and even comprise the Appeals Tribunal of the WCB. Even from the most cursory view, these individuals might be seen not as Directors, but as employees, embedded right in the WCB system.

The current Board composition lacks the necessary breadth of experience and skills to meet the needs of Saskatchewan's diverse economy. In other provinces, the Workers' Compensation Board draws upon a wider array of talent and perspectives, ranging from 8 to 11 part time Directors, to deal with the various challenges of the Workers' Compensation system. Provinces far smaller than Saskatchewan, without the intricacies of our economy, have far larger Boards to address the complex work of Workers' Compensation.

The insular and closed world of the Workers' Compensation Board needs to be opened up. The WCB could benefit from wider perspectives and experiences of Board members from different walks of life.

Expanding the Board and bringing in outside points of view would help to provide additional experience and expertise that the Board needs. Members with diverse backgrounds, experience and skills will help to ensure that the Board is meeting the needs of Saskatchewan workers and employers in a modern economy.

Reforming the Workers' Compensation Board is long overdue. The problems with the system need to be properly addressed – by fixing the underlying governance issues that have been ignored for too long. It is, indeed, time for transformational change, and it needs to start with a new governance structure.

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