



your voice at work

Edmonton
ph. (780) 452.0362
fx. (780) 451.3099
14040 128 Ave.
Edmonton, AB
T5L 4M8

Calgary
ph. (403) 291.1047
fx. (403) 250.3412
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.
Calgary, AB
T3J 5H7

Red Deer
ph: 403.342.0150
fx: 403.341.3810
#1, 4646 Riverside Drive
Red Deer, AB
T4N 6Y5

Lethbridge
ph. (403) 328.4245
fx. (403) 320.9288
#104, 3305 18 Ave. N.
Lethbridge, AB
T1H 5S1

Brooks
ph. (403) 501.8486
fx. (403) 501.5144
P.O. Box 1148
631 - A Sutherland Dr. E.
Brooks, AB
T1R 1B9

Fort McMurray
ph. (780) 743.4190
fx. (780) 743.8312
#205, 9914 Morrison St.
Fort McMurray, AB
T9H 4A4

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www.ufcw401.ca
ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca

United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Union, Local No. 401

April 17, 2020

Andrew Follwell
Sobeys Capital Incorporated
4980 Tahoe Boulevard
Mississauga, Ontario
L4W 0C7

Dear Andrew,

RE: Response to your March 23, 2020 Letter

I would like to thank you for your kind words in your letter and acknowledging “the incredible efforts of Safeway employees [to] assist customers and keep stores running is truly appreciated by the company. Every employee has stepped up.” These are nice words.

People need to make a living. People have the right to have their and their families lives protected. COVID-19 is a terrible disease. You can carry the disease without knowing it. You can wander around without symptoms. The disease can be transmitted with very little interaction. There is no vaccine. There is no treatment, and there is no cure.

Playgrounds are closed, dog parks are closed, campgrounds are close, business are closed, restaurants are closed, schools are closed, churches are closed, Mosques are closed, and the list go on.

Grocery stores are open. They are the last public space were people can go, and nice words just don’t cut it.

You talked about the “Hero Pay Program” and your comment that you “expect that [this] addresses some of the concerns raised by the union”. I want to be clear, it does not. A member reached out to me and I believe he relayed the feeling of so many Sobeys worker’s feelings about Hero Pay Program when he said, this makes me feel like a “second-class hero.” The inequity in the Hero Pay Program needs to be corrected immediately.

We have heard from so many members that go to work every day to make sure Albertans have food to put on the table, they feel like second class heroes. You requested that we address this issue in collective bargaining, and today we did. We tabled a proposal asking that all employees be paid at a rate of time and half for all hours worked. This would help to compensate and acknowledge the tremendous risk being taken by every grocery store worker.

This week, Safeways' parent company, Empire Company Limited, reports a 37% increase in sales, excluding fuel and Easter, for the four-week period following March 8, 2020. Your response was to pay your 'bonus eligible' managers ten times the compensation of a part-time worker taking the same risks.

Safeway Hero Pay program gives greater compensation to staff that are not on the front lines dealing with customers, stated Cindy Horrocks, Negotiating Committee member. Safeway compensation says that some lives matter more than others, if the company values the manager more, they should be taking the product out to the shelves with the customers and ringing in the groceries, while the second-class heroes should have less exposure to the public.

Why isn't overtime being paid for every single hour worked in your store? Overtime should not just be paid for long hours, or for working on certain days - it should be provided for the terrible hazards and risks.

Your workers are not staying home in their pajamas, or watching Netflix, and enjoying the generosity of the public purse. They certainly do not have the means and the privilege to just stay at home.

In the past few weeks, notwithstanding the requests we have made, you have refused and failed to act meaningfully. It is time to act now. No lives can be lost. And those who are risking them should be bloody well paid for it.

We will table proposals on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday next week to address the other outstanding issues related to COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse
President



Richelle Stewart
Secretary-Treasurer