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

July 3, 2020

Via E-mail

Donald Fehr

Executive Director, NHL Players' Association
10 Bay Street, Suite 1200
Toronto, ON
M5J 2R8

Dear Sir:

Re: Proposed Commencement of NHL Season / Playoffs in Edmonton

My name is Thomas Hesse and I am the President of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Local 401. With 32,000 members in Alberta we are but one of many UFCW local unions in North America, many of which are located in NHL franchise cities. We are also an International Union of 1.5 million members across North America and we belong to the Canadian house of labour, the Canadian Labour Congress, which is 3 million members strong. In addition, we belong to the Alberta Federation of Labour which boasts 29 different affiliated unions and 170,000 members in the province.

We note that members of the NHLPA are considering a Return to Work Agreement that would see many games played in the Rogers Place arena in Edmonton. The Rogers arena is part of what Edmontonians know to be the Ice District. Connected to the arena, and as part of the entertainment offerings in the area, is a casino called the Grand Villa. It is owned and operated by Gateway Casinos; a company with numerous casinos in Canada. The casinos are almost universally unionized and we represent the employees at the Grand Villa Casino, and at the Starlight Casino in West Edmonton Mall.

Management of the Grand Villa have now been found to have broken the law through the commission of unfair labour practices. They are bullying their employees and trying to take advantage of them in the middle of a global pandemic. Employees will soon, and invariably, be contemplating a strike. In fact, some initial signals tell us that the employer may lockout its employees.

Employees are gravely concerned about the employer's lack of preparedness and unwillingness to be transparent about their plans for a safe reopening plan in the midst of COVID-19. Simply put, they wonder if the casino can be safe or could be a Petri dish such as the one our union has seen at Cargill, where the single largest workplace related COVID-19 outbreak in North America has occurred.

The implications for your members and professional hockey could be dire and far reaching. Firstly, unionized players may have to confront a picket line of ordinary but vulnerable working Albertans who are struggling for economic security and safety from COVID-19. There is a high rate of union density in Edmonton and we expect a lot of support for these workers and players may have to confront hundreds of union supporters. Secondly, the operation of the casino as an integrated part of Rogers arena could pose a serious COVID-19 threat to players and others in the vicinity. Thirdly, it

could be an ethical and moral nightmare for the NHL and its players to become embroiled in this controversy at a time when Canadians have little tolerance for beating up on the vulnerable during a global pandemic. To be clear, we are certain that our members, and union members generally, would love to see the restart of professional hockey, especially in Edmonton, Alberta. We firmly believe that they do not want to see their favourite players, themselves represented by a bargaining agent, caught up in this.

I invite you to contact me as soon as possible to discuss this matter further with a view to building solidarity and in the spirit of ensuring that your members have a clear perspective regarding this matter. We would love to see hockey come to Alberta, and to Edmonton in particular. But as a final note, we can say that we see no friendly alliance with Gateway Casinos. You will surely be disturbed to know that Gateway has, in part, blamed its business failings on the failure of the Edmonton Oilers to perform in a satisfactory way.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse
President, UFCW Local 401

Cc: Daryl Katz, Chairman, Katz Group
Don Iveson, City of Edmonton Mayor
Liam Peuramaki, Coalition of Edmonton Civic Unions
Gill McGowan, President Alberta Federation of Labour