



George Derby contracting out declared 'on hold'

200 GDC veterans, family members, workers and supporters applaud surprise announcement by Centre's board

More than 200 health care workers, veterans and family members, Legionnaires, municipal and provincial politicians and supporters from the community at-large erupted in cheers and applause when they learned that contracting out was on hold as they rallied in front of George Derby Centre on November 24.

In a surprise move, the George Derby Care Society's board of directors approached rally organizers during the event and asked to address the crowd to tell them that effective immediately, it had "unanimously declared a moratorium on the proposed contracting out".

HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson says that the unexpected decision is appreciated and opens the door to renewed discussions with George Derby Centre.

"We will be pleased to reopen discussions with George Derby Centre to maintain support services and improve care levels for the veterans at the facility," says Pearson.

She adds that the Fraser Health Authority and B.C.'s Ministry of Health need to be actively involved because each has a significant role to play in ensuring that quality care and services continue at the Centre.

Before the board's decision was announced, BC NDP leader Adrian Dix, B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair, HEU president Victor Elkins and George Derby local chairperson Sheila Mennie had each called for a reversal of the contracting out and for a continuation of community actions.

Family member Dale Gebhard interrupted his remarks so that the announcement could be made, stepping forward to thank the board's acting president, Ike Hall, for the decision as television news cameras recorded the event.

Afterward, Gebhard encouraged rally participants to celebrate but also to remain in touch to make certain that all parties, including the FHA and Veterans Affairs Canada, reach a satisfactory funding arrangement that maintains quality support and care services at George Derby Centre.

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Both Gebhard and Hall called on Prime Minister Harper and his government through Veterans Affairs Canada to participate in discussions.

On October 30, more than 90 HEU housekeeping, food services, laundry, clerical and activities workers learned that their work was to be contracted out. Since that time, residents and their family members, volunteers, the health care workers and their union, and others have been pressing for a reconsideration of that decision.

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