



USW POST-COVID RECOVERY PLAN

Workers and Communities First for Economic Recovery

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has upended many elements of our society and caused significant upheaval to the economy. The most immediate response from governments at every level has been to provide financial assistance to affected workers and companies through a number of new programs. While the full extent of the impact is not yet known, and may not be for a long period of time, what is clear is that the economic after-shocks will be substantial and require ongoing government attention.

The voices of workers must be front and centre in the decision-making that is to come. COVID-19 has reminded society of something that the United Steelworkers (USW) union has always known: workers make our communities, provinces and country work. Most USW members have continued to work during the pandemic, with their work being defined by government as essential. This newly found societal respect will not translate to an automatic and corresponding increase in governments considering the priorities of workers unless we fight for it and force governments in that direction.

District 3 Steelworkers have identified a number of priorities that should be central to any government initiatives and programs moving forward.



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A. Making Worker Safety & Health a Priority in the Economic Recovery

1. Listen to workers and unions

Frontline workers serve as an early-warning system. Unions are experts in workplace safety and health, and are in touch with frontline workers in ways that employers and government regulators are not. This includes reinforcing and strengthening the role of workplace health and safety committees, which are crucial to the implementation of workers' rights that are at the heart of the Canadian health and safety regime – the right to know, the right to participate and the right to refuse unsafe work. In any economic recovery, it is imperative that there are transparent, robust systems for addressing workers' concerns and complaints and for union input on issues of worker safety and health.

2. Robust and proactive prevention

- i. **“Precautionary Principle”** – When lives are at risk, we should always err on the side of caution to eliminate potential hazards or shutting down potentially dangerous worksites – even if that action seems premature.
- ii. **Proactive and Increased Inspections** – No virtual inspections. If the workplace is unsafe for an inspection, it is not safe for workers. Allowing local government by-law officers to help enforce social distancing guidelines in public-facing locations has been a needed tool to deter and educate our communities and should continue. Worksites are no different and require more, not less, enforcement. Governments should be providing resources for additional inspection.
- iii. **No Industry Self-Regulation** – Enforceable orders, not self-regulation, guidance and recommendations are needed to ensure the safety of workers, especially workers who do not have union representation.

3. Enforce and prosecute

Where safety and health legislation, regulations and health orders are not being adhered to by employers, it must be clear that there are meaningful penalties that act as deterrents. Where employers are negligent in risking the health and safety of their employees, it must be clear that the province will pursue criminal prosecutions under the Westray provisions of the Criminal Code.



4. Presumptive WCB coverage

Workers whose jobs have exposed them to a greater risk of COVID-19 need the confidence that they will get compensation without jumping through hoops to prove workplace exposure. B.C. has taken steps in this direction. Other jurisdictions need to follow.

5. Meaningful assistance for vulnerable workers

We cannot have situations like the Cargill case in Alberta or a second wave of COVID-19 because workers are forced by economics into unsafe and unhealthy situations. Failure to provide meaningful assistance to vulnerable workers – more than temporary, token, pay increases – will mean the failure of any recovery, both from a safety and an economic perspective. Workers need to be financially secure enough to enforce their rights and ensure the health and safety of themselves and their co-workers, without fear of reprisal.

6. Protect safety rights on the job

We must implement the Helps Report recommendations in B.C. and ensure similar recommendations for workers' compensation board (WCB) ombudspersons are in place in other provinces so that workers have a safe, reliable place to raise concerns about safety. The right to refuse is the paramount tool to protect the safety and health of workers. It needs to be protected and strengthened.

B. Valuing Frontline Workers

The temporary financial and other supports for these important workers need to extend beyond the pandemic. If we need these workers in a crisis, we need them all the time and their work needs to be valued as such. Governments need to provide lasting wage increases, permanent improvements to working conditions and increased benefits, including sick pay and leave to public sector workers and make it easier for workers to join unions to help negotiate these improvements for private sector workers across these industries.

C. Rebuild a Local Manufacturing Base

If the COVID-19 economic recovery plan follows the path set by the great recession of 2008, workers will see the least benefit. More technological change, encouraged by social distancing, will replace workers. Employers discovering remote work capacity may pursue more off-shoring of work. We are also likely to learn that we have been too dependent on jobs based in the service sector if a “new normal” prevails. This will mean that good-paying resource jobs and a vibrant domestic manufacturing sector are even more important to sustaining a successful economy.

Important lessons are also being learned about the dangers of becoming overly reliant on other jurisdictions for important and essential supplies. Our governments must invest in resiliency not just by stockpiling personal protective equipment (PPE), but investing in local supply chains to produce it and other goods we need to keep our society and economy functioning. We don't yet know what demands this pandemic or a future one will bring, but decades of shedding manufacturing work has to be righted so we have the capacity to protect lives and jobs.

1. Use government procurement on infrastructure and supplies to source locally, recognizing the United States and other jurisdictions are doing the same.
2. Invest in training workers for high-skill, high-knowledge resource and manufacturing sectors.
3. Focus on low-carbon/high value potential for targeted investment and prioritize food and goods security for health and public welfare.
4. Deliver targeted, measurable stimulus not broad-based tax cuts. Ensure any stimulus is tied to sustaining and creating jobs, in our communities and provinces.
5. Support trade agreements that demand protections for workers and the environment and a low-emissions future. Ensure trading partners that control vulnerable supply chains are transparent.

There is a real opportunity to shape our economy as we move forward from the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis. We can have an economy that values and prioritizes workers, especially their safety and health, and that supports domestic industry, through local businesses and good-paying, highly skilled jobs that support our families and communities.

The United Steelworkers will fight for a worker- and community-focused economic recovery.

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