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(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

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New WSIB Funding Review
Are Ontario's Injured Workers on the Chopping Block Again?

(Toronto) The Ontario WSIB has announced an inquiry into funding of our workers compensation system. The last time the Ontario government raised a hue and cry about workers' compensation funding it was a smokescreen to reduce compensation for injured workers and give employers cheap rates. In 1997 the government passed legislation cutting benefits for the injured, citing financial need. However, instead of building financial reserves, employer rates were slashed by 30%, back to the rate they were paying in the 1980's.

Members of Ontario's injured worker community are worried that once again they will face benefit reductions as a result of a false financial crisis. The WSIB has never been in debt. It has a reserve fund of investments now valued at more than \$14 Billion. It survived the great depression of the 1930's, not to mention our recent recession. Recently, the WSIB has had to use it's reserves to pay injured workers because it did not collect enough from employers in the year to cover the cost of the injuries. That comes as no surprise given that employers' rates are still rolled back to 1980's levels. Employers continued to receive full immunity from lawsuits even though they were not paying their share. Rates are now going up 2% but if the WSIB was serious about employers paying their fair share, it would at least set the rate at \$3.00 per \$100 that employers were paying in 1995 when the Harris government took over the Workers' Compensation Board.

Only about two-thirds of Ontario's workforce is required to have workers' compensation coverage. One in three Ontario workers has no workers' compensation coverage, and their employers do not contribute to the system. If the government is committed to the financial security of the WSIB, it will bring legislation to ensure that all Ontario employers contribute to the system and all Ontario workers are covered by workers compensation.

The historic compromise of 1915 protects employers from being sued for workplace injuries and disease in exchange for funding a public, no-fault system of compensation for as long as the disability lasts. The Ontario Network of Injured Worker Groups wants to maintain a public workers' compensation system that is responsive to injured workers and does not stoop to a penny pinching, cost cutting private insurance mentality. The Network hopes the government will listen this time.

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