

Attn: Willy Noiles
President
Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups
412 Louth Street, Unit 1
St. Catharines Ontario
L2S 3P7

Dear Mr. Noiles,

Thank you very much for giving us an opportunity to speak to the issues that injured workers face in Ontario. I am happy to respond on behalf of the GPO.

We acknowledge the hardship workers have to go through after a workplace injury. Therefore, we support a compensation regime that is fair and one that provides sufficient support to workers so that they can be treated with dignity.

Re: Election Questionnaire

- 1. Contrary to popular belief, the WSIB is not funded by the public; it is funded by employer premiums and its own investments. However, when the WSIB denies claims, injured workers are forced onto social assistance, meaning that the public does end up paying for the care of injured, ill, and/or disabled workers.**

How will you ensure that the workers' compensation system properly supports injured workers, so that the costs for work injuries are not downloaded onto the public?

The Green Party of Ontario understands that injured workers are vulnerable. They are financially deprived and are coping with life changes resulting from their injury. A compensation system must put the health and well-being of workers first.

We understand that injured workers often have difficulty providing objective evidence to prove their injuries. The lack of compensation these workers receive from the WSIB prevents them from fully recovering from their injuries. As a result, they have to rely on social assistance and the financial responsibility falls onto the public.

The Green Party of Ontario will ensure the workers' compensation scheme addresses these issues so that injured workers are properly compensated under this regime without resorting to the social welfare system.

- 2. The WSIB routinely pays little or no attention to the medical opinions of the healthcare professionals who treat injured workers directly, meaning their recommendations around return to work, treatment, and medication are often ignored.**

Do you agree that the WWIB should be required to prioritize and respect the medical opinions of injured workers' treating healthcare professionals?

The healthcare professionals who treat the injured worker directly have a full picture of the person's health condition. We agree that the WWIB should be required to take into account the medical opinions of the healthcare professionals who are treating the worker. These medical professionals should be involved in crafting the injured workers' return to work, medication and treatment plan.

- 3. The WSIB cuts compensation based on what they call "pre-existing conditions," even if the "condition" (often simply regular ageing) never affected the worker's ability to function before their work injury.**

Will you call for an end to cuts based on "pre-existing conditions" that never affected a worker before their injury?

We believe denying workers' claims based on "pre-existing conditions" jeopardizes public trust in the worker compensation system, particularly if the condition never affected the worker's ability to function before the work injury. Workers should not be denied claims based on pre-existing conditions that did not affect a worker before their injury.

- 4. Almost 50% of injured workers with permanent disabilities are living at or near the poverty line, largely because of the WSIB's practice of "deeming". Moreover, the WSIB has made "deeming" even harsher since the minimum wage was raised, and has cut people' benefits even further.**

What do you think should be done about the fact that the WSIB cuts people's benefits based on phantom jobs, rather than compensating them for actual lost earnings?

We oppose to the practice of "deeming" as the system does not support injured workers.

Injured workers should be compensated for their lost earnings based on their income before the injury.

- 5. For the past many years, the WSIB has consistently been among the top five most complained about government agencies in Ontario. Yet there is still no proper legislative oversight or accountability.**

Will you support the call for a public inquiry of the WSIB, and ensure that the recommendations made will lead to genuine change?

We understand that more oversight is needed for the WSIB. In the past, due to political interference, unfavourable market conditions and unsound management, the WSIB accumulated an enormous unfunded liability. While this unfunded liability is being subsequently reduced, legacy debts cause Ontario employers to pay one of the highest premium rates in Canada.

The Green Party of Ontario supports a public inquiry into the WSIB in order to improve the operation of the organization.

- 6. Ontario workers are suffering with and dying from occupational diseases, often without workers' compensation benefits. How do you plan to address this injustice?**

The Green Party of Ontario understands that some diseases manifest themselves in the human body slowly, which makes it difficult to link them to an occupational hazard. Currently, the only compensation workers have in these cases are tort lawsuits against the employer, which is highly financially and emotionally straining for the surviving family members and does not guarantee a positive outcome.

We support expanding the list of occupational diseases so that more employees are covered by the Occupational Disease and Survivors Benefits Program.