



## NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Regina, SK

Day 3

June 1, 2024

### EVIDENCE

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**Witness 6: Jeanette Wightman**

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**Wayne Lenhardt**

Our next witness will be Jeanette Wightman. My name is Wayne **Lenhardt** and I'm of the lawyers of the NCI during these proceedings. Jeanette if you could spell your name for us, and then I'll do an oath with you.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Jeanette Wightman J-E-A-N-E-T-T-E W-I-G-H-T-M-A-N

**Wayne Lenhardt**

And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth during your testimony today?

**Jeanette Wightman**

I do.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Your story is an interesting one about your employment during the pandemic. So, to start this off, what were you doing when the pandemic started in January 2020?

**Jeanette Wightman**

I was the purchasing manager of a production facility in Medicine Hat.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay. So it was a housing factory in Medicine Hat?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yes, we build modular homes.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Right. You were the purchasing manager.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yeah.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So you were part of management, correct?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Correct.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

And you had been there for a while, had you?

**Jeanette Wightman**

At that point I was there for—that was 2020, so, 14 years at that point.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay. And you were making some sort of management salary.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yeah, management salary plus bonus.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay, so tell us what happened after COVID started in 2020.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Well, first when the government shut everybody down for 2 weeks, management stayed in and production staff, I think, was sent home, if I recall correctly. And at that point we didn't have a lot of orders. So once we were allowed to bring people back in, we cleared out the production lines so that any homes that started were completed.

Then we had orders starting to come in, like they were coming in fast and furious. So when we were allowed, we started up the production facility again. And shortly after that, we had started seeing lead times on materials start to jump due to COVID, due to—you know, most of our stuff came from China. So there were issues with shipping, shipping yards not being open due to COVID, and then shipping yards on our end not being open due to COVID, which caused long delays.

So there was a struggle to get material on the ground in a timely manner. Our lead times would go from two weeks to six weeks to twelve weeks without any notice. So with us having a large backlog at the time, it was a struggle to get product in. I spent a lot of extra time trying to make sure that the plant stayed running.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

And there were no mandates that affected your plant at that point?

**Jeanette Wightman**

No.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

What happened as you went into 2021?

**Jeanette Wightman**

2021 started off similar to what the end of 2020 looked like. And it was in August of 2021 when our VP of Canada had started to mention that the Canadian government was looking at vaccine mandates for travel. And he had mentioned that being management, you had to be able to travel for your position, even though it was not in my job description for traveling. And the previous purchasing manager, who had done the job, I think, for nine years, had never had to travel for work.

And in my experience as a purchasing manager—by the end of 2021 I think it was six and a half years—I only traveled once. We opened up a new RTM [Homes] location. It was a self-drive to Saskatoon. So at this point, I had no expectations of having to drive anywhere. I've never been to any trade shows or sent to any management meetings anywhere. So I asked my GM [general manager] if, you know, the VP was planning on doing meetings or planning a work trip, because he's coming up with this information about the vaccine. And my GM, he didn't know what our VP was planning, but he had told me that he didn't ever. Because he used to be the purchasing manager, he didn't know. He never had to travel for work, so he wasn't sure.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So as the summer went on, there was more talk about a mandate for the plant.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yes. Once the election was finalized and Trudeau announced he was bringing in the mandate, our VP in September had sent out an email stating that he was planning management meetings, and they were going to be held in either November or December at one of our BC locations, because we have five locations in Canada. So he was going to have all management go to BC.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay. And then there finally was a mandate laid on and a date for it, correct?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yes. Then the VP had decided that he was going to implement a vaccine mandate for management only. Now I work in the production facility, and every day I had to walk through the plant, through all the production workers who didn't have to get vaccinated,

but I was supposed to be vaccinated. So it just—it didn't make any sense to me why he was forcing just management and why he was planning—

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So essentially, it was a small enough plant that regular workers and management were basically all in the same space. Is that fair?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yeah. Management was out on the floor quite often.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So when the mandate came down, which was end of October, if I'm correct?

**Jeanette Wightman**

End of October was the deadline for everybody to get vaccinated.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

That was 2021, correct?

**Jeanette Wightman**

That was 2021.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Okay. So how did you cope with that? Tell us what you did.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Well, I stressed about it a lot because I didn't want to get vaccinated because I, at that point, didn't believe they could come up with an effective and safe vaccine within a year. So I, you know, had lots of discussions with my husband about what to do, because I didn't want to lose my job, because we were, you know—

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So what did you do?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Well, I eventually had to tell my GM that I wasn't getting vaccinated, and he was directed to replace me and start looking right away because he knew I wasn't going to get vaccinated.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Sure. So you stayed with the plant though, correct?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yes. My GM didn't want to lose me, and he didn't himself want to get vaccinated, but because of his personal situation, he had to. And I know he didn't feel it was right what was being done, but his hands were tied. It wasn't his decision to let me go. So he offered me a lower paying position, which at that point, I mean, I went to my doctor because I was so stressed over this. My doctor gave me three days and, "Here, take some pills and this will help you get ready to take your vaccine next week." And I just, I couldn't.

So when I was looking for other jobs, everything that was posted you had to have proof of vaccination. And I knew that if I lost my job that I wouldn't be able to collect unemployment, because they were saying that not being vaccinated wasn't a valid excuse. So I wouldn't have been able to collect unemployment, and I would have been out of work. So my only option at that point was to take a lower paying position.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Yep. So you had to move out of management into basically a worker position.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yeah, correct.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Can you give us an idea of even what a rough percentage decrease would have been?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Well, the salary decrease wasn't—you know, it was about 10,000 a year, the salary decrease. But it was the bonuses that make all the differences. And bonuses, in my six and a half years, range anywhere from 80,000 up to close to 200,000.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

And the bonuses just didn't exist at that lower level.

**Jeanette Wightman**

No. No.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

So are you still with that factory?

**Jeanette Wightman**

I am, yeah. I'm still working with, and the VP who had implemented this is no longer with the company. He retired last October.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

And did it cause you some stress while all this was going on?

**Jeanette Wightman**

Absolutely, yeah. I mean, there was already stress in the position trying to keep a plant running. And at that point, both my sons were living at home, and with the whole situation with COVID, they were stressed out. They were both suicidal. So I had stress at home. I had stress at work trying to keep a plant running. And then I had added stress put on me to go get vaccinated.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Is there still a vaccination mandate in that plant?

**Jeanette Wightman**

No.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Oh, they lifted it.

**Jeanette Wightman**

Yeah, well, actually I can't answer to that because I don't know what the new VP has decided, but because vaccines aren't required for travel, and which was the whole reasoning behind forcing management—

**Wayne Lenhardt**

At this point, I think I'm going to ask the commissioners if they have any questions.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

I just have one question. I want to make sure I heard you right. Did you say that you went to see your doctor, and he suggested to give you pills that would help you get the vaccine?

**Jeanette Wightman**

He gave me pills to help me sleep so I would be less stressed, so I could get the vaccine.

**Commissioner Drysdale**

Thank you.

**Jeanette Wightman**

And I still have those pills sitting beside my bed to remind me how our healthcare system dealt with this.

**Wayne Lenhardt**

Are there any more questions from the commissioners? Going once, going twice. Okay, on behalf of the National Citizens Inquiry, I want to thank you very much for giving your testimony.