



BC LIBERAL BUDGET

More *cuts to public services* and a *fire sale* of public assets

THE B.C. LIBERAL government's supposedly balanced budget will come at a high cost to public sector workers and the people and businesses that rely on quality public services.

"After a decade of budget and staffing cuts, extending the hiring freeze will lead to the loss of another 1,350 public sector jobs and most ministries are facing budget cuts or small increases well below the rate of inflation," says Darryl Walker, president of the BCGEU.

"Our justice system and Community Living B.C. are both in crisis. Neither are getting the meaningful budget increases they desperately need. Community and social service workers are the lowest paid workers in our health care system. They will see no increase. The Ministry of Children and Family Development will be unable to adequately serve the most vulnerable people in our society.

"These are just a few examples. Budget cuts have undermined the delivery of all public services," says Walker.

Many of the service cuts will also have a direct negative impact on the economy.

The most obvious example is the enormous permit backlog in the natural resource sector. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations is facing a budget cut of almost \$40 million, the biggest single cut in ministry spending. There is no reason to believe the



permit backlog will be cleared. The economic activity and job creation of our natural resources sector will continue to be squandered.

Also troubling is the sell-off of important public assets. The Liberals plan to sell almost twice as many public assets in the next two years as they sold off in all of the 2000s. This sell-off comes at a time of declining land prices. It is not the time to sell surplus assets.

The government has also failed to use the carbon tax to create new revenue. The carbon tax will not be increased, expanded or broadened to include industrial process emissions.

"Reducing B.C. greenhouse gas emissions is critical to addressing climate change and must be the responsibility of all of us," says Walker.

Jim Sinclair, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour, said the government should put a hold on selling any public assets, just weeks before the May 14 provincial election.

"The people of British Columbia have not given this government a mandate to balance books by selling assets," he said.

"(The finance minister) is going to add over half a billion in sales to balance the budget. You can't sell your house to pay off your cheque-book. That's what he's doing," said Sinclair.

For more on the budget, please see:

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THE ADVOCATE

In this edition:

Elder abuse is aptly described as a silent epidemic. It hurts a shocking number of Canadian seniors – hundreds of thousands of us – but we rarely hear about it. We take a close look at the issue on page 3, and call on the government to create an independent Seniors' Advocate with a priority focus on preventing elder abuse.

Introducing universal home care is another step the government could take to prevent abuse, which is most often perpetrated by untrained family members or volunteers. Home care is also needed to allow seniors to age with dignity in their own homes, rather than being sent away to live out their lives in more expensive institutions. Our feature report is on pages 8 and 9.

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Preventing elder abuse must be a top priority for Seniors' Advocate

RECENT LEGISLATION to establish a Seniors' Advocate in British Columbia is a step forward, but ultimately disappointing, says Diane Wood, President of BC Forum.

"We've had considerable discussion of this issue in the seniors' community," says Wood.

"The consensus is that the position should be truly independent – an officer of the Legislature like the Ombudsperson or the Auditor General – and that a priority focus should be to combat elder abuse."

"Unfortunately, after months of delay, the B.C. Liberals have not done that. Instead the Advocate will be answerable to the whims of the minister of health," she says.

Elder abuse is a silent epidemic. Older people in vulnerable situations have few places to turn to, and therefore only a small percentage of cases are reported.

An article published last September in the *Journal of the Canadian Medical Association* estimates that 200,000 to 500,000 seniors experience some form of elder abuse or neglect.

Most frequently, victims of abuse are in a home setting where they are cared for by non-professionals such as family members or other untrained caregivers. (See our feature report on the need for home care, pages 8 and 9.) Often the offender is financially dependent on the older person.

The Canadian Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE) says common forms of elder abuse include:

- Physical abuse such as slapping, pushing, beating or forced confinement.
- Financial abuse such as stealing,



Elder abuse has become a silent epidemic, hurting up to 500,000 seniors in Canada.

BC FORUM is calling for an independent Seniors' Advocate to lead the efforts to identify cases of abuse of the elderly, stop abuse where it occurs, and take action to prevent it from happening in the future.

fraud, extortion or misusing a power of attorney.

- Sexual abuse such as sexual assault or any unwanted form of sexual activity.
- Neglect such as failing to give an older person in your care food, medical attention, or other necessary care or abandoning an older person in your care.
- Emotional abuse as in treating an older person like a child or humiliating, insulting, frightening, threatening or ignoring an older person.

Often more than one kind of abuse occurs at the same time. The most commonly reported form of abuse is financial. In 70 percent of cases, the perpetrator is a family member or acquaintance. Abuse may occur as a single incident, or as

part of a continuing pattern of behaviour.

"We need real action to identify cases of elder abuse, to stop it where it's happening, and to prevent it from happening again," says Wood.

"Universal home support, provided by trained caregivers, is a good place to start. In addition, health care providers must learn to recognize the signs of elder abuse and not be too quick to dismiss injuries as being the result of a fall.

"The new Seniors' Advocate must have the independence to take the lead on ensuring that vulnerable seniors are not left to suffer in silence.

"Preventing elder abuse must be a top priority for that office, and indeed, for everyone who values a civil society," says Wood.



BC FORUM urges you to support the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign.

AIDS pandemic – real action to help grandmothers cope

“When one part of the human family is under siege, the privileged part must respond.”

THIS WAS STEPHEN LEWIS' clarion call for the world to wake up to the reality of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and led to the creation of the Foundation that bears his name.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation works with grassroots organizations that are turning the tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa by providing care and support to women, orphaned children, grandmothers and people living with HIV and AIDS.

African grandmothers are central to this effort. With almost no support, they are caring for millions of children orphaned by AIDS, sometimes as many as 10 to 15 in one household. They display astonishing love, courage and emotional resilience, even while grieving the loss

of their own adult children.

More than 50% of those infected by HIV in Africa are women. Treatment reaches fewer than half the target. And on November 28, 2012, the Harper Conservatives defeated an NDP motion to get affordable, generic AIDS-drugs to Africa. It's a tragedy and shame wrapped into one.

African women and grandmothers are leading the way, but they cannot – and should not – do it alone. In March 2006, the Stephen Lewis Foundation launched the *Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign* in response to the emerging crisis faced by African grandmothers. It began with only a few groups of committed Canadian grandmothers. It has evolved into a dynamic and responsive movement of grandmothers and “grand-others” working to raise awareness about the pandemic, mo-

bilize support, and raise funds in Canada for Africa's grandmothers.

The Campaign currently boasts more than 240 groups of grandmothers across the country. Many have organized into regional and national networks to support each other's development, fundraising and advocacy networks.

The *Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign* in Canada has raised an astonishing \$16.5 million for African grandmothers and the children in their care. These funds are invested directly at community level for food, educational support, medical care, HIV counselling and testing, housing and bedding, grief counselling and support groups, home visits, and much more.

Join with us. As activists and seniors, you can lend your support to the Foundation's work:

- Start or join a group of Grandmothers: www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/get-involved/grandmothers-campaign.
- Organize an event: www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/get-involved/plan-an-event and call us at 1-888-203-9990 for materials to distribute.
- Make a donation of stocks, Aero-plan miles, or funds: www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/ways-to-give.

Active retirees, especially union retirees, have been supporters of the Foundation from its beginning in 2003, responding generously and without hesitation. At the Foundation, we have always thought of labour's support as an inspiring example of global social justice: grassroots to grassroots.

As a member of BC Forum, you can stand in solidarity once again ... and put the AIDS pandemic back on the agenda.

To learn more about the Foundation and the Grandmothers Campaign, please visit our website: stephenlewisfoundation.org.



On Jan. 16, members of the BC FORUM Executive Committee – President Diane Wood, Vice-President Bill Silvester, Treasurer Dave Gill and Vice-President John Savage (not pictured) held their first liaison meeting with representatives appointed by unions affiliated to the B.C. Federation of Labour. Further meetings will be held quarterly to discuss joint action on issues.

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Quick facts about the pre-election budget tabled by the B.C. Liberals

“To achieve a balanced budget in these challenging times, the Liberals resorted to a combination of stop-gap measures, some unprecedented, others merely unusual, all highly debatable.

“The most controversial saw the inclusion of \$800 million worth of scheduled asset sales, mostly government-owned land that has been declared surplus, marketable, or both.

“Previous governments have sold off assets from time to time as well. I don’t recall them doing it to this extent nor as a route to a balanced budget.”

– Vaughn Palmer,
Vancouver Sun, Feb. 19, 2013

The B.C. Liberals “re-profiled” \$150 million in expenditures, a sleight-of-hand that moved them from the 2013/14 budget to the 2012/13 budget. They reduced this year’s deficit by increasing last year’s deficit.

“If the 2013 provincial budget does nothing else, it confirms the Liberals know they have a major credibility problem.

“Why else would the Liberals spend almost \$17 million of public money on partisan ads that, according to leaked documents, are to help ‘decrease the credibility gap’ of government.

“It also confirms the Liberals are again willing to resort to the tricks they used prior to the 2009 election, tricks that hid a massive deficit and led directly to the harmonized sales tax.

“This is a budget founded on dubious one-time asset sales, unrealistic cuts to health care and the



abandonment of major areas of our resource economy, such as forestry and mining.”

– Bruce Ralston,
opposition finance critic

MSP premiums – nearly doubled since the B.C. Liberals came to office – will increase another 4 percent.

B.C. is one of only two provinces to retain this regressive tax. The Liberals now collect as much from MSP premiums as corporate taxes.

Despite the importance of post-secondary education in determining the future prospects of our children and grandchildren, the B.C. Liberals continue to cut advanced education.

Skills training, climate change, and reinvesting in B.C.’s land base are completely missing from the budget.

Before the 2009 election, the B.C. Liberals declared their budget deficit would be a maximum of \$495 million, and that the HST was not on the radar.

The real deficit was four times larger – \$1.8 billion. If it wasn’t deliberate deception, it was the largest miscalculation in B.C. history.

BC Hydro’s “deferred debts” will hit \$4.5 billion. Auditor General

John Doyle has said B.C.’s annual deficit would balloon by \$450 million if Hydro’s debts were properly accounted for.

Electricity rates for consumers will go up more than 16 percent in three years.

The B.C. Liberals have prevented Hydro from producing new power, opting instead to privatize public rivers and streams and pay private producers up to \$124 per megawatt hour – far more than market rates of anywhere from \$4 to \$52 per MWH.

BC Hydro is now contractually obligated to pay them \$30 billion.

“In fact, it’s the Liberals’ fifth deficit budget in a row. How can the minister of finance go out and spend taxpayers’ dollars on a partisan Liberal ad campaign claiming a balanced budget when this budget isn’t balanced at all?

“This is 2009 all over again, where the government claimed a deficit of \$495 million, maximum, a week before the election and proved to be multiple times that afterwards. This is the same as 2009 when the government said, ‘No cuts to health care here,’ and then after the election imposed cuts to services to people that mattered.”

– Adrian Dix,
Leader BC NDP

Funding for the long promised and long delayed Seniors’ Advocate position is buried in the budget for the health ministry, raising concerns that the Seniors’ Advocate will be subject to the whims of the minister, *not* truly independent.

B.C. budget shortsighted on seniors' care, sustainability

THE B.C. HEALTH COALITION, of which BC Forum is a member, says the B.C. Liberals' 2013 budget does not take the necessary steps toward improving seniors' care nor ensuring the long term sustainability of the public health care system.

"B.C. needs a system that is there to care for our aging population, yet there is little evidence in this budget to suggest our government intends to take serious action on seniors' care," said BC Health Coalition co-chair Rick Turner, noting that the budget projects a reduction in real health care spending.

The budget comes one year after the release of the Provincial Ombudsperson's report on the state of seniors' care in B.C. Since then the Ministry of Health has fully implemented only four of the 141 recommendations made directly to the ministry.

"The Ombudsperson's report clearly revealed that strengthening home and community care services will greatly improve the lives of sen-

iors," said Turner.

"Furthermore, investment in home and community care services reduces pressure on the more expensive primary and acute care parts of the health care system.

"The government's current shortsighted approach will not address current challenges such as crowded emergency rooms and hospital beds."

Speaking to the government's focus on "balanced budgets," Turner noted that the majority of the health care budget is spent on costly acute hospital care – by far the most expensive part of the system.

"The Ombudsperson's findings indicate that the Ministry of Health has, in many cases, failed to fulfill its leadership role for seniors' care in our province," said Turner.

"By failing to act on seniors' care, the government is failing seniors and missing an important opportunity to reduce overall health care costs."

Inequality spikes in B.C.

While elite incomes have soared, 90% of British Columbians are earning less than in 1982

A CANADIAN CENTRE for Policy Alternatives' analysis of the latest data on Canada's richest 1% shows how much the income gap has been rising in Canada.

The richest 1% of Canadians make almost \$180,000 more today than they did in 1982 (adjusted for inflation). The bottom 90% of Canadians saw income gains of only \$1,700.

However, in Canada's three largest cities – Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal – the bottom 90% make less today than they did in 1982.

They've seen drops in income of \$4,300 in Vancouver, \$1,900 in Toronto, and \$224 in Montreal.

The top 1% saw pay increases of \$189,000 in Vancouver, \$297,000 in Toronto, and \$162,000 in Montreal.

"No province has managed to become more equal since 1980," says CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald. "Instead, all provinces have become more unequal, although to varying degrees."

Alberta is the most unequal province. The ratio of the richest 1% of Albertans to the bottom 90% is the highest in the country at 18 times.

British Columbia was the only province where the bottom 90% make less than they did in 1982.

"This new data shows how extreme income inequality has become.

"It also reveals for the first time how the bottom 90% of those in Canada's biggest cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal actually make less today than they did in 1982," says Macdonald.

ADVANCE VOTING

You can vote for change for the better before election day

IF YOU WISH to vote before the B.C. Election Day, Tuesday May 14, there are several opportunities to do so. Any voter may vote during the advance polls, which will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (May 8 to 11) of the week preceding general voting day.

To vote you must prove your identity and residential address. This requires one government issued document with your name, photograph and address, such as a driver's licence, B.C. Identification Card, or passport. Alternatively, you will need two documents with your name, at least one of which has your address.

For more information, including other options for early or absentee voting, phone 1-800-661-8683, or visit www.elections.bc.ca.

AGING IN PLACE

Home care must be expanded

THERE ARE VERY FEW people who want to move out of their homes and live the rest of their lives in an institution. Yet government policies in B.C. and Canada seem to have been designed to force them to do exactly that.

It doesn't make sense.

From every standpoint – morally, socially and economically – it would be far better to support the frail elderly and people with disabilities in their desire to remain in their own homes, and in their own familiar communities.

We all remember the tragic stories of elderly married couples who have been separated from each other and forced into residential care in far-away communities.

A different approach

PUBLIC HEALTH CARE expenditures in Canada are overwhelmingly directed towards institutional care.

Tine Rostgaard, of Aalborg University, an internationally recognized expert on policies that allow people to age in place, says care for the aged in Denmark is universal with the goal of allowing people to age in place, near friends and family in their own communities.

About 75 percent of public expenditures on elder care are targeted to home care, and 25 percent to institutional care.

In Canada, she says, the balance is reversed with only 20 percent going to home care, and 80 percent allocated to institutional care.

The key to the Danish system is prevention. Preventive home visits with the elderly, most often by a nurse, must by law take place once a year. After a structured discussion of general well-being, social networks, housing, finances, health and func-



The BC government has eliminated home support services that help people stay healthy in their own homes such as housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and taking people to medical appointments.

tional ability, the municipality must follow up and offer needed services.

"There is strong evidence for the preventive effect," says Rostgaard.

"The visits result in an increase in the use of home care services (including personal care and practical assistance such as cleaning).

"The visits also result in a fall in mortality, an increase in functional ability, and a lower rate of admission to hospitals and nursing homes."

A huge unmet need

STATISTICS CANADA REPORTED Dec. 19, 2012, that just over a million people – 25 percent of those aged 65 and older – are receiving formal or informal home care.

More than half of them depend on family, friends and neighbours for help.

Close to 180,000 seniors report that they had unmet needs for professional home care services.

About two-thirds of them (63%)

said personal circumstances such as inability to pay prevented them from getting the services they need.

About one-quarter of seniors (24%) cited shortcomings of the health care system, with the service simply not available.

The remaining 13 percent blame a combination of personal circumstances and unavailability of services.

"Research shows that unmet needs for assistance are associated with negative consequences including inability to prepare food for oneself, injuries, depression and reduced morale, higher hospitalization rates, and increased risks of falls, institutionalization and premature death," says Statistics Canada.

Women, and those who live alone, are almost twice as likely to have unmet needs. Housework and personal care are the two most common tasks with which seniors need, but do not receive, professional assistance.

“Home care can alleviate demands for hospitalization. It can reduce readmissions to hospital, and as well, it can decrease the likelihood of institutionalization,” says Melanie Hoover, one of the authors of the Statistics Canada study.

Saving money by doing the right thing

WENDY YOUNG, Canada Research Chair in Healthy Aging at Memorial University in Newfoundland, says expanding home-care services could save the health care system a lot of money.

“How many people understand that granny getting her housework done actually saves the health care system an incredible amount of money?” says Young.

“If she can’t get her housework done, then she ends up being admitted to a nursing home.”

The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports that five percent of acute hospital beds are occupied by people waiting for an alternative level of care.

About 85 percent of these patients are seniors who wait more than a month for long-term care. Waits for those who have access to home care are closer to a week.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates spending on home and community care to be just 4.6 to 5 percent of total health spending.

With such limited public support, people must rely on informal, uncertain unpaid care, amounting to 242 million hours a year in B.C.

Compared to home and community care services:

- Assisted living is 1.2 to 1.8 times more expensive.
- Long term care is 2.2 to 3.4 times more expensive.
- Acute care is up to 8 times more expensive.

About one half of the people who

are on waiting lists for long-term care could remain at home if they received appropriate care.

Continuing cuts in home support services

SINCE THE LATE 1990s, home support services in B.C. have been continuously eroded. Needed services have been eliminated.

“Time spent with clients is rationed to the minute,” says Darryl Walker, president of the BCGEU, the union which represents the largest number of home support workers in B.C.

“Duties which used to be a part of making sure the client was supported at home have been eliminated.”

The assistance that has disappeared includes housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, taking clients for walks, shopping, and taking clients to medical appointments.

“These critical non-medical supports – which research shows contribute to a person’s recovery and health – have been removed from the public support system,” says Walker.

Instead of providing a needed service to help people live at home, the provincial government is shifting even more of the burden to untrained volunteers. The United Way’s “Better at Home” program is hit-and-miss, varies greatly from community to community, and depends on unreliable short-term funding.

An initial three year pilot program in five communities, undertaken at significant cost, shows this approach clearly does not meet the need for service.

The pilot program managed to register just 798 clients – and over 40 percent of those registrants gave up on or never used the service during the three years it was in operation.



Universal home support services would make it possible for thousands of seniors to live with dignity and respect in their own homes – at a much lower cost than acute or residential care – and reduce pressure on B.C.’s acute care hospitals.

As a matter of human decency and economic common sense, providing universal home support is the right thing to do.

Governments have betrayed our children and grandchildren

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT in B.C. has reached 14 percent, twice as high as the overall average. But that's only a small part of the challenge facing our children and grandchildren.

Precarious work has soared. Thousands of young people must go from one temporary job to the next. They have no benefits, no pension plan, no certainty about how many hours they'll be working the next week or even the next day. On average, they will have held 11 different jobs by the time they're 30 years old.

An economic analysis by the TD Bank says high unemployment and underemployment will drag down young workers' careers and reduce their income for decades to come.

The B.C. Liberals have relentlessly implemented policies that mean "flexibility" for employers and insecurity for workers, especially young workers.

They have slashed the rules and enforcement for hiring, workplace practices and firing.

They've cut the minimum call-out time from four hours to two. They've given employers the right to pressure workers to forego overtime pay, even if they work 12 hour days for seven days in a row.

And instead of enforcing the much-weakened rules, they've posted a "self help" kit on the web, forcing workers to take on bad bosses all by themselves.

A new study by McMaster University shows that nearly half of working adults in Greater Toronto have unstable employment, with huge social and economic consequences.

There's every reason to believe the situation is as bad or worse in



Since the B.C. Liberals changed the apprenticeship system, completion rates have fallen to just 43 percent. BC FORUM urges you to sign the B.C. Federation of Labour's online petition to improve access to skills training at bcfed.ca/expand-apprenticeship-in-bc.

our province since the B.C. Liberals' changes to workplace standards are among the harshest in Canada.

The Harper government has added to the misery.

They have refused to improve the Canada Pension Plan, the only pension available to people with unstable jobs.

They have also continued to slash Employment Insurance benefits. More than half of the unemployed are now denied benefits – and young people in precarious work are especially unlikely to have enough continuous hours to qualify.

Instead of pushing workers onto welfare, EI should support them while they search for a new job.

Change for the better

Our governments, provincially and federally, must take practical steps to give young people the opportunity to build a better future:

- Implement and enforce proper employment standards to support secure employment.
- Make it possible for more young people to obtain post-secondary education and apprenticeship skills training.
- Support local jobs and local workers. Stop building ferries and Sea-buses overseas. Stop bringing in migrant workers when qualified local people are available.
- Reform the CPP and EI to recognize today's economic realities.

New web-based service could point you to significant savings on prescription drugs

PACIFIC BLUE CROSS has launched a new service – called Pharmacy COMPASS – that could save you a considerable amount of money on prescription drugs.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), Canadians spent \$26.1 billion on prescription drugs in 2010, including \$4.6 billion out-of-pocket. And the cost of prescription drugs is the fastest growing component of our health care system.

Pacific Blue Cross says smart shopping can save us a lot of money as individuals, and save our health care system billions of dollars. The company adds that all British Columbians deserve to have access to affordable health care and prescrip-

tion drugs.

Recognizing that it's difficult for individuals to do comparison shopping for prescriptions – drug prices and dispensing fees are not features you usually find in drug store sale flyers – Pacific Blue Cross has developed a free, interactive web-based tool to help you find the best value for your money.

Accessible via computer, smartphone or tablet, Pharmacy COMPASS allows you to compare prices at different pharmacies in your community, and thereby helps you to lower your out-of-pocket costs.

In an example provided by Pacific Blue Cross, Tania, a 54 year old mother and wife who takes Lipitor to lower cholesterol levels, found

that she can save \$62.81 a month by switching to another pharmacy and a generic version of the drug.

She had been paying a total of \$85.60 for a month's supply of 20g brand name Lipitor – 30 tablets at \$2.50 each, plus a \$10.60 dispensing fee.

After Tania researched the alternatives on Pharmacy COMPASS, she is now paying a total of \$22.79 a month for 20g generic Lipitor – 30 tablets at \$0.61 each, plus a \$4.49 dispensing fee.

To see if using this tool will save you money, visit www.pharmacycompass.ca.

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Government accused of hypocrisy, lying

THE PRESIDENT of the Canadian Labour Congress has sent a strongly-worded letter to the Prime Minister regarding legislation that will harass unions, invade the personal privacy of Canadians and cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

“I write to you to express my disgust with the recent conduct of the government regarding Bill C-377,” Georgetti says in his letter to Stephen Harper.

Bill C-377, a Private Member’s Bill brought forward by Conservative MP Russ Hiebert, passed the House of Commons on December 12. It will now move to the Senate.

The bill would force every labour organization in Canada to file detailed financial information annually on their spending, including what they pay out to private contractors for janitorial services and snow removal. The information would be posted publicly on a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) website.

The Canadian Bar Association says that Bill C-377 invades personal privacy, is likely unconstitutional and should be withdrawn. Canada’s federal Privacy Commissioner also expressed deep concern.

Georgetti says Bill C-377 was a Private Member’s Bill in name but in reality it was orchestrated by senior staff in the Prime Minister’s office.

“To present this bill as serving a demonstrable need or policy objective lacks any credibility,” says Georgetti.

“The premise of your government’s Bill C-377 is that tax deductibility creates a public interest, however, an amendment to include business organizations, whose members enjoy the same tax treatment as our members do, was voted down by all Conservative members.

“This confirms to us and any objective observers that this bill is nothing more than an attack on the four million hard-working Canadian union members.”

Georgetti accuses proponents of the bill of lying to Canadians in saying the cost to the CRA of monitoring compliance with the legislation would be negligible.

“It is hypocritical in the extreme

to proclaim fiscal conservatism and lean government, cutting front line public services like marine safety on both coasts for example, while committing tens of millions of dollars to create a wasteful bureaucracy that will serve no purpose other than to reward the Conservative Party’s political friends and punish groups that challenge your government’s policies.”

Is “right-to-work” next on Harper’s anti-union agenda?

THERE ARE GROWING indications that the Harper government is planning even more attacks on unions and the right of workers to receive a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

Usually reliable sources say the federal Conservatives are writing some form of right-to-work legislation. This troublesome information has been corroborated by senior insiders. The Library of Parliament, used by MPs to research new bills, is currently researching the issue.

Anti-union right-to-work laws – which are more accurately described

as right-to-work-for-less – are typically thought of as features of U.S. states in the deep south. Research shows that workers in these states are paid significantly less, and are far less likely to have medical coverage from their employers.

Recently, far-right Republicans have spread the anti-union measures to other states, including Michigan.

Canadians will need to be vigilant. There are enough financial pressures on working families without the federal government going out of its way to further drive down wages.

CPP reform stalled again

EVEN AS THE NEED for improvement in the Canada Pension Plan cries for attention, Canada’s finance ministers again failed to move forward at their meeting in December.

“I blame Ottawa for this,” says CLC president Ken Georgetti.

“Most provinces want to use the CPP to improve retirement pensions for Canadians, but the federal government keeps stalling. This government is letting down millions of Canadians who are not able to save enough for a comfortable retire-

ment,” says Georgetti. He vows to continue working with provinces to improve retirement security.

A majority of Canadians surveyed in a recent poll say any plans to retire by age 66 are more of a fantasy than a reality. Only 27 percent – a decline of nearly 50 percent from the previous year – believe they’ll be able to retire when they are 66.

Almost two-thirds of those who were polled (63%) said they will need to work past 66 out of economic necessity.

Ray Andrus steps down as BC Forum director

RAY ANDRUS, a passionate orator and advocate for working people, has stepped down from his position as a member of the BC FORUM board of directors due to health concerns.

“Ray has represented the Canadian Union of Postal Workers on the board for many, many years,” says Diane Wood, president.

“He has made a significant contribution not only to our organization, but to the well-being of workers, retired workers, and our families,” she said. “We thank Ray from the bottom of our hearts and send him our love and best wishes.”



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Seniors in ferry-dependent communities demand a change for the better

THE ONLY LONG-TERM resolution to arrest and reverse BC Ferries' escalating fares and impending service cuts is to take our ferries back under government control as a crown corporation," says Jef Keighley, Chair of the Sunshine Coast Senior Citizens (a branch of COSCO-BC of which BC Forum is an affiliate).

That's the message the SCSC took to the "BC Coastal Ferries Consultation and Engagement" meeting held in Gibsons in December.

"In 2003 Gordon Campbell set out a then new mandate for BC Ferries as a nominally independent corporation to be run on a user pay model. Rather than provide a critical public service providing the coastal links of our highways infrastructure, no different than a road or a bridge, the Campbell mandate requires BC Ferries to capture as much of their costs through fare and/or service cuts as possible. This has driven up fares at four and a half times the rate of inflation!" said Keighley.

In contrast, the Department of Highways operates 14 inland ferries, all of which are free of charge.

In the fall and winter of 2011 Ferry Commissioner Gordon Macatee conducted townhall meetings throughout BC's coastal ferry dependent communities.

"What he heard was that our ferries are our highways and should be treated and funded as such.

"What he concluded, was that ferry fares had reached 'the tipping point' and that ferry usage was now on the decline as a result. The additional above-inflation increases dictated by the provincial government exacerbate the problem," he said.

Keighley noted the Campbell mandate has created a self-defeating, downward spiral. As ferry usage



View from the Queen of Surrey as it nears Horseshoe Bay. The ferry runs every two hours in a limited schedule connecting the Sunshine Coast and the Lower Mainland.

declines due to increased fares and service cuts, BC Ferries' finances worsen, necessitating still higher fares, more cuts, producing less usage, and down it goes.

"BC Ferries' mandate doesn't and can't work. Demanding that coastal residents not only pay our fair share of our provincial highway system and also demand we shoulder the lion's share of the cost of service to connect to that system is double dipping into coastal residents pockets. It is strangling BC's ferry dependent communities, where almost 20% of our population reside," said Keighley.

"The cost of ferry travel is damaging local economies, limiting the frequency of contact between family and friends and treats coastal residents as second-class citizens.

"The mandate needs to be



Jef Keighley, Chair of the Sunshine Coast Senior Citizens organization.

changed and if the current provincial government won't change it, perhaps its time to change the government," said Keighley.

WORKING FOR CHANGE

Your membership in BC FORUM has never been more important

Please encourage your friends and colleagues to join our team

THROUGH OUR UNIONS, before we retired, we've all seen the benefits of collective action. Our voices are strongest when we stand together in solidarity.

That's what BC FORUM is all about. We are the only organization that represents union members who have retired or are nearing retirement. We are an integral part of the labour movement, with formal representation in leadership bodies, and maintain strong links with provincial and national seniors' groups.

Together, we can make a difference for ourselves and our families.

Please encourage friends, colleagues and family members to join us using the form below, or on-line at www.bcforum.ca.



Diane Wood, president, and Bill Silvester, vice-president, promote the importance of retired workers staying engaged in the labour movement through BC FORUM and community building initiatives such as Protein for People.



BC FORUM has always provided free \$2,500 Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance coverage to members.

We are proud to now extend this coverage to members' spouses at the low cost of \$5 per year. All you have to do is check the appropriate box when you apply or renew your membership. BC FORUM's AD&D coverage is valid until you reach age 86, the maximum age we were able to negotiate.



Please check expiry date on mailing label. If membership is due you can also renew at www.bcforum.ca. BCGEU, HSA, COPE and UFCW will pay first year BC FORUM dues for qualified members.



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It's time to protect, strengthen and extend public health care

By Maude Barlow
and Michael McBane

HEALTH CARE is always rated as Canadians' top election issue and number one social program. Yet the federal government isn't interested in shaping health care in Canada. Instead, responsibility for the future of health care is being downloaded onto the provinces.

In December 2011 – without consulting premiers, health ministers, or health-care providers – finance minister Jim Flaherty announced that the 6 per cent escalating Canada Health Transfer would be reformulated and tied to economic growth starting in 2017. He then announced that the federal government would not be discussing the 2014 Health Accord further, and left the room.

Without a 2014 Health Accord, there will be no national improvements to health care, no continuation of Tommy Douglas' ultimate vision of universal health care including necessary programs such as pharmacare. And despite Canada facing an aging population, there will be no national standards for home and community care. The provinces are on their own, and we're not confident that they can fill the shoes of the federal government, nor should they need to.

Last year, the premiers met from July 25 to 27 in Halifax. On their agenda was the 2014 Health Accord, and in particular areas such as innovation and financing. They were trying to work out how to improve health care in Canada for the next 10 years.

But without the federal government at the negotiating table, it is

unlikely that the premiers will be able to protect, strengthen and extend public health care as Canadians are calling on all of our leaders to do.

"A rising tide lifts all boats" is supposed to mean that everyone's quality of life will improve together. But without the federal government ensuring that the water is fairly distributed in each province, some boats will rise while others sink. Resources in Canada are not equally distributed, and it is the job of the federal government to try and even out some of that inequality.

In health care this is mandated by the Canada Health Act. The principle of "portability" ensures that Canadians can travel from one province to another and receive the same quality of care. It's what makes our universal health care universal. Without the involvement of the federal government, who will compare the basket of services and quality of care being offered in each province and territory to ensure we're all meeting the highest standard? Are provinces and territories expected to be watchdogs for each other?

In the 2004 Health Accord, the federal government found areas of weakness in health care across Canada. They tied financial bonuses to national standards in those areas of weakness. Provinces that met certain benchmarks were rewarded financially. In 2011, the Health Council of Canada came out with a report that showed that this strategy worked remarkably well and wait times for targeted areas fell by years.

If the federal government does not look after the needs of Canadians, who will? Who acts as a catalyst for innovation and best practices? Who will protect national standards and ensure universal access without financial barriers to care, as called for in the Canada Health Act?

Canadians expect both levels of government to work together to secure the future health care needs of all.

Maude Barlow is the national chairperson of the Council of Canadians.

Michael McBane is the national co-ordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition.

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