



BC FORUM members speak out

Lively annual meeting debated a wide range of resolutions on issues affecting workers, retirees and our families

THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE of determination to speak out and demand change at the 2013 BC FORUM annual general meeting, held in Burnaby in June.

The members debated and in some cases proposed amendments to a package of resolutions defending public health care, calling for action on an independent seniors' advocate, and maintaining the Therapeutics' Initiative as an independent watchdog over the safety of prescription drugs.

They also declared support for defined benefit pension plans, maintenance and expansion of post-retirement health care benefits, and opposed privatization of postal services.

In addition, the members adopted the Board of Directors' report on the many activities undertaken by BC FORUM over the last year.

Janine Farrell, Seniors Care Researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives described the mounting challenges facing seniors who hope to age in place. Secretary-Treasurer Irene Lanzinger brought greetings from the B.C. Federation of Labour.

Our full coverage of the AGM begins on page 4.



NOT IMPRESSED – Janine Farrell, Seniors' Care Researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, doesn't think much of the provincial government's continuing failure to meet the needs of seniors in British Columbia. See story on page 6.



CLC launches major campaign

THE CANADIAN LABOUR Congress, with the participation of several unaffiliated unions, has launched a major campaign to emphasize the significant contribution made by unions and their members in build-

ing stronger, healthier communities.

As never before, this long-term initiative promises to reach out to Canadians about the benefits of union membership. See the full story on page 10.

Board of Directors

President

Diane Wood, BCGEU

Chair

Jim Sinclair, BCFL

Vice Presidents

John Savage, CEP

Bill Silvester, TWU

Secretary

Miriam Olney, UFCW

Treasurer

Dave Gill, COPE

Directors

Dan Bradford, BCGEU

Millie Canessa, BCGEU

Fred Girling, USW

Gord Larkin, CLC

Marion Pollack, CUPW

John Radosevic, CAW

Gord Savard, CUPE

Maureen Shaw, FPSE

Russ St. Eloi, BCTC

Alice West, PSAC

Gordon Westrand, ILWU

Staff

Hitomi Nasu

Advocate

The Advocate is published by the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members. BC FORUM – supported by Working Enterprises and affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour – is dedicated to representing the interests of members and their families, and continuing into retirement the relationship they enjoyed with the union movement.

#200-5118 Joyce Street
Vancouver, BC V5R 4H1
Toll-free 1.800.896.5678
Tel. 604.688.4565
bcforum@bcfed.ca

Editor: Soren Bech
soren.bech@gmail.com
2102 Porter Road, Roberts Creek,
B.C., V0N 2W5

Labour Council Delegates and Regional Representatives

Campbell River, Courtenay & District

Suzanne Bennett

Lynda Reid

East Kootenay & District

Chris Johns

Fraser Valley

Pamela Willingshofer

Kamloops & District

Mogens Jorgensen

Nanaimo, District & Duncan

Tom Duncan

Iris Taylor

New Westminster & District

Ken Isomura

North Central

John Hurren

Victor Johnson

Ron Williams

North Okanagan

Doug Gibson

Port Alberni & District

Mike Lang

South Okanagan Boundary

John Colbourne

Terry Green

Squamish Labour Committee

Marie Worth

Sunshine Coast & District

Lyle Kristiansen

Bruce Elphinstone

Vancouver & District

Sandy Bauer

De Whalen

Victoria Labour Council

Mona Sykes

West Kootenay & District

Marjorie Witton

Mary Gay

In this edition

This issue of BC FORUM's quarterly news magazine features complete coverage of the annual general meeting which passed several significant resolutions and heard disturbing news about the state of seniors' care in B.C. – and about the fees and mark-ups charged by large pharmacy chains. Check out the stories on pages 4 to 9.

Also in this edition:

- Major campaign launched by Canada's labour movement.....page 10
- Why home care must be a national prioritypage 12
- Our take on the provincial government's new wheelchair tax ..page 14
- Time to renew? Please use this convenient formpage 15

Visit the BC FORUM website:

www.bcforum.ca

Join us on Facebook:



[facebook.com/
BCRetiredUnion
MembersForum](https://facebook.com/BCRetiredUnionMembersForum)

Printing of the
Advocate courtesy
of UFCW Local 1518



Alice West wins Rosemary Brown award

ALICE WEST, former President of BC FORUM, has won the 2013 Rosemary Brown award for Women, recognizing her immense contribution to the labour movement, equality and social justice in Canada, and in particular her contributions in the area of Women in the Labour Movement.

The award is a memorial to the life and work of the late Rosemary Brown, a champion for equality rights of women.

Each year the Award is presented to a woman or a women's group who has made an outstanding contribution on the issues championed by Rosemary Brown.

The award was presented by Cleta Brown, the daughter of Rosemary Brown, in a ceremony held at Hycroft House in Vancouver.

Alice West began her labour activism in 1942 at age 16, when she took a job paying 37.5 cents an hour at a plywood plant on Boundary Road. Although her father had been blacklisted as a union activist on the Prairies, Alice wasn't scared off. She worked with the Vancouver Local of the IWA to organize the plant.

In the 1960s, then working for the federal government, Alice was elected shop steward, then Local President, and Treasurer of the B.C. – Yukon region of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). In 1979, she was elected as National Director for B.C., Yukon and Northwest Territories.

As one of only three women on the National Board of Directors, Alice mobilized and organized to break new ground for women.

Nycole Turmel, former PSAC President and now a Member of Parliament, said her work "set the stage for the rest of us."

"(She) pushed forward an equity



Alice West, seen here listening closely to a speaker at the BC FORUM annual general meeting, has been honoured with an award that recognizes her work as "a fearless pioneer" for the rights of women.

agenda, emphasized the need to be mobilized and politicized... (and) raised issues that were key for women like child care, anti-harassment and pay equity," said Turmel.

Alice was a key organizer of the Union's first ever Women's Conferences, nationally and regionally, and chaired the union's Equal Opportunity Committee. She was the third woman elected as an Officer of the B.C. Federation of Labour, serving as Vice-President and representing PSAC on Operation Solidarity during the turbulent 1980s.

"My focus has always been how I could try to make life better for all of us," says Alice.

Even after retirement, Alice didn't slow down. She was asked by former

TWU President Bill Clark to participate in establishing BC FORUM in 1991. She has served as a director ever since, including holding the positions of Vice-President and President. She worked with Ellen Woodsworth to create Women Elders in Action (WE*ACT), served as Chair of that group, and conducted research into poverty among senior women.

Alice was a fearless pioneer for the rights for women at a time when women were not regarded as equals in the workplace. She fought for pay equity, and continues to fight for retirement security for elder women.

Alice West is a most deserving winner of the Rosemary Brown Award and the province-wide recognition of her many achievements.

A year of action, but much more to do

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS' report on BC FORUM action and advocacy during the last year was adopted unanimously by members.

Here are some highlights:

BC FORUM is unique. We are the only B.C. organization of older and retired workers which is directly affiliated to the labour movement.

As we all know from our years in the movement, we are strongest when we work together in solidarity, bringing our experience to bear for the benefit of workers both young and old. That strength has never been needed more than it is today.

Like other seniors' organizations, BC FORUM advocates on public policy issues that affect our members and their families. Unlike most other seniors' groups however, we are not non-partisan.

We have been active, and will continue to be active, in civic, provincial and federal elections to support candidates who will speak out for working families.

We were dismayed by the comprehensive defeat handed to Adrian Dix and the BC NDP, and to working people and seniors throughout our province, in the May 14 provincial election. Either the polls were spectacularly wrong, or NDP supporters simply stayed home. Voter turnout remained abysmal, barely more than the historic low of 51% recorded in 2009. The NDP's share of the popular vote dropped almost 3%. In the months ahead, the party and the movement will face hard questions about where we go from here.

During this election period, BC FORUM, its directors, regional representatives and volunteers undertook several initiatives to communicate with our members and motivate them to take action.

We published an issue sheet out-



Diane Wood, President, chaired the BC FORUM AGM and presented the annual report.

lining our election priorities. We supported the labour movement's call for action on employment standards, apprenticeships, and employer intimidation.

In addition, we called for universal public home support services, action on child poverty, improvement in public pensions, fair taxes, affordable public child care, and a truly independent Seniors' Advocate.

We published a special election edition of our news magazine (and) completely redesigned our website to highlight our key election issues. During the campaign itself, directors, regional representatives and other volunteers personally contacted hundreds of BC FORUM members by telephone to encourage them to vote for change.

At the federal level, we partici-

pated in the by-election campaign in Victoria. This swing riding was successfully held by New Democrat Murray Rankin.

In every campaign, there are many factors at work in determining the eventual outcome. We can be proud of our contribution to these campaigns.

BC FORUM's regional representation through delegate status at labour councils continued to grow. During the period covered by this report, we welcomed nine new labour council delegates.

Ensuring that every union member has the opportunity to join BC FORUM when she or he retires is essential if we are to build our membership. To collectively address this issue, and other common interests, we have established a process of regular consultation with affiliated unions.

Sixteen members of BC FORUM participated in a two and a half day "train the trainers" course in March.

This modular course on pre-retirement planning will be delivered by our instructors through labour council weekend schools and affiliated unions.

Our volunteer board is focused and working hard. Our visibility is higher than ever. Union leaders have provided great encouragement and support. Still, we need to do more to increase our membership, and to help former union members remain active and aware participants in promoting labour's agenda.

In the years ahead, with the support of Working Enterprises, affiliated unions, our members and activists, we look forward to further expansion of our membership, activities, and even stronger advocacy on behalf of retired workers.

See the full report at www.bcforum.ca.



Irene Lanzinger, Secretary-Treasurer, B.C. Federation of Labour

Unions must renew fight for social justice in wake of disappointing election results

IN THE WAKE OF the May provincial election, Irene Lanzinger told the BC FORUM AGM in June that she is “obviously disappointed” in the outcome.

“We didn’t get the results we wanted,” said the B.C. Federation of Labour Secretary-Treasurer.

She thanked BC FORUM and its members for their advocacy on issues such as seniors’ care and equality, and for working with the union movement to promote social justice.

Lanzinger said there will be much to do in the months and years ahead – it’s never been more important for unions and activists to speak out.

Issues such as climate change and looming cuts in public services to people must be addressed.

She criticized right-wing governments, both federally and provincially, for their continuing attacks on unions and ordinary people.

“No matter who the government is, we have to demand our rights” as members of a free and democratic society, she said.

“If you don’t believe in politics, then you don’t believe in democracy.

“If you don’t exercise your rights, then they will take them away from you,” she said.

Health Care and Dental plans

Exclusively for Union Members and Members of BC FORUM

- Retiree health, or health with dental, exclusively for BC FORUM members.
- Coverage for union members still working who need benefits.
- We offer a conversion plan – for people who had previous group coverage within the last 90 days, with coverage of pre-existing conditions – and a standard plan.
- Estate planning.
- Registered Education Savings Plans for grandchildren (RESP).
- Guaranteed issue life insurance.
- Tax Free Savings Accounts (TFSA).
- A Union operated company.

Union products and services are just a phone call away:

- 1 855 863-9991 (toll free)
- dave@weconsultants.ca
- www.weconsultants.ca

WE Consulting & Benefits
Working Enterprises Consulting & Benefits Services Ltd.

Access to home support cut 30%



Janine Farrell, Seniors' Care Researcher for the B.C. branch of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, says there's "lots of work to do" to improve care for seniors.

Independent advocate needed

WHILE MOST RETIRED workers are living longer and healthier lives, others are subjected to a growing "silent epidemic" of elder abuse, says a resolution adopted at the BC FORUM annual meeting.

Before the last election, the provincial government introduced legislation to appoint a Seniors' Advocate – but the position would be answerable to the Minister of Health

and not truly independent.

"We need a true advocate for seniors that would be an independent officer of the Legislature, like the Ombudsperson, with a priority focus on combatting elder abuse," said the resolution.

It demanded the appointment of a truly independent advocate to take the lead on ensuring that vulnerable seniors get the support they need.

THE CHALLENGES facing retired workers who hope to age in place are growing worse, according to Janine Farrell, Seniors' Care Researcher for the B.C. branch of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

She told BC FORUM members at the annual general meeting that access to home support has been cut by 30% by the B.C. Liberals. This drop comes even as the population of B.C. continues to age, increasing the need for such services.

A recent CCPA study found that the number of seniors over age 75 increased by 28 percent between 2001 and 2010. Yet during this period access to home support throughout B.C. was reduced by 30 percent, and access to residential care dropped 21 percent. In some regions, the cuts were even deeper.

The cuts in service affect all British Columbians by putting new strains on acute care hospitals. Up to 20 percent of acute care beds are used by patients who are waiting for long term care, home support or other alternative care.

In addition, Farrell said, the government has fully implemented only four of 179 recommendations made by the B.C. Ombudsperson to improve community care.

That scathing 400 page report – described by Farrell as the most extensive Ombudsperson's report in the history of B.C. – documented how deeply the government has failed seniors. The second of two such reports, it called for objective and enforceable standards of care. However, as the Ombudsperson has noted, there are still recommendations from 2009 that haven't been fully accepted and implemented.

"It's discouraging," said Farrell. "We have lots of work to do to improve care for seniors."

Members blast Harper government for abandoning public health care

THE HARPER CONSERVATIVE government is abandoning the essential federal role in Canadian health care, charged a resolution adopted by members at the BC FORUM annual general meeting.

“We need to tell it like it is,” said Bill Zandar during the debate. “I suspect the government’s intent is to privatize health care.”

The resolution said Harper’s decision to terminate the Health Council of Canada by eliminating its \$6 million a year funding will end common standards across the country, and strike a blow to accountability, transparency and evidence-based health care policies.

The Health Council’s achievements include lowering wait times, encouraging innovation, and promoting a continuum of care as recommended by the Romanow Royal Commission in 2003.

The resolution said the lack of federal coordination means more and more Canadians will lack access to comparable services in primary care, prescription drugs, home care, rehabilitation and long term care.

In addition, the Harper government has announced major cuts to federal transfer payments that will take more than \$60 billion out of health transfers starting next year.

“The Harper government is essentially saying it is time to wind down national Medicare,” said the resolution.

Members demanded that the Harper government “protect and maintain support” for the Health Council of Canada, and called on the government to reverse the decision to cut \$60 billion from federal transfer payments commencing in 2014.



Directors Dan Bradford and John Savage pay close attention during the debate of resolutions. Savage (Chair) served with Maureen Shaw, Bill Silvester and Gord Savard as members of the resolutions committee.

Therapeutics Initiative provides a vital service in patient safety

THE THERAPEUTICS INITIATIVE – an independent watchdog over the safety of prescription drugs – saves both lives and money, BC FORUM Director Bill Silvester told the annual general meeting.

By warning of the dangers of several drugs, the acclaimed group of researchers at the University of B.C. has saved close to 500 lives, he said. And by recommending generic drugs that are just as effective as expensive new drugs, TI saves money for both patients and PharmaCare.

TI has provided evidence-based analysis of prescription drugs to physicians, pharmacists and PharmaCare since 1994.

In 2008, the B.C. Liberal government appointed a pharmaceutical task force loaded with representatives of big drug companies. Not surprisingly, these vested interests called for the abolition of the Therapeutics Initiative.

Since then, the provincial government has steadily cut funding. This year, it announced that it would cut the final \$1 million, thereby effectively abolishing TI. BC FORUM members at the AGM unanimously demanded that the government restore full funding to the Therapeutics Initiative.

Are you paying too much for drugs?

DAVE PORTEOUS of WE Consulting and Benefits caused a stir at the BC FORUM annual meeting by releasing information about the average mark-up and dispensing fees charged by six large pharmacy chains operating in B.C.



Dave Porteous addresses the BC FORUM AGM on rising drug costs.

Pharmasave charged customers the most in both categories, while Costco was significantly lower than the other five.

With the cost of prescription drugs rising faster than any other aspect of health care, Porteous urged individuals to check out a new web-based service launched by Pacific Blue Cross.

Pacific Blue Cross says smart shopping can save us a lot of money as individuals, and save our health care system billions of dollars.

Accessible via computer, smart-phone or tablet, Pharmacy COMPASS allows you to compare prices at different pharmacies in your commun-

ity, and thereby helps you to lower your out-of-pocket costs.

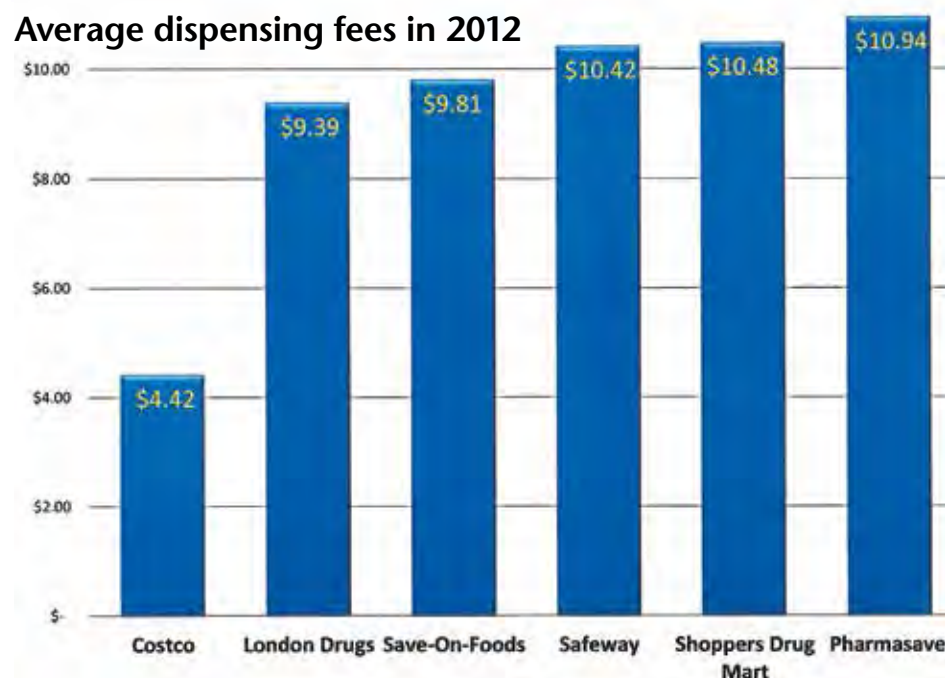
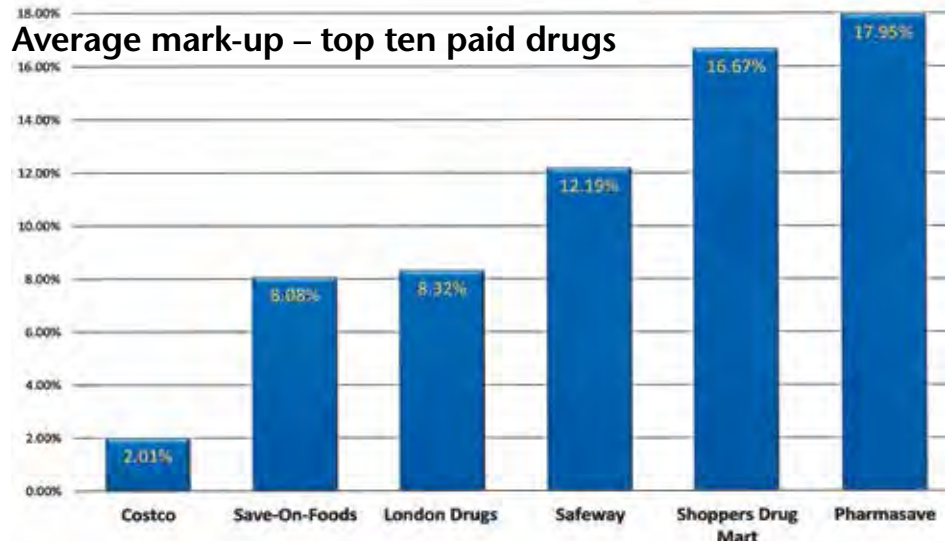
In an example provided by Pacific Blue Cross, Tania, a 54 year old mother and wife who takes Lipitor to lower cholesterol levels, found that she could save \$62.81 a month by switching to another pharmacy and a generic version of the drug.

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 you can save on drugs, visit www.pharmacycompass.ca.



Benefits, pensions and public services

BC FORUM members take a clear stand on issues affecting retirees and older workers

POST-RETIREMENT health care benefits are under attack by governments and employers, says a resolution adopted by members who attended the annual general meeting.

“The elimination or reduction of post-retirement health care benefits adversely affects retired workers and puts more pressure on our public health care system,” said the resolution.

Members resolved to work with the labour movement to maintain and expand such benefits for current and future retirees.

Defined benefit pension plans – which provide workers with a more secure retirement than defined contribution plans – are also under attack as employers try to shift all the risk to workers. Members resolved to work with the labour movement to maintain existing defined benefit pensions and to advocate for their expansion.

Another resolution notes that many seniors rely on Canada Post as an important source of communication. However, public postal outlets in many communities are being closed. A deregulated or privatized postal service will reduce access.

BC FORUM will “support efforts to maintain public postal counters in our communities, and publicly advocate for universal public postal service.



Pat Kerwin, President of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC), and Russ St. Eloi, BC FORUM director, discussed the issues facing retired workers during a break in the proceedings.

“We’re in this for the fight,” declares CURC President

WHILE THE HARPER Conservatives worry about “thieves” in the Senate who have excellent pensions, they are ignoring the real issue of improving the Canada Pension Plan for people who really need better pensions, says Pat Kerwin, President of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC).

“The finance ministers keep talking about this. They’ve agreed in principle to do something. They’re talking about a modest increase but they don’t even meet. They were supposed to meet six months ago to discuss this problem. Postponed. They didn’t do it,” said Kerwin.

“When Irene Matheson (NDP MP) presses them on the issue, all they come back with is talk about PRPPs (Pooled Registered Pension Plans), which is a nice thing for the insurance companies to make money on, rather than dealing with the real

problem of pensions for retirees.”

Kerwin noted that the average CPP pension in Ontario this year was \$530. Even after adding the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and Old Age Security (OAS) payments to that, it leaves those pensioners well below the low income cut-off level.

He pointed out that the Harper government is in the process of making things worse by increasing the eligibility age for OAS and GIS to 67.

“The Conservatives want to basically turn it over to the insurance industry, and tied with that is their attacks on unions,” he said.

Kerwin called on retired workers to get involved in the fight for improved pensions for their children and grandchildren.

“Politicians pay attention to retirees. We’re in this for the fight,” he said.

Major campaign to highlight union contributions to our communities

WITH SO MANY right-wing forces and governments conspiring to drive down wages and erode working conditions for employees, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is spear-heading a major campaign to highlight the union movement's many contributions to our communities.

The campaign – “together FAIRNESS WORKS” – will involve both affiliates and unions that are not affiliated to the CLC. It was officially launched with events in 17 targeted communities on Labour Day, with supporting events in more than 50 communities.

It's a long-term initiative. And it's comprehensive. The labour movement will be speaking directly to Canadians about how unions have improved the lives of working people, union and non-union alike.

“We believe in the old saying that what we desire for ourselves we wish for all,” says Ken Georgetti, President of the CLC.

“Many of the benefits first won by unions are enjoyed by all workers today, including fair wages, overtime pay, pensions, workplace safety standards, parental leaves, vacation pay and protection from discrimination and harassment,” he says.

These issues and more will be highlighted in a major national advertising campaign that begins in late September, social media events and an unprecedented level of direct contact with union members.

“This is the largest member-to-member engagement program in Canadian labour history,” says Amber Hockin, the CLC Regional Director for the Pacific Region.

“The goal is to have three million conversations with union members

on the value of union membership,” says Hockin.

Georgetti says researchers at the CLC have found that unionized workers earn an average of \$4.97 more than others.

“Decent middle class family-supporting wages translate into vibrant communities,” says Georgetti.

“Unionized workers spend their pay cheques close to home. They buy at local businesses and bolster

the tax base, which in turn supports public works, community services and charities. These communities become better places in which to live and work.

“We in the labour movement take satisfaction in knowing that we have helped to build a stronger middle class and a more secure economy for everyone in our country. When unions stand up for fairness, they raise the bar for everyone,” says Georgetti.



Decent pensions

FOR GENERATIONS, workers either stayed on the job until they died or – because they were too ill or too old to work any longer – retired into a life of poverty.

Together, workers said enough. Canadians who had worked their lives for an employer should not be used up and thrown away when they got too old to be of use to their employer. Workers who are too old to work and too young to die should live their remaining years in dignity.



Together, workers negotiated pension plans in their workplaces. They arranged for part of their wages to be set aside, so that it would be there for them when they retired. They also got employers to contribute, in recognition of the service to (and profits made for) employers during their careers.

Workers didn't just demand dignity in retirement for themselves. They demanded public pensions for all Canadians, whether in paid work or not. Workers fought for and won Old Age Security in 1952, the Canada Pension Plan in 1965, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement in 1966. Together, this country's public pensions are responsible for Canada having one of the lowest old-age poverty rates in the industrialized world.

– Information from the “together FAIRNESS WORKS” campaign

Better at Home helps with simple tasks

BETTER AT HOME is a program that helps seniors with simple day-to-day tasks so that they can continue to live independently in their own homes and remain connected to their communities. The program is funded by the Government of BC and managed by the United Way of the Lower Mainland. It is based on the successful Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI) pilot project that operated in five communities in BC and enrolled 1,000 clients.

The March edition of the Advocate mentioned that 40% of those enrolled in CASI programs gave up on or never used the service during the three years it was in operation. In fact, the evaluation report looked at only 18 months of services and showed that 82% of participants in the program were satisfied with the program. While it is true that not all

seniors continued using the service – some passed away, some moved away, some moved over to home and community care – the firm that conducted research on this project did not find that 40% gave up or never used the service.

Currently seven Better at Home programs are delivering services in BC, an additional 14 are starting service delivery in the coming months, and by mid 2014 we hope to have funded up to 68 programs. Although programs will look different in every community, because they are based on local needs and assets, there are a few commonalities: service delivery will be provided by a combination of paid staff and volunteers and all staff will go through a criminal record check; service fees will be on a sliding scale based on seniors ability to pay; services will be non-medical; and there will be an Advisory Com-

mittee established for each local program.

Better at Home is not a substitute for – nor does it replace – those critically-needed home support services provided by the health authorities. The program is for seniors who require modest help so they can continue to live independently and be fully engaged in communities. The United Way of the Lower Mainland recognizes that there is a need for services that address the medically necessary needs of seniors and are delivered by trained staff such as home and community care workers. We will keep advocating for those services to ensure that in the future all seniors stay connected to their community and stay safe at home as long as possible.

– Mervyn van Steinburg,
Labour Director,
Lower Mainland United Way

Managed by GrowthWorks Capital Ltd.



Create wealth for your retirement. Create jobs for BC.



The Working Opportunity Fund offers investors:

- Up to \$1,500 in tax credits
- An investment for your RRSP
- The satisfaction of helping to create well-paying jobs in BC

Call your Investment Advisor or visit www.growthworks.ca/wof

Commissions, trailing commissions, management fees and expenses all may be associated with investment fund purchases. Please read the prospectus before investing. Investment funds are not guaranteed, their values change frequently and past performance may not be repeated. Investments in the Fund have some restrictions on resale and redemption. Tax credits are subject to certain conditions.

Home care must be a priority

A national strategy for seniors' care is long overdue, but there's little leadership from Ottawa

By David Porteous

AT THE RECENT Canadian Medical Association (CMA) convention, held in August, delegates were informed about the results of an Ipsos Reid poll which found that Canadians have little faith in the ability of the health care system to meet the needs of seniors.

"The anxiety Canadians have about health care in their so-called golden years is both real and well-founded," said Dr. Anna Reid, outgoing president of the CMA.

"Let there be no doubt that a national strategy for seniors' health care should be a federal priority," she said, adding that the results send a strong message that the public wants action.

The poll, commissioned by the CMA, found that three in five respondents believed there would not be sufficient hospital beds, long-term care and home-care services to meet the demand.

There was 93 percent agreement that governments should unite to develop a comprehensive seniors' strategy. A clear majority of 78 percent, said Ottawa should play a significant role in developing the strategy, despite the Harper government's stand that health is strictly a provincial matter.

Asked about priorities for improvement, 63 percent said more should be invested in home and community care, 24 percent chose hospital and long-term care, and 12 percent chose end-of-life care.

The new federal health minister gave her first speech to delegates at

the convention, held in Calgary.

After her speech, she said, "As soon as a federal minister says the words 'national strategy' a lot of provinces flinch a little. So we don't talk about those kinds of things until we talk to our colleagues in the provinces and territories."

She added that the looming "demographic crunch" will put more pressure on the health care system.

It's interesting to note that home care for people with a chronic health condition costs about \$55 a day. The costs are about \$126 a day in long-term care and \$842 in a hospital.

These costs and the poll results demonstrate that making it easier

for seniors to stay at home while getting the care they need would be the preferred and most cost-effective option.

Once again, we see very little leadership from the federal government regarding health care. A national strategy on seniors' care is long overdue.

With little leadership from our federal government, and the federal election two years away, pressure on the provincial government is needed now. Quality home care for seniors must be a priority.

David Porteous is an Elder Planning Counselor, and a charter member of the Canadian Initiative for Elder Planning Studies.

An open letter to Canada's premiers

This letter was sent to all premiers as part of a Canadian Health Coalition campaign to defend Medicare.

AS STRONG SUPPORTERS of public health care, we are deeply concerned that the federal government led by Stephen Harper has no intention of engaging the provincial and territorial governments to secure a new 10-year Health Accord when the current one expires in 2014.

Public health care reflects our fundamental values of equity and fairness. Protecting and improving our public health care system is a priority for Canadians. Yet, the federal government is retreating from supporting and upholding public Medicare. It has downloaded costs and responsibilities and abandoned its essential federal role in encouraging innovations like curtailing the cost of drugs and expanding the principles of Medicare to cover home and continuing care.

The federal share of funding for health care, already low, will decline by \$36 billion in coming years. Ottawa plans to leave the risks and the pressures to provinces and territories to deal with on their own. In addition, the Harper government has also cut health care for refugees, RCMP, veterans' long term care beds, and the Health Council of Canada.

(You) have the opportunity to take a stand for public Medicare and call the Harper government back to the intergovernmental table in order to work together for the necessary changes to ensure universal access to quality care for generations to come.

Know that you have overwhelming public support to advocate in the strongest terms possible for federal leadership on health care and a renewed Health Accord.

Sincerely,
Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM



Former President Gerry Edwards steps down from BC FORUM Board

GERRY EDWARDS, a former President and a long-time director of BC FORUM has stepped down from the Board for health reasons.

Edwards served as President of the 2,000 member Regina Local of the Steelworkers for 12 years. He was a union staff member for 20 years, and is known as an exceptional organizer. Before his retirement, he was the union's area supervisor for B.C. and the Northwest Territories.

He has been the union's representative on the BC FORUM board since 1996, holding a number of positions including first vice-president, president, and chairperson of the resolutions committee.

Edwards stepped down as President in May of 2012, saying, "Over

the last few months, I have had some health challenges which make it difficult for me to give as much time and energy as the position of President of BC FORUM demands and deserves. I know that BC FORUM will be in the good hands of an active, energetic and involved board of directors. There is much to do. Let's get it done!"

During his time as President, BC FORUM was deeply involved in the fight against the HST, Harper's plans to undermine public pensions, and the federal election that vaulted the NDP into the official opposition.

"We'll all miss Gerry and wish him our best as he concentrates on getting better," said BC FORUM President Diane Wood.

**Quality protection
at a great price.**

**Home & Tenant
Insurance**

Be sure to mention you're a member of BC FORUM.

**1-800-663-4200
www.weinsurance.com**

WE Insurance
Working Enterprises Insurance Services Ltd. A Division of HG Insurance Agencies Ltd.

Government's new wheelchair tax hits those who have the least

THE NEW \$25 a month wheelchair tax takes unfair advantage of people who are already between a rock and a hard place. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority has backed down on the fee, but at press time Fraser Health had not.

The government has already significantly raised the fees for residential care to 80 percent of income – unless your income isn't high enough to pay the minimum of \$958.90 per month. Then they take the extra from your spouse, creating additional misery.

Here's a Fraser Valley example.

An elderly woman collecting \$515.97 a month in Old Age Security and \$317.08 in Guaranteed Income Supplement – the current averages paid by the federal government – has a monthly income of \$833.05.

Her husband, already living on a tight budget before she was admitted to residential care, has to pay the difference of \$1,510 a year. As of September 1, he had to find an additional \$300 a year to pay for wheelchair maintenance.

Could he buy one instead? Sure. But she may need a more sophisticated wheelchair in a few months at a far greater cost, something that staff in the care home are quick to point out.

The government maintains that its residential care fees are set to ensure that individuals have a minimum of \$350 a month for personal expenses. A health ministry information sheet claims that even after paying the wheelchair tax, "Residents in B.C. are left with at least \$325 a month for personal expenses and other allowable charges."

That's only true if you are fortunate enough to have a relatively good income. It's not true if your only in-



Many seniors require residential care because home care, if it was available, can no longer meet their needs. They require a wheelchair to get to meals and the washroom. For the B.C. Liberals these seniors, unlike the super-rich, are captive targets for a tax.

come is OAS and GIS, as is the case for many elderly women.

The wheelchair tax is especially aggravating for seniors' advocates who recall buying wheelchairs when their parents were admitted to residential care, and then donated them to the care home when their parents died. Now the users of these wheelchairs are forced to pay for the privilege.

Health minister Terry Lake claims that's entirely fair.

"While residential care is a person's home, and while the public health system covers the cost of medical and health care needs, residents pay for the cost of their personal equipment and supplies just as

they would if they lived in the community," he said July 24.

Janine Farrell, Seniors' Care Researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, questions that argument.

"The new fees undermine the human rights of persons with disabilities and seniors in this province. They will hit those least able to afford it the hardest. How is that fair?" she says.

"The home and community care sector is especially vulnerable to creeping user fees that undermine universality... (but) should not be used as a Medicare loophole to raise extra funds," says Farrell.

SIGN UP A FRIEND

Your membership in BC FORUM has never been more important

Please encourage your friends 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.

Foldable cataract lenses now covered by Medical Services Plan

CATARACT SURGERY has become the most common surgical procedure performed in North America. It has restored the vision of millions of women and men.

Unlike some other provinces, the B.C. Medical Services Plan has until now only paid for rigid lenses which require a larger incision in the eye. Patients paid as much as \$1,000 for folding lenses which are the current standard of

care and do not require stitches in the eye.

The good news is that MSP will now pay for foldable monofocal lenses.

On the other hand, if you require specialty lenses – such as multifocals or lenses to correct serious astigmatism – you will have to pay the difference in cost between the specialty lenses and monofocal folding lenses.



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.



B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members • #200 - 5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, V5R 4H1
604 688-4565 • 1 800 896-5678 • Fax: 604 430-5917 • bcforum@bcfed.ca • www.bcforum.ca

Membership: Application Renewal New address

Name: _____
LAST FIRST INITIAL

Address: _____
STREET ADDRESS CITY POSTAL CODE

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Union: _____ Date of birth:* _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

Spouse's name: _____ Spouse's birth date:* _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

\$20 - 1 year \$49 - 3 years (free \$2,500 AD&D for member)

\$25 - 1 year \$64 - 3 years (adds \$2,500 AD&D for spouse)

Payment: Cheque Visa MC Expiry: ____ / ____

Card number: _____

.....
SIGNATURE

Date of application: _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

* Required for AD&D group insurance coverage to age 86.

On fairness

By Doug Macpherson

WHEN WE WERE young, our parents did not have many of the rights and benefits Canadian workers enjoy today. During our working lives, we fought hard and long with our unions for the wages and benefits workers enjoy today, a fair share of the richness of Canada. Wages and benefits that allowed us to buy a house, take an occasional vacation, put our kids through college and university, and set aside something for retirement. As retirees, we are not about to just sit by and see our children and grandchildren lose what we fought for.

The Canadian conservative (attacks on unions) are not new. They have been tried south of the border in the United States.

In a report by the Centre for American Progress, entitled *Michigan 'Right-to-Work' Bill is the Wrong Economics for the Middle Class*, authors Adam S. Hersh, Heather Boushey and David Madland state:

“Unions support a strong middle class and, increasingly, economists are finding evidence that a strong middle class is not only good for the workers and their families who directly benefit, but for the economy overall. We know that if workers cannot afford the basics, ultimately the overall economy suffers along with these individuals.”

J.S. Woodsworth (1874-1942), a pioneer in the Canadian social democratic movement, said it best: “What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all.” As retirees, we desire fairness for our children and our grandchildren. They too deserve a fair share of the richness of Canada.

Doug Macpherson is a vice president of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC). Extracted from a longer Retiree Matters article published on rabble.ca



Sandy Bauer, BC FORUM regional representative and delegate to the Vancouver and District Labour Council, and Miriam Olney, BC FORUM Secretary to the Board of Directors, have the booth all set up, ready for action at the Lower Mainland Labour Day celebration at Vancouver's Trout Lake Park.

Labour Day 2013

LABOUR DAY is far more than the last long weekend of the summer. It is a recognition that working people, when we stand together, can bring about immense improvements in the lives of ordinary people. The super-rich – the so-called 1% – have tremendous economic and political power. They have no interest in improving wages, working conditions, pensions or public health care. In fact, they continually strive to lower the bar. To paraphrase James Lee Burke, they get rich in the traditional way, by taking from the rest of us. On Labour Day, we celebrate our solidarity through our unions, the organizations whose purpose is to stand up for working families.

New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM. You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone or e-mail: 1.800.896.5678 (toll free), 604.688.4565, bforum@bcfed.ca



Please check the expiry date on your label. Is your membership due for renewal?