

Advocate

Official news magazine of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)



Vol. 18 No. 2 Summer, 2015

Federal election preparations dominate annual meeting

PREPARATIONS FOR the next federal election – scheduled for October 19 – dominated the BC FORUM Annual General Meeting, held June 17 in Vancouver. Issues affecting older and retired workers and their families were at the forefront in keynote speeches, and in resolutions adopted by delegates.

Diane Wood, BC FORUM President, underlined the need to focus on the federal election as she presented the volunteer Board of Directors' annual report to the meeting.

She noted that the Harper Conservatives have repeatedly made decisions that hurt ordinary families. Their actions include voting against a sorely needed national strategy to help individuals and families affected by dementia, undermining retirement security by raising to 67 the qualifying age for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement and refusing to improve the CPP, and unilaterally cutting the federal contribution to public health care.

Jenny Kwan, the NDP's candidate in the federal riding of Vancouver East and currently MLA for Vancouver - Mount Pleasant, said the health of some seniors is being compromised by both federal and provincial cuts.

For example, service to seniors who have been receiving home support for up to 10 years, and whose conditions have worsened in that period, has suddenly been cut to only one hour a week for a bath.

Kwan said action is needed to im-



Diane Wood, President, outlined how BC FORUM is working with allies and seniors' groups to ensure that key issues will be front and centre in the federal election. Please visit www.bcforum.ca for more coverage, including a link to video highlights of speeches.

prove Canadians' access to public health care, appropriate and affordable housing, transportation, and health care.

Aaron Ekman, Secretary - Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour, said the Liberals and Conservatives are fundamentally only red and blue factions of the same party, representing the same narrow segment of society.

The NDP, he said, is made up of and represents people like us.

Ekman dismissed the suggestion that people should vote for the candidate who is most likely to be able to defeat the local Conservative. How do you determine who that is, he asked. Polls are frequently inaccurate. The best option is to vote for the change you want to build our country and make it a better place.

You'll find full coverage of the AGM in this edition. In addition, a link to video highlights of speeches can be found on our website: www.bcforum.ca.

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

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In this edition

This issue continues our expanded coverage of federal issues in advance of the critical federal election scheduled for October. We also have full coverage of the BC FORUM Annual General Meeting, which focused extensively on federal issues.

In this edition:

- Stopping Harper is not enough – we must build a better Canada ...4
- The third of three special reports on improving health care 9 - 12
- Home support “near the breaking point”14
- Harper’s “broken covenant” 16

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Working to achieve the changes we want in Ottawa

By Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM

THIS is a year for action by all our members, and indeed by all Canadians who care about the future direction of our country.

A federal election will be held in October. That will be our opportunity to finally give Stephen Harper his pink slip, and to bring about real, progressive change for working people, retirees and our families.

Jack Layton often said, “Don’t let them tell you it can’t be done.”

And in the last federal election, he did it. Side-by-side with his then Quebec lieutenant Tom Mulcair, he led Canada’s NDP to a virtual sweep in a province where the party had barely had a toehold in the past.

On May 5th of this year we witnessed another political miracle.

With a campaign built on inspiration and hope, Rachel Notley led the Alberta NDP from four seats to a majority government, thoroughly trouncing the conservative dynasty that has ruled the province – in the form of the Social Credit and Conservative parties – since 1935.

Jack Layton lit a spark. And Rachel Notley has fanned the flame even brighter.

If the NDP can win in Alberta, victory in a federal election is clearly and realistically within reach for the first time in Canada’s history.

Going into this year’s campaign, our party is stronger than ever before. For the first time, Canada’s NDP starts from the position of being the official opposition.

In addition, the party has outlined an impressive series of progressive policy proposals including a plan to strengthen public health

care, affordable child care, a \$15 federal minimum wage, and abolition of our scandal and patronage ridden Senate.

Recently, the NDP presented a bill to the House of Commons calling for a national strategy to tackle the the growing problem of dementia among seniors. The Harper majority defeated the sorely needed initiative.

It is one more example of how out-of-touch this government is, refusing to act on issues that could make lives better for Canadians.

Instead, the Harper Conservatives continue to undermine Medicare by refusing to renegotiate the federal-provincial Health Accord that expired last year. The government is threatening the retirement security of our children and grandchildren by raising the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and refusing to make much-needed improvements to the Canada Pension Plan. It is deepening inequality and poverty by relentlessly handing out tax giveaways to corporations and the wealthy. It is working overtime to intimidate and silence its many critics through political Canada Revenue Agency audits, shutting down scientists and researchers whose findings disagree with Conservative ideology, and giving intelligence operatives powers to pry into the private affairs of citizens in a way that’s unprecedented in Canada.

The labour movement, workers, and retired workers are under constant attack. We must work together to defeat this government.

Our partners at the Canadian Labour Congress have kicked off a comprehensive “Time for Change” initiative with a series of rallies



Diane Wood

across the country. A new website – betterchoice.ca – outlines key issues that we all need to think about as we cast our ballot.

As the election date grows closer, we will intensify our efforts to motivate and inspire people to vote Harper out of office and elect Tom Mulcair’s New Democrats.

We ask every BC FORUM member to join us in these initiatives. We ask you to help us grow stronger by signing up a friend, relative or co-worker. You can use the form that’s printed on page 19, or join online at bcforum.ca. Remember that membership is open to all members of unions affiliated to the B.C. Federation of Labour who are aged 50 or more, not just retirees.

Canadians deserve a better government, one that cares about the everyday needs of ordinary people. We must help make it happen. Together, we can.

Stopping Harper is not enough – we must build a better Canada

WE CAN talk about stopping Harper, but we must also talk about what is happening in Canada and what we want to build, Aaron Ekman told delegates to BC FORUM's annual general meeting.

"Income inequality has reached such a rate of disparity we haven't seen since 1929," said the newly elected Secretary - Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour.

"The top income earners, less than one percent, control as much wealth as 90 percent of the population. What's so scary about it is that this is what shapes the foundations of our economy," said Ekman.

"When you've got that much wealth, and there's only so many dollars in the system, concentrated in so few hands, then those who are supposed to drive the economy by shopping locally and ensuring small businesses are supported and the jobs are created haven't got the money to do so," he said.

Ekman said the Conservative and Liberal parties don't talk about this important issue.

"We talk about it. We understand it. And we have to do something to change it.

"It's a lot more than just stopping Harper. It requires a government that's going to build something," he said.

Ekman said that a very small segment of society, the segment that has all the money, isn't paying a fair share towards running the system on which we all rely.

"Until we ensure that the taxation system in this country, and provincially as well, is fair and progressive regardless of income level



Aaron Ekman, Secretary - Treasurer, BC Federation of Labour. Visit www.bcforum.ca for more coverage, including a link to video highlights of Ekman's speech.

we're never going to be able to fix this system. These folks are going to run away with everything and that's what's happening."

He told the audience that your generation understands that well, but people in my generation generally do not.

"That's why I think it's so important that we work together, and why I rely on you so much in terms of letting me know where the cliffs are and also reminding me how we got here in the first place," said Ekman.

"We have to turn this stuff around and we can't just wait for the next election to do it. We have to ensure that our voices are raised, and these issues are raised, in a strong way between elections.

"We have to continue to build the movement.... That's what it takes to turn this stuff around. We're only ever going to be able to do it together," he said.

"I'm so much looking forward to working with all of you and moving forward," concluded Ekman.

Canadian Medical Association joins call for better home care

By David J.A. Porteous EPC

MOST DOCTORS are calling for improvements to the home care system in Canada. Currently the overcrowding problem in hospitals is “the thin edge of the wedge” and won’t be solved until there is a national senior care strategy.

It’s only going to get worse – in particular with the high proportion of seniors who are in hospital waiting to go to nursing homes or waiting to go home with better home care support.

The Canadian Medical Association is calling on the federal government to “right-size” its health care

transfers to the provinces according to the age of their populations.

Most recently the federal government announced that their health transfers are going to be on a per capita basis which significantly disadvantages older populations in at least four provinces including British Columbia.

Home care that is really robust under Medicare that looks after people with chronic diseases outside the hospital setting can be part of the solution and can be delivered at a much lower cost!

The bottom line is it costs \$1,000 per day to keep somebody in a hospital and home care costs are \$200

or under per day.

We hear federal and provincial governments say there is no money to invest in home care but it’s not like seniors are just going to go away.

They’re going to keep pouring into emergency departments and keep being admitted to hospital at a much larger cost.

With the federal election coming this fall we all have an obligation to VOTE for real change.

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

He is a member of UFCW Local 1518.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Retired workers have a lot at stake in 2015 election

EVERY GENERATION has been affected by the actions of the current federal government, but older and retired workers have even more reason to be concerned.

As she introduced debate on the volunteer Board of Directors' annual report at the BC FORUM annual general meeting, President Diane Wood touched on several issues that should be considered when we go to the polls this October.

With the increasing number of individuals and families struggling with the painful effects of Alzheimer's disease, Canada's NDP recently introduced plans for a national strategy on dementia in the House of Commons.

"I'm very sad to report that that Bill was defeated by the Harper government," said Wood.

"If they can't accept a Bill dealing with a national strategy on dementia, what the heck is going on," she said. "That's a big issue for us coming up to the election."

The BC FORUM President also criticized the federal government's underfunding of public health care.

As a result of Harper's failure to renew the federal-provincial accord on Medicare, provinces will lose \$36 billion in health care funding. British Columbia will lose \$1.7 billion.

This will create longer wait times and reduced service for families, she said.

"We also have an on-going fight on the age of eligibility for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement.

"As you know, they have raised that to 67. We want that returned to



"How many grandparents are looking after their kids' kids," asked BC FORUM President Diane Wood. Hands were raised throughout the meeting room. Visit www.bcforum.ca for more coverage, including a link to video highlights of Wood's presentation.

age 65. We see that as a real poverty issue for many citizens in this country. It's so important that the eligibility age not be raised," she said.

"We want additional funding for the guaranteed income supplement, and a change to the Canada Pension Plan that the Canadian Labour Congress has been lobbying and advocating for.

"For many of you, like myself, who have children or grandchildren who don't have a pension in their working life, the only pension they're going to have is the Canada Pension. It's absolutely critical that we see the CPP improved so they will have a decent pension upon retirement," she said.

"We patently disagree with Conservative ideology, and every opportunity we get to say that, we do.

"BC FORUM is partisan and we get to say these things. We'll continue to say them whenever we have a forum to do that," said Wood.

She also called for a national child care program and a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

"How many grandparents are looking after their kids' kids," she asked, as members of the audience raised their hands.

"And how many still have their kids or their grandkids living with them?"

"Our generation had the opportunity to move out, be on our own, and do our own thing, which they cannot do now on the wages they're receiving.

"We need a national child care program. We need a minimum wage of \$15 an hour," she said.

Taking action on retirement security for working people

CANADA'S NDP has made a firm commitment to improve retirement income security for working individuals and families.

Jenny Kwan – who recently won the party's nomination to fill the very large shoes of retiring MP Libby Davies – told delegates to the BC FORUM annual general meeting on June 17 that issues affecting seniors and their families will be priorities for an NDP government.

“Thomas Mulcair and the NDP have made a commitment. We will bring back the pension age to 65 so that people can actually retire and enjoy the fruits of their labour in all the years of their working lives,” said Kwan.

“Related to that, we know and understand that you seriously need to see the pensions dollars increase to keep up with inflation. You've fallen so behind that it's indecent, really, it's indecent,” she said.

“Addressing that is also part of the federal NDP program.”

In a wide-ranging speech, Kwan also touched on the need to improve public health care, better access to home support services, affordable and appropriate housing, and the tragedy of murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada.

She strongly criticized both Conservative and Liberal federal governments for their lack of commitment to health care.

Noting the Harper government's failure to renew the health accord with the provinces, Kwan said this will cost provincial governments \$36 billion in funding for Medicare.

“That is a heck of a hit.

“This is Harper, but it was started by the federal Liberals. The fed-



Jenny Kwan, federal NDP candidate in Vancouver East, touched on many issues during her speech to BC FORUM delegates. Visit www.bcforum.ca for more coverage, including a link to video highlights of Kwan's speech.

eral Liberals, when Paul Martin was there, started the federal transfer payment cuts.

“Many of you will remember that the NDP were in government in B.C. then, and the federal government's transfer payment cuts hit us hard in health care and social services.

“Now this is being carried on by the Harper government to the tune of some \$36 billion,” she said.

“Health care is absolutely critical, so remind people about that when you get out to talk to people about the importance of voting and the future of our health care system.”

Kwan said affordable housing is also a major platform item for the NDP.

“The federal government in 1993 – the federal Liberals once again – actually cancelled the national

housing program. Had the government not cancelled that program, there would have been an additional 600,000 units of affordable housing across this country, housing that we now don't have,” she said.

Under the Conservatives, thousands of Canadians will be harshly affected by Harper's elimination of federal support for co-op and non-profit housing, she added.

Canada's NDP has announced a series of measures to encourage the construction of up to 10,000 affordable rental units each year, as well as renewed support for co-op and non-profit housing.

“We have the full spectrum of the housing equation that we're going to bring forward (as soon as we) elect Tom Mulcair as the first NDP prime minister in this country.”

Delegates call for the election of a new federal government

EVERY CITIZEN of Canada deserves a government that will work for their benefit, and not the corporate interest, says the background to a resolution adopted at BC FORUM's annual general meet-



Bill Silvester, BC FORUM Vice President, supported the call for a national Pharmacare program.



Bill Zander, BC FORUM member, called for a tough line in criticizing the Harper government.

ing, held June 17 in Vancouver.

The resolution says the present federal government has shown its true colours with regard to the rights of Canadians by introducing legislation to restrict the rights of citizens, unions, working men and women and seniors.

Delegates committed BC FORUM to working with our allies to ensure the election of a federal government that will represent the best interests of all Canadians.

Delegates noted a March, 2015 report by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which focused on missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada.

The report found that the Harper government has gravely violated the rights of Indigenous women, and recommended a national inquiry and a national action plan to address the tragedy. Harper has rejected both recommendations.

The BC FORUM AGM joined the growing call for a national inquiry and a national action plan to prevent more missing and murdered Indigenous women.

Building on existing policy which calls for improvements in public pensions and supports defined benefit pension plans – retirement security for all – delegates approved a resolution for BC FORUM to support unions which are working to protect and defend workplace pensions and post-retirement benefits.

"People don't realize how bad it's getting," said Dave Porteous of WE



John Savage, BC FORUM Vice President, chaired the Resolutions Committee and debate of resolutions at the AGM.

Consulting and Benefits.

"And if you think we have problems now, just wait to see what we'll have ten years from now unless there's a change in government," he said.

Delegates strongly opposed Canada Post's plan to end door-to-door mail delivery, and pledged to support a variety of actions including working for the defeat of the federal Conservatives.

Art Kube said it's not enough to fight the cuts – there should be universal home delivery for everyone.

Delegates to the AGM also reiterated BC FORUM's demand for a Universal Pharmacare program, noting that a national plan would improve health care and reduce prescription drug spending in every province.

MEICHAIRE 2.0

EXPAND. IMPROVE.

The right prescription

Why don't we have a **national pharmacare** program yet?



High drug costs are a symptom of a hands-off policy on drug profits.

OVER THE PAST two decades, research in medications has dramatically changed the way in which health care is delivered. Fewer and briefer hospital stays. Chronic conditions treated at home or in the community. Health problems previously untreatable now manageable.

But this has come at a cost. Currently, pharmaceuticals are the largest cause of rising health care costs in Canada.

A major part of the rising costs is the patent protections that the Canadian government has given large pharmaceutical corporations. Canada's patent laws have so many loopholes that big drug companies have a virtual stranglehold on the drug industry.

We also have a problem with how drugs are purchased and dispensed in Canada.

Individuals are primarily responsible for their own medications. If you have money or a good drug insurance plan, then you will be alright. But far too many people can't afford their medications. There are people staying longer in hospitals because they are unable to purchase their medications upon discharge. People with rare, chronic or life-threatening illnesses often face astronomical drug costs.

Because buying medications is an individual responsibility, the drug companies simply dictate the prices. There is no possibility of bulk-buying benefits.

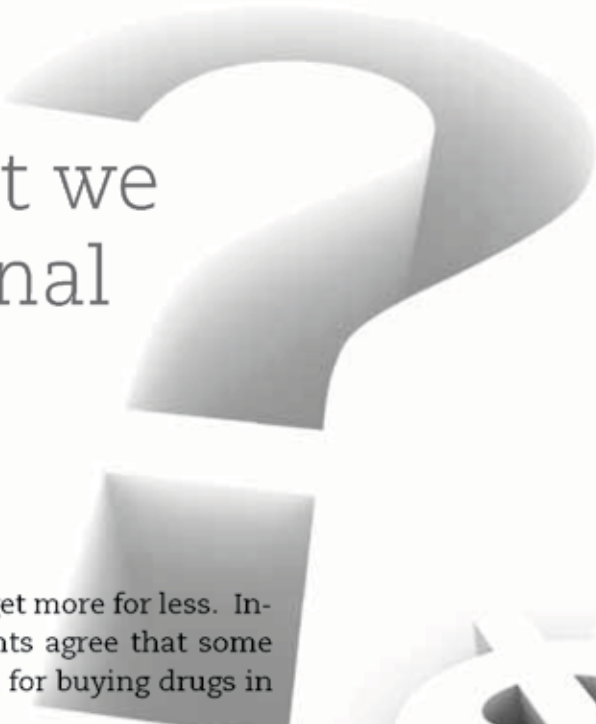
Some provinces do have pharmacare programs, but many programs are inadequate to the demand.

It doesn't have to be this way. Many countries have national public pharmacare programs that ensure that everyone has access to needed medications. And these national pharmacare programs save money for both the country and its people.

How much money could be saved if Canada had such a program? A lot. A recent study found that a national pharmacare program, with some changes made to the patent legislation, could save between \$4.45 and \$10.7 billion! When you think that the total current expenditure on pharmaceuticals is \$25.1 billion, you see how significant this amount is.

More importantly though, every Canadian would have access to the medication they need!





So, why don't we have a national pharmacare program?

SOUNDS LIKE an easy decision—get more for less. Indeed, most provincial governments agree that some sort of pharmacare, or a program for buying drugs in bulk, is needed in Canada.

Unfortunately, the Harper government has been opposed to any measure that would not be in the best interests of the major drug companies. They also do not want to create any new national public programs.

Previously, the Federal government would use its ability to raise taxes and transfer funds to the provinces as a way to create, or expand upon, national programs. The money from the Federal government, usually matched by the provinces, would be targeted for specific programs. Provinces would deliver the services, but with standards and a mandate set by the Federal government.

This worked well. The current health care system that Canadians so value was created this way.

Unfortunately, for the past two decades the Federal government has tried to back away from the role it has historically played. Cuts to transfer payments, and a “hands-off” approach to dealing with the provinces, have left the system without Federal leadership.

The Harper government has taken this trend to a new level. They dictated how much money they will transfer under the Canadian Health Transfer (CHT), yet with almost no direction on how it will be spent.

Priorities for the Harper government have been spending billions of dollars on new fighter jets and federal mega-prisons, while introducing more corporate tax cuts. But pharmacare, and other services that Canadians want, are not on the government's list.



**It's
not the
lack of
money**

RESEARCH PROVES IT: our health care spending is not out of control or a problem. What we really have is a revenue problem.

Since the mid-90s, governments have cut taxes so drastically that they've reduced their revenue by at least \$90 billion every year.

That's more than enough money to create a national pharmacare program—and MORE!

It's all about priorities and choices. There's more than enough money to protect, strengthen and expand our Medicare—the Federal government just has to make it a priority.



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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International.

What we need the Federal Government to do!

LISTEN

The Federal government must listen to what Canadians want. They must consult with Canadians and the provinces about what services are needed and make our demand for a national public pharmacare program a priority.

ACT

- ▶ **INTRODUCE** legislation that would guarantee pharmacare services are available to all Canadians, regardless of where they live, and based on the five principles of the *Canada Health Act*:
 - publicly administered
 - comprehensive
 - universal
 - portable
 - accessible
- ▶ **EXPAND** the CHT to include funding to create a national public pharmacare program.
- ▶ **SET** national standards and guidelines and hold the provinces accountable to meet them!

What we need to do!

We need to remind the Federal government that they must play a progressive role in Canada's Medicare system. They have to do more than help pay the bills. They must also lead from the front to create the kind of Medicare we need and want.

Together we can make them do the right thing.

This special report on Pharmacare – reprinted courtesy of NUPGE – is the last in a series of three reports on improving public health care in Canada. Reports on home care and long term care were published in previous editions of *The Advocate*.



BC FORUM welcomes Andy Ross to Board of Directors

ANDY ROSS – who made his presence known at the Annual General Meeting by speaking to resolutions and handing out door prizes – is the newest addition to BC FORUM’s volunteer Board of Directors.



Andy Ross

Long an influential leader in the labour movement, Ross represents the Canadian Office and Professional Employees (COPE) Local 378 on the board.

Prior to retirement, he served as President of the union. In that capacity he led efforts to fight climate change by taking steps to make the union’s activities carbon neutral.

He also led the BC campaign to establish COPE as an independent Canadian union, helped encourage youth involvement, and was a member of the union’s first political action committee.



Delegates to the 2015 BC FORUM Annual General Meeting paid tribute to Art Kube, giving him a standing ovation after he was introduced by Lorraine Logan, President of the Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of BC (COSCO) and Diane Wood, President of BC FORUM (upper photo).

Kube was President of the BC Federation of Labour during turbulent times. He played a key role in bringing together the Solidarity Coalition, the largest social movement in BC history. An exceptional organizer and strategist, Kube has also served as President of the National Pensioners’ Federation, and as President and Ombudsperson of COSCO where he continues to play an active role as a director.

BC home support system near breaking point, study finds

Lack of support at home leaves seniors unsupported, family caregivers overburdened, and costly hospital services overcrowded

IT IS now harder than ever for BC seniors to access the basic home support services they need to remain at home, despite the BC Ministry of Health's stated goal of supporting seniors' desire to stay independent at home for as long as possible, says a new report released by the Integrated Care Advocacy Group (ICA) and the BC Health Coalition (BCHC).

The report examines results from focus groups with the people most directly connected to the home support system – clients, family caregivers, family physicians, home care nurses and home support workers.

"A strong consensus emerged from the focus group findings: the home support system could be doing so much more to help seniors stay healthy and live independently," says report author Marcy Cohen, a researcher with ICA and BCHC and adjunct SFU faculty member.

"In the face of rising health costs and an aging population, investing in home support will maximize the health and well-being of seniors and the cost effectiveness of our health services."

The number of seniors in B.C. has nearly doubled over the past twelve years, but the number of seniors receiving home support in 2013-14 was virtually identical to the number receiving home support in 2001.

Experiences shared by focus group participants revealed that the growing demand for services and limited resources have limited the time spent with each senior, and thereby forced the role of home support workers to become very narrow.

As a result, there is an increased burden on family caregivers, and no ability for workers to provide the social support and basic services that are vital to keeping seniors healthy.

"Our goal is to keep Mom at home for as long as possible but she needs more support than what she is getting," said Susi Hill, a North Shore resident with an aging parent.

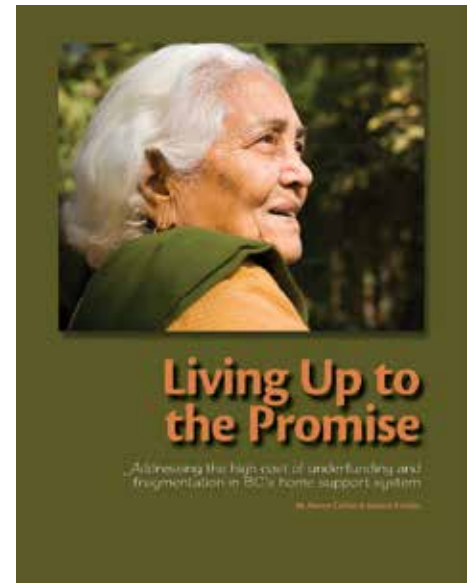
"Simple things like regular baths and someone to check in on her and talk with her would make such a big difference but it's really difficult to get the services."

The report says home support agencies and health authorities have not been able to resolve the challenges in home support on their own.

"We urgently need leadership from the Ministry of Health to support early interventions and team based approaches in home support so that problems can be addressed before there is a full blown crisis and the seniors end up in emergency or admitted to hospital," said Dr. Margaret McGregor, a family doctor at Mid Main Community Health Centre.

The report recommends the Ministry of Health provide the funding for home support required to increase staffing levels, teamwork and training to ensure that seniors can stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

Cohen says this funding should be based on a ten-year plan.



"The Ministry of Health needs to develop a plan to align new investments in B.C.'s home support delivery system with current research on what is needed to provide high quality, cost effective services that are inclusive of family caregivers, support seniors to better manage their chronic physical and mental health challenges, and ensure that seniors can remain as independent and socially engaged as possible," said Cohen.

The study was funded by the Snider Foundation, the BC Retired Teachers Association, and the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO). BC FORUM is a member of the BC Health Coalition, one of the publishers of the report, and is affiliated to COSCO.

The full text of the report – Living Up to the Promise: Addressing the High Cost of Underfunding and Fragmentation in BC's Home Support System – is available on the Integrated Care Advocacy Group's website: www.icadvocacy.ca.

Recognizing the contributions of older and retired women and men

CITIZENS AND governments around the world will be observing the 25th anniversary of the International Day of Older Persons on October 1.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Sustainability and age inclusiveness in the urban environment."

The United Nations designates the day as an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of older persons to our society, and to examine issues which affect older persons and their communities.

On behalf of its 84 affiliated organizations, including BC FORUM, the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO) is ask-

ing communities throughout British Columbia to join in the celebrations.

In a letter to Mayors and Councils, COSCO asks them to publicly proclaim their support of the International Day of Older Persons, and to prominently display the Canadian version of the celebration's flag on October 1.

"We sincerely appreciate any efforts you make to assist in making October 1st a true community endeavour, and provide you an avenue to recognize your senior citizens," writes Lorraine Logan, President of COSCO.

The United Nations says this year's celebration of the Day of Older

Persons, "seeks to demonstrate that an age inclusive agenda is crucial for sustainable urban environments to promote equity, welfare and shared prosperity for all."

Worldwide, people are moving to cities at a record pace. Six out of every 10 people in the world are expected to reside in urban areas by 2030. The number of older persons is also increasing most rapidly in urban areas.

Well planned, age-friendly cities can offer older persons opportunities to improve their quality of life, with safe environments and accessible transportation to support participation, independence and social inclusion, says the UN.

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Harper's "Broken Covenant"

By Maude Barlow
National Chairperson
Council of Canadians

UNTIL RECENTLY, despite their many differences, governments of all political stripes in Canada believed that promoting and defending a strong civil society was good for our democracy. Stephen Harper does not share this vision for Canada.

This is a Prime Minister that prorogued Parliament not once, but twice, when it suited his political agenda. This is a Prime Minister that runs a secretive, highly controlled operation. The group Canadian Journalists for Free Expression gives the Harper government the lowest possible grade for transparency, saying it takes longer than ever to access government information. This is a Prime Minister who uses omnibus budget implementation bills hundreds of pages long to enact sweeping non-budgetary changes such as gutting environmental legislation with no opportunity for debate or dissent.

So it can come as little surprise that Stephen Harper set his sights on his political opponents in civil society. He has called those who oppose his policies "terrorists" and "enemies of Canada." There has been a relentless siege against those who advocate for equality, justice, the environment and peace. The clear message is that those who are not on board with this government's ideology will be punished.

Dozens of organizations and advocacy groups have had their funding removed and others are threatened with the loss of charitable status. Government scientists and environmentalists have been muzzled and many have been fired. Institutions that have promoted a vibrant cultural community have had

to close their doors. First Nations advocacy groups are scrambling in the wake of deep cuts. Agencies that promote human rights internationally have been eliminated. Anti-poverty and women's groups have been gutted. Unions are fighting for the right to stand up for workers and the very right to unionize. And the government departments and agencies that service this civil society outreach have also been gutted.

The Harper government has extensively tracked its political opponents since 2006. Through the Government Operations Centre, over 800 public demonstrations and events were observed and information was collected, including university panels, meetings of environmental organizations, union rallies and First Nations protests. The Harper government gives out multi-million dollar contracts to keep tabs on political opponents. Between 2012 and 2014, the Harper government spent more than \$20 million on the media monitoring of journalists, critics and opposition parties.

The government has also earmarked \$13.4 million so the Canada Revenue Agency can audit civil society opponents that have charitable status. Sixty organizations in Canada have been targeted. They include progressive think tanks such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a host of environmental organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation and Environmental Defence, anti-poverty groups such as Make Poverty History, and international aid and development agencies such as Oxfam. Oxfam was told that its goal of "preventing poverty" is a politically unacceptable goal for a charity.

They also include clearly non-partisan organizations such as Dying With Dignity and the Kitchener-

Waterloo Field Naturalists for "exercising moral pressure" on issues dear to their hearts – the former for promoting a dialogue on patient choice and the latter for worrying about chemicals that cause bee deaths.

The Harper government has also made it harder for citizens to vote with its Fair Elections Act, which came into force in 2014 despite public outcry. The bill would dispense with (vouching and) the use of Voter Information Cards used now by Canadians who lack ID that proves their current address. Students, senior citizens in facilities, and First Nations citizens will be negatively affected by the new rules. In 2011, 120,000 Canadians relied on the vouching provision in order to vote.

Stephen Harper's decision to go after organized national and grassroots civil society movements was a deliberate strategy to silence dissent and abolish the power of these movements to stand up against an ideologically driven agenda. The strategy included gutting advocacy funding for the government's enemies and potential critics while encouraging advocacy for its friends.

But the Harper government did not stop with going after those working on behalf of human rights, social justice and environmental accountability. It has gutted the agencies, government departments and government staff that interface with civil society movements. By making the clear-cut so wide and so deep and breaking so completely those bonds between government and civil society, it is the intention of the Harper government that these changes become permanent. Long after Stephen Harper is out of office, his legacy will haunt us.

Edited from Broken Covenant, a Council of Canadians report available at canadians.org.

Please join the campaign against expanding private health care in BC

By Rick Turner,
Co-chair, BC Health Coalition

MANY OF B.C.'s public hospital Operating Rooms stand empty for hours and hours every week, but a recent policy paper from the Ministry of Health shows they are considering signing over more public surgeries to expensive and risky private, for-profit clinics.

The province's policy paper is still under consideration. But in the meantime, Island Health plans to farm out 55,000 procedures to for-profit clinics over the next five years.

This is a costly bandaid solution that will do little to increase health care capacity in the long run.

We need to send a clear message to Island Health and Minister Terry Lake now, otherwise we could see a massive increase in contracts with for-profit clinics on Vancouver Island and across the province.

Tell Health Minister Lake and Island Health that we need affordable, safe public solutions to wait times, not expensive contracts with for-profit private clinics that put people at risk.

Evidence shows for-profit facilities are not as safe as public facilities.

Researchers estimate that if all Canadian hospitals were converted to for-profits, there would be an additional 2,200 deaths a year.

One in seven private health-care clinics in Ontario have failed provincial safety inspections.

Since 2011, Hepatitis C outbreaks at three private colonoscopy clinics have caused at least 11 patients to become critically ill.

And international evidence shows that private clinics have not helped reduce wait times anywhere in the

world. In fact, for-profit clinics make wait times longer by draining health care professionals from the public system.

In spite of this evidence, the Ministry of Health's policy paper reveals that the province is considering making contracts with private, for-profit clinics a permanent part of delivering public surgeries in B.C.

The province is even considering changing B.C.'s laws to allow for-profit clinics to keep patients for up to three days.

This legislative change would basically create full-blown private hospitals in B.C. Both Island Health and the Ministry of Health are making crucial decisions about health care contracts now.

Island Health has requested proposals from private clinics, and the Ministry of Health is currently soliciting feedback on their policy paper. They need to hear from British Columbians now.

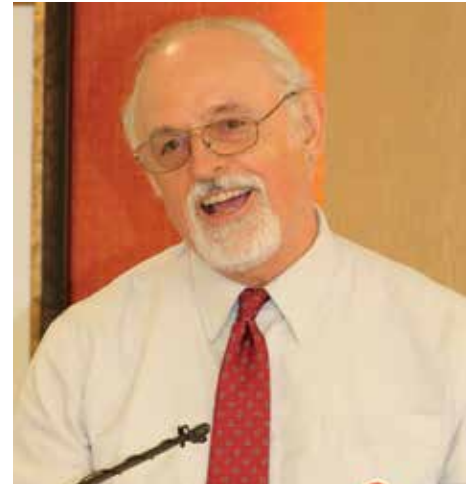
Can you take a minute to send Health Minister Terry Lake a message calling for affordable, safe, public solutions to wait times?

Ask Minister Lake to pursue proven solutions, some of which are outlined in the ministry's policy paper: using our public hospitals' existing surgical capacity, addressing staffing shortages, and scaling up successful programs that have already reduced wait times dramatically.

Ministry of Health data shows that only 82 percent of public main Operating Rooms (ORs) are regularly staffed.

In the summer almost one quarter of public day-time OR capacity is closed.

Why put tax dollars into expen-



Rick Turner is a strong advocate for quality public health care.

– Advocate file photo

sive, risky, for-profit clinics while public Operating Rooms stand empty?

We know costs in for-profit clinics tend to be much higher than the public rates.

The Ministry of Health and Island Health have a clear choice between strengthening the system for everyone in the long run and investing in expensive stop gap measures. They need to hear from British Columbians who want them to make the right choice.

Tell Minister Lake that people in B.C. deserve long-term, safe and cost-effective public measures to manage wait times now.

With thanks for your commitment to timely care for all.

•
Emails can be sent to Health Minister Terry Lake at: h1th.minister@gov.bc.ca

Please send a copy of your email to Opposition Health Spokesperson Judy Darcy at: judy.darcy.mla@leg.bc.ca

Harper's ethics spokesperson gets jail time

DEAN DEL MASTRO – the man Prime Minister Stephen Harper hand-picked to be his Parliamentary Secretary and the Conservatives' spokesperson on ethics – has been sentenced to a month in jail, four months house arrest and 18 months probation after being convicted of breaking Canada's election laws.

The offences are an "affront" to the principles of Canada's democratic system and the very "antithesis" of democracy, said Justice Lisa Cameron.

"This type of cheating and lying will result in serious sanctions. Custody is required to reflect the need for denunciation and deterrence," said Cameron as she passed sentence.

Conservatives have now been convicted of cheating in every election they won.

We've seen attempts to hide spending through the so-called "in-and-out" scheme in 2006, election spending violations in 2008, and the robo-calls scandal in 2011.

More recently, the Conservatives rammed through Parliament the Fair Elections Act – dubbed the "Unfair Elections Act" by many critics – which seems designed to make it easier for them to cheat in the future.

Del Mastro is just the latest convicted Conservative.

- Michael Sona – convicted for electoral vote suppression and preventing people from casting their ballots.
- The Conservative Party pled guilty to evading spending limits through their infamous in-and-out scheme involving senior Conservatives – including Conserva-

tive Party fundraiser and Senator Irving Gerstein, and former party president, and current Conservative Senator, Donald Plett.

- Bruce Carson – convicted on multiple counts of fraud in the 80's, will stand trial in September for influence peddling.

A trio of Senators appointed by Harper may be the next to join the list.

Mike Duffy is on trial. Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau potentially face charges. And the RCMP is reviewing the cases of 30 other Liberal and Conservative Senators identified in the Senate expense scandal.

"Conservatives promised they were going to change Ottawa and get rid of Liberal corruption and scandal – instead, Ottawa changed them," says Canada's NDP.

"Canadians deserve better. Canadians are ready for real change."



Diane Wood proudly holds the BC FORUM banner at one of many rallies held to mark the National Day of Action for public health care.

Report reveals Conservatives misled Canadians on Bill C-51

NEW DEMOCRATS are dismayed by reports that the sweeping new information sharing measures enacted by the Conservatives through C-51, now the Anti-terrorism Act of 2015, were not, in fact, requested by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS).

"New Democrats opposed this bill right from the start because it was clear that these powers were unprecedented, excessive and lacked oversight," said NDP Public Safety critic Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan De Fuca).

"Now we learn that the Conservatives weren't truthful when they told Canadians that these laws were necessary.

"In fact, internally, CSIS was saying they could work within existing legislation."

Contrary to Conservative claims, a recent report obtained under the Access to Information Act reveals the gutting of privacy protections under Bill C-51 was uncalled for.

The Conservatives' new legislation removes safeguards that ensured information about law-abiding Canadians was not referred to security and intelligence agencies without good reason.

Federal Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, denounced the changes as "clearly excessive."

"While the Liberals serenely supported the reckless Conservative legislation, Canadians can count on Tom Mulcair's New Democrats to fix the damage done by Stephen Harper," said Garrison.

Strengthening 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 where BC FORUM comes in. We are the only provincial 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.

Renew your membership – and sign up a friend

PLEASE HAVE A LOOK at the mailing label on this edition of *The Advocate* to check whether your membership is now due for renewal. If your membership is about to expire, you can renew by mailing the coupon below to BC FORUM, #200 - 5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, B.C. V5R 4H1.

You can also renew your membership on-line at www.bcforum.ca.

We also ask for your help in reaching out to people who are nearing retirement or have already retired. Like all membership-based organizations, we are all stronger when as many people as possible work together.

Remember that BC FORUM actively welcomes workers who are 50 and older, so don't be shy about encouraging your friends and family members to join us, even if they are still in the workforce.

Solidarity makes us strong.



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

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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Justice for Indigenous people

THE RELEASE of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report is a landmark moment in Canada's reconciliation process," says NDP Leader Tom Mulcair.

"Today, our country is trying to turn the page on the many dark years and to move forward towards a better future for all peoples," he said following release of the Commission's report in June.

"As Canadians, we must all learn more about this sombre chapter in our history.

"We will not forget the testimonies and we will remember the children who never made it home to their families," said Mulcair.

He said the NDP is determined to repair the broken relationship with Indigenous peoples, which is the result of inaction by previous governments at the nation to nation level.

"Canada must show leadership and we must ensure that formal apologies made in 2008 were not in vain.

"The government must act immediately in the areas of education, child protection and health care in order to put an end to the inequalities and sorry legacy of residential schools," he said.

"We are determined to act upon the report of the Commission.

"We will consult with Indigenous people and establish which of the recommendations require the most pressing attention.

"Let us undertake to always pursue the truth, and to work together towards healing and reconciliation," said Mulcair.

Lyle Kristiansen

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

I FIRST met Lyle Kristiansen through the NDP. A woodworker and member of the IWA in the Kootenays, he immediately impressed me. He was a plain talker. He didn't mince words when discussing the issues that matter to working families.

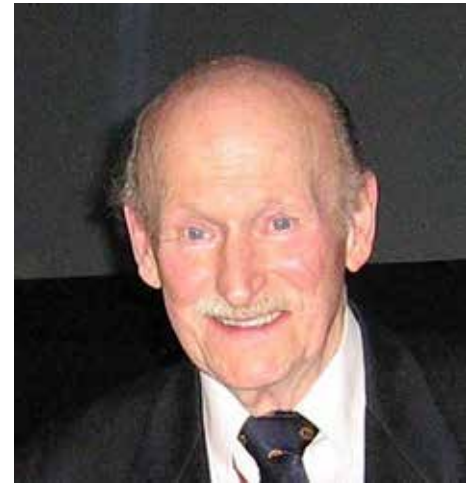
Lyle and his wife Vera were incredible organizers for the party. They worked non-stop to sign up new members and strengthen the local constituency association. Lyle also served as a campaign manager.

In short, Lyle backed up his values and beliefs with action – just the kind of person we need in the House of Commons.

Lyle was elected as a Member of Parliament in Kootenay West in 1980. After losing in 1984, he took "four years off for good behaviour," then returned to win in the redrawn riding of Kootenay West – Revelstoke in 1988. He did not seek re-election when his term ended in 1993.

At the NDP's 2011 Convention, Leader Jack Layton began his speech with a tribute to Lyle and Vera.

"My friends Lyle and Vera Kristiansen celebrated their honeymoon at our founding convention 50 years



Lyle Kristiansen (1939 - 2015)

ago," said Layton, "and they're here with us today."

"I couldn't help but note that at the Conservative convention last week, Stephen Harper said something about how he was just going to wait for the New Democrat honeymoon to end. Well, Lyle and Vera's honeymoon has been going on for 50 years now," he said.

When they retired to the Sunshine Coast, Lyle continued to serve working people as a BC FORUM Regional Representative. After a long battle with emphysema, Lyle died on June 18. He was 76. His ideas and enthusiasm will be missed.

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