

# Advocate

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE B.C. FEDERATION OF RETIRED UNION MEMBERS

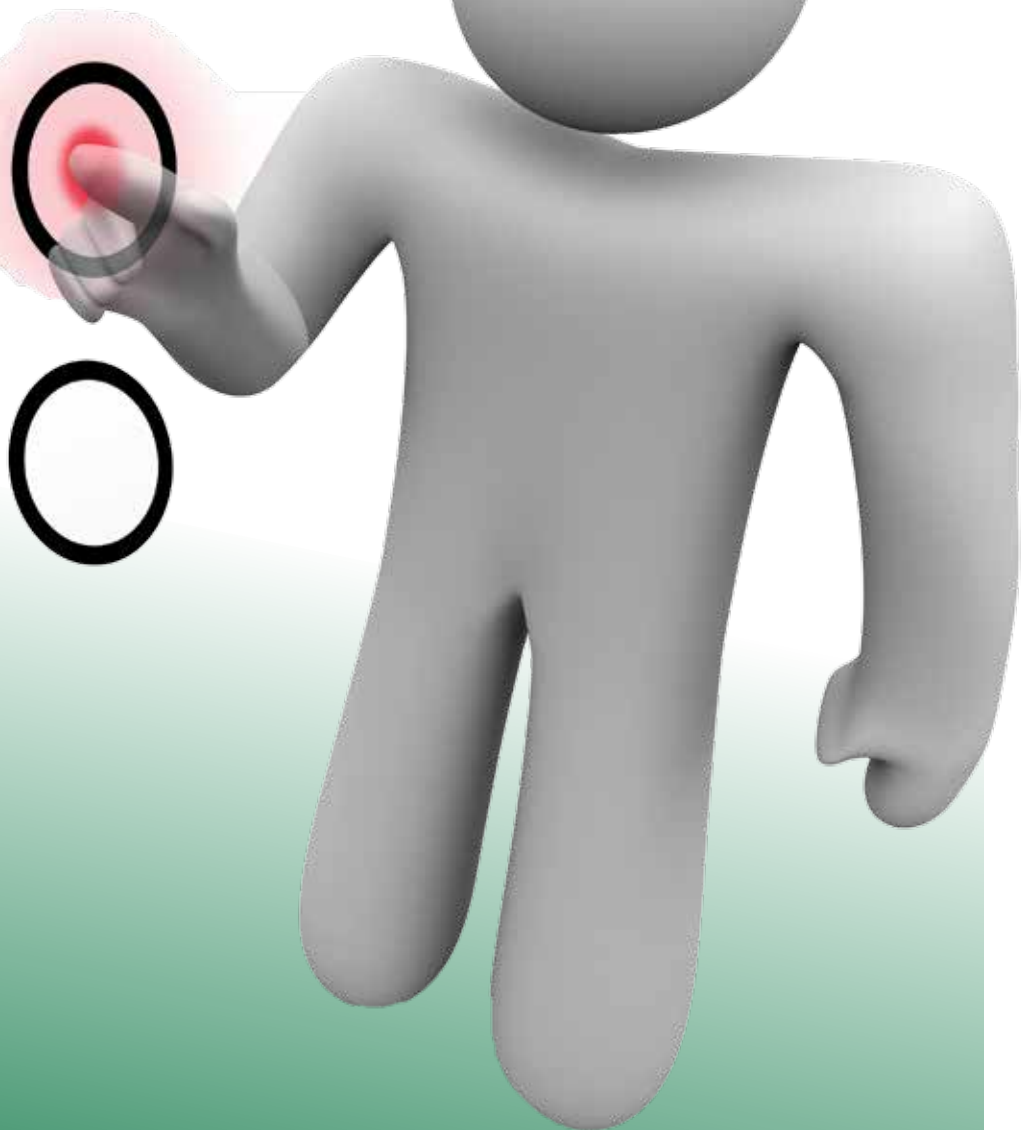


Vol. 16 No. 2 April, 2013

## Vote May 14

CHANGE FOR  
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STAY IN PAST



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## 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.

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## THE ADVOCATE

# In this special edition:

The provincial election that will be held on May 14 is a critical opportunity for retired workers, and workers nearing retirement, to make our voices heard. This special edition of *The Advocate* reviews a range of issues that cry out for action.

Since the B.C. Liberals came to power, they have steadily eroded the very concept of democratic government. At its best, democratic government is the way we work together to care for each other, and to achieve the goals that individuals cannot accomplish on their own: a civic society, a clean environment, justice, and equal opportunities and respect for all. Instead, the B.C. Liberals have consistently taken from the many to benefit the few.

The continuing revelations about their abuse of the public interest to benefit themselves show that they will do and say anything to win votes. Their record shows they will often do the opposite of what they say. They don't deserve our trust. They don't deserve our votes. On May 14, let's vote for change for the better.

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# The kids are <sup>not</sup> alright — and neither are their parents

By Diane Wood  
President  
BC FORUM

IF THERE'S ONE THING every parent wants for his or her children, it's the opportunity to build a better future. Under the B.C. Liberals, that dream has faded.

The government has broken the apprenticeship system, and significantly increased the cost of post-secondary education.

Many young people can't get the skills training they need. Others carry huge student loans. They struggle to get ahead in insecure jobs.

With the rise in precarious work – supported by the B.C. Liberals' attack on minimum employment standards – young people will hold an average of 11 jobs by the time they're 30.

The B.C. Liberals' have deliberately shifted taxes to favour the wealthy, and implemented policies designed to drive down wages.

We are now the only province in Canada where average wages have declined for 90 percent of workers over the last 30 years, while the top one percent collected an extra \$189,000 a year.

This growing inequality affects every generation.

Children are growing up in poverty. Retired workers, and workers nearing retirement, find themselves dipping into their savings in order to support their children and grandchildren – an unexpected extra burden on their fixed incomes.

On May 14, let's stick together and use our votes to demand change for the better.



## We need change for the better

On May 14, please  
vote for a provincial  
government that will:

- Fix B.C.'s broken apprenticeship system to provide skills training for young people.
- Put a halt to employer intimidation when workers want to join a union.
- Reverse the race to the bottom in employment standards so workers can have more job security.
- Work to eliminate child poverty.
- Introduce universal home support so retired workers can live with dignity in their own homes and communities, rather than being forced into more expensive resi-

dential or acute care institutions.

- Fight for improvements in public pensions – CPP, OAS and GIS – rather than forcing workers to postpone their retirement.
- Work towards fair taxes to support the quality public services required for a civil society, not more tax giveaways to corporations and the rich.
- Introduce quality affordable child care so young families are not denied the opportunity to contribute to our economy.
- Create a truly independent Seniors' Advocate. The position should report directly to the Legislature, not be answerable to the whims of any cabinet minister.



In 2002, the B.C. Liberals imposed an unproven privatized apprenticeship system, run by industry.

Since then, the completion rate has been cut in half.

By 2011, only 37 percent of apprentices completed their training.

# FIX TRADES TRAINING

## Apprenticeship and skills training can create good jobs for British Columbians

For decades we've known that British Columbia is facing an acute shortage of skilled workers. Baby boomers in the skilled trades are retiring, but B.C. is simply not training enough workers to meet the need.

A modern, strong and stable economy must produce its own skilled workers. The B.C. Liberals have failed to do so. Instead, they have relied on temporary workers imported from abroad.

### Ill-conceived experiment

Government actions have actually left us further behind. In 2002, when the priority should have been to expand trades training, the provincial government ended its involvement in apprenticeship training. It shut down the Industry Trades and Apprenticeship Commission – a partnership of industry, labour,

educators and government. Instead, it imposed an unproven privatized system, governed by industry.

This risky experiment has been a dramatic failure. Completion rates have plummeted. From the 1960s through the 1990s, 60 to 80 percent of apprentices qualified for nationally recognized certifications. By 2011, the completion rate had fallen to just 37 percent. The number of employers registered as training sponsors also continued to decline.

## Rebuilding B.C.'s apprenticeship system

We urge you to join with BC FORUM and the labour movement in calling on the next provincial government to take the following practical steps to rebuild B.C.'s apprenticeship system, and to ensure the system can meet the needs of young people and our economy:

- Double the completion rates for nationally recognized Red Seal certifications.
- Provide comprehensive counseling and regional support for ap-

prentices.

- Full scope training – apprentices need to work directly with journeypersons to learn their trades.
- Restore the partnership model of training, with industry, labour, educators and government working together to ensure apprentices will have the opportunities they need.
- Require apprenticeship positions on publicly funded projects such as roads, bridges and universities.

*I served my apprenticeship at a shop that did not provide adequate opportunities for me to develop a comprehensive skill set. I left feeling as though I have the knowledge of a second year apprentice, rather than a confident and employable tradesman. There needs to be a system to ensure apprentices learn all aspects of the trade.*

– Luke



# The BC Liberals' record of failure on skills training and apprenticeships

- In the two most recent provincial budgets, the B.C. Liberals cut funding for advanced education. As a result, colleges that provide skills training have been forced to reduce programs. The presidents of all 25 B.C. colleges and universities have protested the cuts.
- Despite spending millions on TV ads about skills training, the government is cutting skills training by 12 percent over three years.
- Apprenticeship completion rates had fallen to 37 percent by 2011, and were on track to fall to 35 percent in the 2012/13 fiscal year.
- When the B.C. Liberals shut down the Industry Trades and Apprenticeship Commission in 2002, they cut staff from 120 to 12 and closed regional offices that coordinated skills training programs.
- The discredited Industry Training Authority has set a target of just 7,500 apprenticeship completions for 2012/13. Tens of thousands more are needed.
- The B.C. Labour Market Outlook for 2010 to 2020 estimates that the demand for skilled workers will outpace the number available by more than 60,000.
- For health and safety reasons, and to ensure quality work, most provinces designate compulsory trades where the work must be done by certified journeypersons and their apprentices. The B.C. Liberals have completely abandoned the concept.
- The current government doesn't have a plan to meet the needs of growing industries. For example, despite being told by a mining task force five years ago that a training program was needed for underground mining, the B.C. Liberals failed to act.
- Increasingly, temporary foreign workers are filling jobs that could be done by British Columbians if training were available. The number of temporary worker permits issued in B.C. reached 46,378 in 2011, a 66 percent increase from 2005. In proportion to our population, we have twice as many foreign workers as the rest of Canada.

## 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.
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# More respect for voters, please

"The culture of crass, partisan evasion remains very much on display in the Clark administration, starting with the person at the very top of the chain."

– Vaughn Palmer  
Vancouver Sun

"Ms. Clark and some of her closest advisors have been exposed, again, as disingenuous and incompetent."

– Bruce Hutchinson  
National Post

A 17 PAGE MEMO, distributed via private e-mail accounts to government officials and B.C. Liberal party insiders, has revealed a plan to use public funds to hire organizers to win votes in ethnic communities – a plan that is both immoral and illegal.

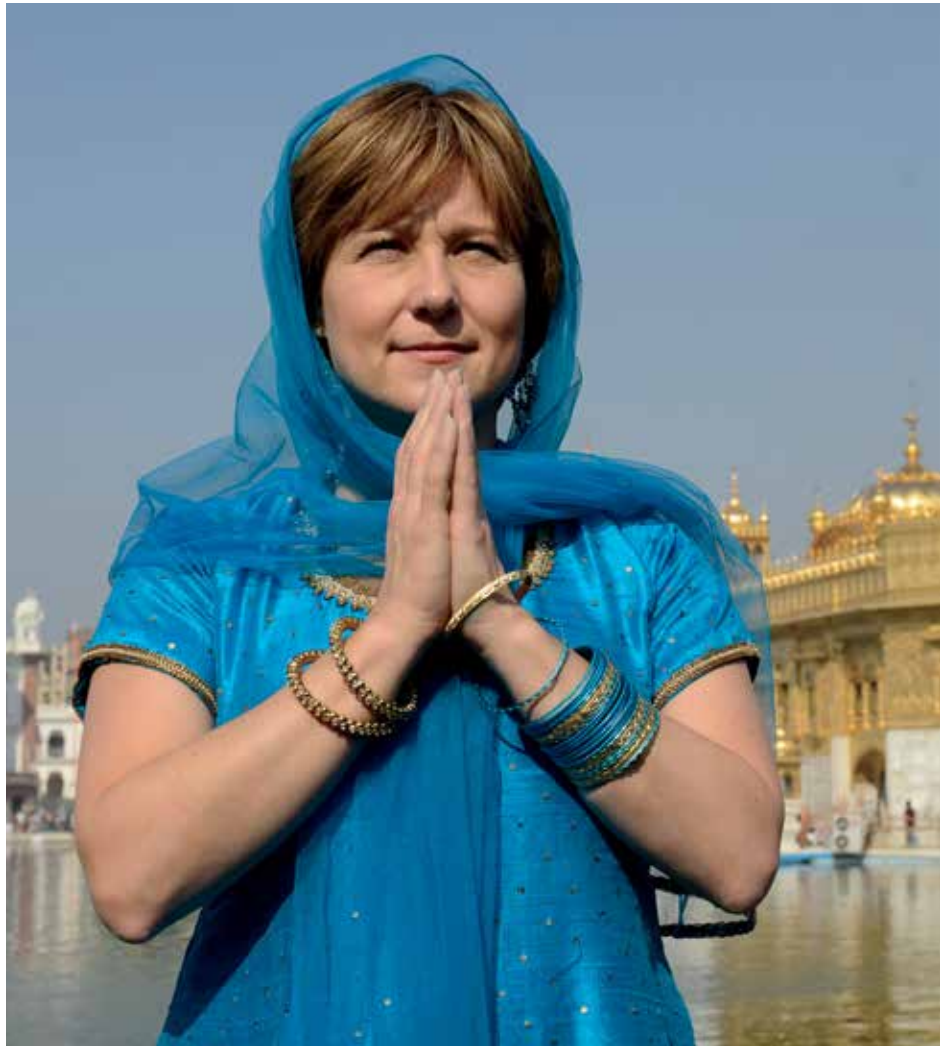
Kim Haakstad, Premier Clark's deputy chief of staff and for years her closest advisor, resigned for her role in the affair. Multiculturalism minister John Yap also resigned, even though he wasn't the minister when the memo was written.

Obtained and made public by the BC NDP, the memo describes several scenarios that would use taxpayer funds to boost B.C. Liberal support. It calls them "quick wins" with Indo-Canadian and Chinese voters.

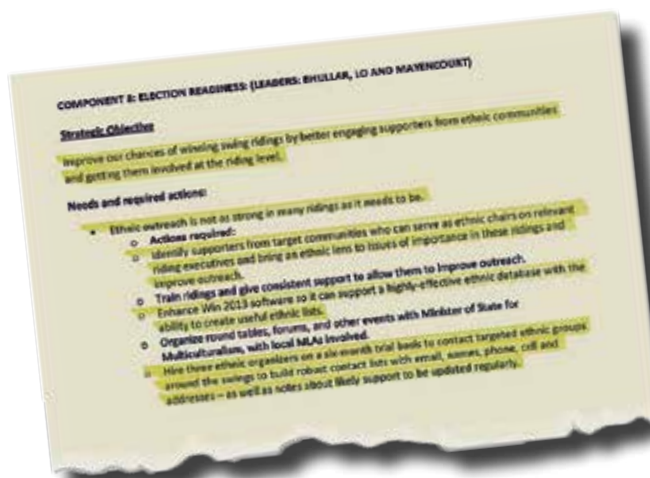
The memo was written before the B.C. Liberals announced they would spend \$11 million to host the first-ever Times of India Bollywood film awards, settling for an imitation after the well established Indian International Film Awards rejected a similar offer from the government.

B.C.'s multicultural communities have expressed outrage over the offensive plan to manipulate them.

The Liberals continue to shrug off calls for an independent investigation. Instead, the premier told her staff in the premier's office to investigate the premier's office.



– Official government photo, distributed by the premier's office in 2011



Public accountability and respect for voters are the foundation of democracy. Neither are evident in the B.C. Liberals' handling of this latest scandal.

Neil Khare via Twitter:  
Dear Christy Clark:  
If you'd like my Ethnic vote, it's up for grabs in exchange for 7 Samosas and some Butter Chicken....

# SAFETY AT WORK

**It's a staggering number: a total of 17,160 workers suffered serious injuries or died on the job in 2011**

**W**OMEN AND MEN have suffered permanent disabilities. Families lost their breadwinner. Children lost a parent.

The human cost is heartbreaking. The economic cost is huge.

We need laws that keep people safe at work, and proper enforcement of those laws. We need to restore full compensation so the cost of workplace injuries doesn't fall on workers' families. And we need meaningful rehabilitation services that will help individuals return to productive work.

Anything less will condemn workers and their families to a lifetime of scraping the bottom of the

barrel to get by – a heavy additional burden on workers who are injured as a result of unsafe workplaces and government neglect of the need for proper regulation and enforcement of safety standards.

## **The B.C. Liberals have made workplaces unsafe**

**T**he Liberal government gutted safety regulations and cut enforcement that kept workers safe.

They lowered benefits and cut people off pensions, then used the savings to reduce employer premiums to the *lowest level in 30 years*.

Negligent employers continue to face trivial fines. Last year an employer who had negligently failed to provide any safety instruction, training or supervision was fined just \$3,250 when a worker fell to his death.

## **Let's reduce workplace injuries and support injured workers**

**E**MPLOYERS AND GOVERNMENTS often claim that safety at work is their top priority – but what they say and actually do are often polar opposites.

Please join with BC Forum and the labour movement in supporting election candidates who will take action to reduce workplace disease and injuries, and help injured workers and their families get back on their feet by:

- Restoring full compensation to injured workers, including providing 100 percent of their net

earnings.

- Restoring life time disability and loss of earnings awards for permanently disabled workers.
- Increasing enforcement and imposing meaningful penalties when employers fail to provide a safe workplace.
- Providing meaningful vocational rehabilitation for injured workers who are returning to work.
- Ensuring worker representatives make up at least 50% on the WCB Board of Directors.



*My father was a red seal journeyman earning about \$80,000 a year.*

*After he was injured on the job, WCB said they would only provide him rehabilitation and training to be a gas station attendant.*

*My father worked his whole life to perfect his trade, and under the BC Liberals he's now pumping gas for \$12 an hour.*

*He's lost everything he worked for, including his dignity.*

*– Peter, 35*



# The case for universal home support services

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

Time spent with clients is rationed to the minute. Duties which used to be a part of making sure the client was supported at home have been eliminated.

### Services cut

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

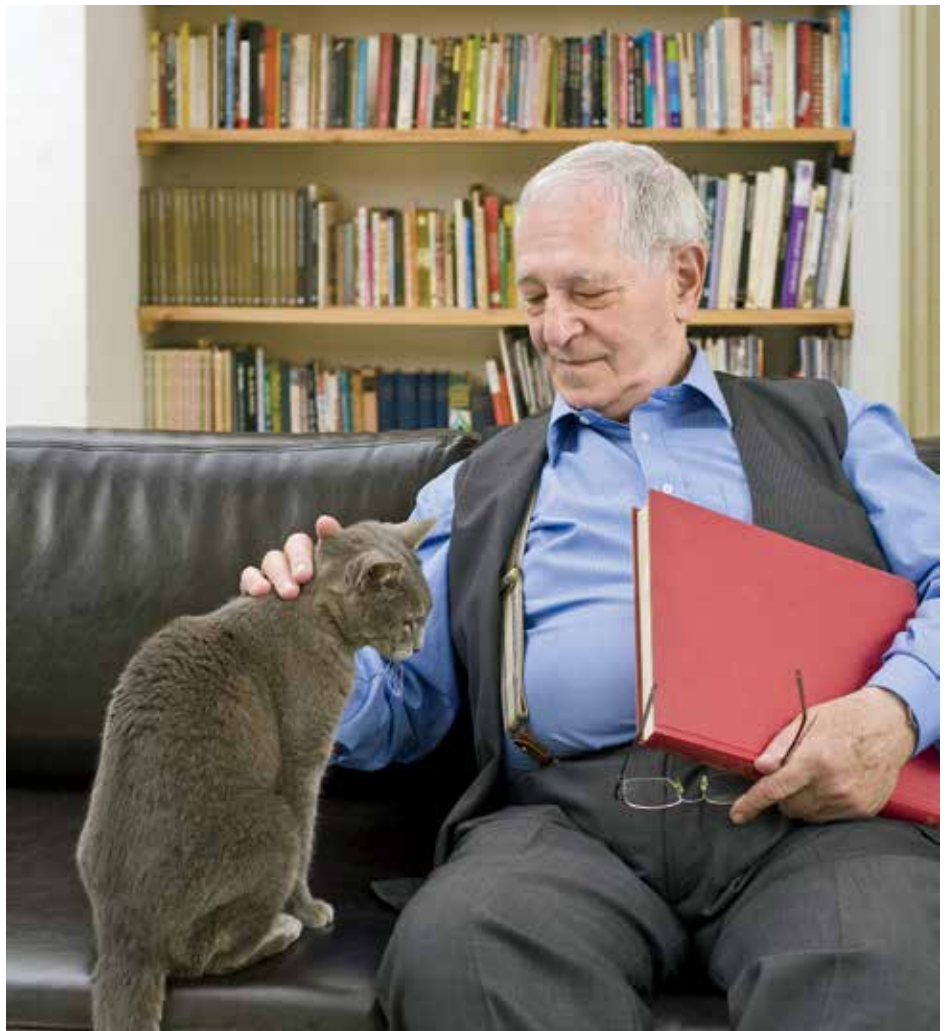
These critical non-medical supports – which research shows contribute to a person's recovery and health – have been removed from the public support system.

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

### Forcing people into care

THERE ARE VERY FEW people who want to move out of their homes and live the rest of their lives in an institution. Yet government policies in B.C. and Canada seem to have been designed to force them to do exactly that. It doesn't make sense.

From every standpoint – morally, socially and economically – it would be far better to support the frail elderly and people with dis-



Universal home support services would make it possible for thousands of seniors to live with dignity and respect in their own homes – at a much lower cost than acute or residential care – and reduce pressure on B.C.'s acute care hospitals. As a matter of human decency and economic common sense, providing universal home support is the right thing to do.

abilities in their desire to remain in their own homes, and in their own familiar communities.

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

"How many people understand that granny getting her housework done actually saves the health care system an incredible amount of money?"

"If she can't get her housework done, then she ends up being admit-

ted to a nursing home," says Young.

### Common sense solution

THE CANADIAN CENTRE for Policy Alternatives reports that up to 20 percent of acute hospital beds are occupied by people waiting for an alternative level of care. About 85 percent of these patients are seniors.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates spending on home care is just 4.6 to 5 percent of total health spending. About one half of the people on waiting lists for long-term care could remain at home if they received appropriate care.



# FAIR LABOUR LAWS



Every worker, in every industry, must have the freedom to join a union and to make the decision without employer intimidation and threats.

## Balance BC's labour laws

**P**LEASE JOIN BC FORUM and the labour movement in voting for a provincial government that will take these necessary steps to restore fairness and balance in labour laws, and respect people's right to join a union.

- End employer intimidation and threats.
- Respect the right of workers to join a union by granting certification when 55% of employees have signed a membership card.
- Provide easier access to mediation to help in negotiating first agree-

ment that meets industry standards.

- Close the contract-flipping loopholes that employers are using to de-unionize their workforces.
- Protect the right to collective bargaining by repealing heavy-handed legislation.
- Fix the Labour Board by bring balance in employer and labour appointments.
- Respect every worker's right to join a union.

### Building a strong economy starts with respect for working people

**A** good labour relations climate is essential if we hope to build a strong economy that provides profits for employers and fair wages for workers – our children and grandchildren.

For employers and workers alike, it is the key to stability, productivity, and growth in a changing economy. In every sector, we can do better by working together.

### Working families face significant challenges

Corporate executive pay is on the rise, but real wages are stagnating.

More and more workers are stuck in jobs with low wages, little security, and no hope of advancement. The middle class is shrinking and it's harder to get ahead, particularly for young people.

It's harder to join a union, and to be part of the movement that created the middle class.

New loopholes in labour laws have given unscrupulous employers the ability to undermine the right of workers to belong to unions.

Over the last decade, the B.C. Liberals have steadily made labour laws more unfair and more unbalanced.

They have torn up legal contracts, and taken away the right to bargain key issues such as contracting out in health care and class size in public education. Students, patients, and workers have all paid the price.

It's time for more balance and fairness in the laws that govern how we work together.



# RAILROADED

**T**HE B.C. LIBERALS promised that they would not sell BC Rail – just like they promised they would not shift \$2 billion in taxes onto small business and ordinary families by introducing the HST.

## Deceit and corruption

- The Liberals maintain they didn't really sell the railway – an engine of regional economic growth with 2,320 km of mainline track – they only leased it to CN for 990 years. Such prevarication is just one more example of their failure to be up front with voters.
- The government's actions are further marred by influence-peddling and bribery. Halting a court case that promised to reveal details of what took place, and who was involved, ministerial aides Dave

Basi and Bob Virk abruptly pleaded guilty in Oct. 2010 to breach of trust and receiving a benefit for leaking information about the BC Rail bidding process.

- Surprisingly, considering they admitted their guilt, the B.C. Liberals shelled out \$6 million in public funds to pay Basi and Virk's legal bills. Did we pay to silence them? The Auditor-General has attempted to investigate, but has been denied access to needed information.
- Former Liberal cabinet minister John van Dongen has accused Premier Clark of conflict of interest for participating in cabinet meetings on the sale. Her ex-husband's home was among those raided by the RCMP.
- Much has been hidden from the public. A full inquiry is needed.



## Killing passenger service

- Even before they sold B.C. Rail, the B.C. Liberals ended passenger service between communities on the line. They started by shutting down the Royal Hudson – an icon of Canadian steam power and one of British Columbia's main tourist attractions.

# A record of failure on care for seniors

**T**HE LIST OF B.C. Liberal failures on care for seniors is long and comprehensive.

They cut home support services that allow retired workers to live with dignity in their own homes.

They failed to regulate and adequately staff care homes, leading to horrific instances of neglect.

They left seniors trapped in acute care beds due to a lack of more appropriate levels of care.

They separated couples after a lifetime together.

For B.C. as a whole, home support services were cut 30 percent between 2001 and 2010. In some regions, the cuts were even deeper.

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 to

become available.

A scathing 400 page report released by Ombudsperson Kim Carter in Feb. 2012 documented how deeply the B.C. Liberals have failed seniors. The government responded with an "action plan" that calls for more reviews and consultation.

"We still have some recommendations from 2009 that haven't been fully accepted and implemented," noted Carter.

Carter's report made 176 recommendations, and called for objective and enforceable standards of care.

The lack of such standards, coupled with government neglect, has resulted in a 10 year race to the bottom in seniors' care.

Even though research has found that the level of care is lower in for-profit residential care, the B.C. Liber-

als have encouraged this model.

For-profit seniors care has increased by 20 percent since they took office. Non-profit care has dropped 11 percent.

Bill 29, which allowed care homes to fire union staff and contract out their jobs, continues to create instability for clients and staff. Just last fall, layoff notices were issued to more than 90 staff at the George Derby Centre in Burnaby. Some had worked there for up to 20 years. Management's plan to contract out services was only stopped after a mass community rally.

The B.C. Liberals promised to improve health care. Instead, they slashed home support, privatized services, increased MSP premiums and reduced prescription drug coverage. It's truly time for a change.

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## Steps to ensure all workers are treated fairly

**M**ORE AND MORE WORKERS – our children and grandchildren – are trapped in precarious, unstable work situations, made even more precarious by a decade of cuts in minimum employment standards. Please join with BC FORUM and the labour movement in calling on the next provincial government to take these common sense steps:

- Raise the minimum wage to \$12 an hour, and increase it annually.
- Eliminate the \$9 an hour “liquor server” wage.
- Restore four hour minimum shifts, along with adequate notice

of shift schedules.

- Increase paid vacation for all workers to three weeks.
- Pay workers overtime after eight hours on the job.
- Raise the minimum working age to meet International Labour standards (ILO).
- Strengthen inspection and enforcement by the Employment Standards Branch to ensure all workers are treated fairly, and all employers follow the law.
- Respect every worker’s right to be treated fairly at work.

## Respect at work

**E**VERY WORKER in B.C. should be treated with fairness and respect in the workplace. All workers deserve:

- a fair wage for a day’s work
- safe workplaces, free of physical hazards, and free of verbal and physical abuse
- to be treated with respect and fairness.

Union workers have the benefit of negotiated collective agreements and assistance from union stewards if things go wrong.

Non-union workers depend on the minimum provisions of the Employment Standards Act, which is subject to change at the whim of government.

Since 2001, the B.C. Liberals have gutted minimum standards for workers and cut enforcement.

The minimum wage was frozen for a decade at \$8 an hour, a situation made even worse by the introduction of an often abused \$6 an hour “training wage” and now the “liquor server wage.” They reduced the minimum working age to 12, a violation of international conventions.

Effective third-party enforcement of minimum working conditions was slashed. Instead, workers were told to download a “self-help kit” from the web.

Many of those who dared to stand up for themselves were fired, given a bad reference, and left out of work for long periods. The lack of effective enforcement and penalties has had another harmful effect – it has given unscrupulous employers a financial incentive to squeeze the lowest-paid workers in the province even more.

# Universal child care

"Don't let them tell you it can't be done."

– Jack Layton

**T**oo many politicians – including some B.C. New Democrats – are telling us it can't be done. They say we can't afford to provide quality child care services. They are wrong.

Research published in 2012 by the Research Chair in Taxation and Public Finance, Université de Sherbrooke, demonstrates that Quebec's affordable, quality child care program more than pays for itself.

The authors found that the ser-



The social and economic benefits of universal child care are well established. It is well past time for the B.C. government to introduce the service.

vice made it possible for 70,000 more women to take long term jobs, increasing the provincial GDP by \$5.1 billion. The tax-transfer return to government significantly exceeds the cost of subsidies.

Not only does universal child care improve the lives of children and families, the report concludes that providing the service is "a profitable enterprise" for all levels of government.

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# OVERCROWDED ERs

**As hospital emergency rooms struggle to serve patients, doctors question government's priorities**

**T**HE B.C. LIBERALS promised "to guarantee all patients the care they need, where they live and when they need it." Early in their mandate, they did the opposite. They closed many hospitals and downsized even more. Since 2002, B.C. has fallen from second to ninth among provinces in per capita expenditures on health care.

As a result, emergency room doctors are questioning the priorities of the current government.

Dr. David Haughton, President of the B.C. Medical Association's Emergency Medicine section, says it's frustrating to see millions spent

on things such as Bollywood film awards, next year's Grey Cup, and government television advertising campaigns while emergency rooms remain overcrowded.

Dr. David Rhine, also an emergency room physician, says a 102 year old woman was forced to wait 10 hours for care at Kelowna General Hospital. An elderly man left because of the wait times.

"I am frustrated and disappointed that we are not able to deliver the care that patients and families expect, and that we also expect to be able to give to people when they come to the emergency room," he said.

Dr. Haughton, who works at B.C. Children's Hospital, says doctors have been forced to publicly campaign for urgently needed improvements because pleas made directly

to the government have not been answered.

"We've been trying for six months to get a hold of the minister of health and the ministry of health," he said, adding that he learned in February that the government had "pulled back and abandoned" all of the collaborative work done on emergency care.

"The government doesn't want to listen to us. Maybe they'll listen to patients," said Haughton.

Patients at B.C. hospitals have frequently spilled into hallways and even a coffee shop to wait for care and assessment.

"If your family member arrives ill with pneumonia or chest pain, they may have to wait," says Rhine. "They don't have access to a bed... in order to be assessed."



## 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](http://www.bcforum.ca).

### ADVANCE VOTING

## You can vote for change for the better before election day

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

To vote you must prove your identity and residential address. This requires one government issued document with your name, photograph and address, such as a driver's licence, B.C. Identification Card, or passport. Alternatively, you will need two documents with your name, at least one of which has your address. For more information, including other options for early or absentee voting, phone 1-800-661-8683, or visit [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca).



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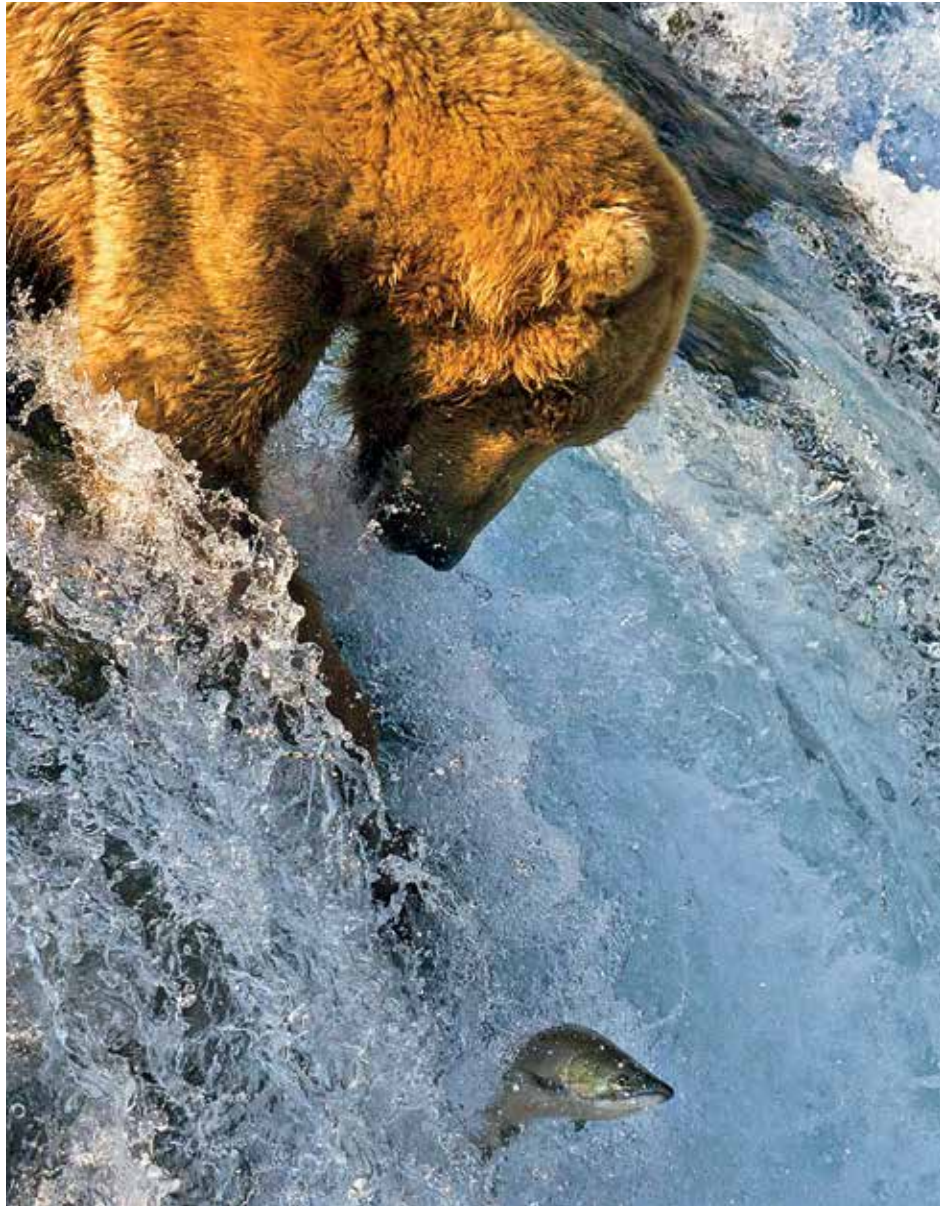
# Unique Beautiful Irreplaceable

**A**UDITOR GENERAL John Doyle reported Feb. 21, 2013, that the provincial government is failing badly at protecting Canada's most biologically diverse province.

"Habitat preservation is critical to the conservation of biodiversity and government's lack of implementation and monitoring is troubling," said Doyle.

The B.C. Liberals' failure to protect biodiversity – a key measure of environmental health – is part of a larger pattern:

- They signed away to the Harper government B.C.'s right to assess the impact of the Enbridge pipeline and tanker traffic on the coast.
- They've eroded environmental assessment, cutting the Environmental Assessment Office by 17 percent.
- The Auditor General reported in July 2011 that the Environmental Assessment Office was not monitoring whether corporations were living up to their environmental mitigation commitments.
- Even though more than 1,600 species are at risk of extinction in B.C., the Liberals have refused to introduce species-at-risk legislation.
- In 2011, Premier Clark eliminated the B.C. Progress board, the only government agency that monitored our economy in depth, including impacts on environmental sustainability and health.
- 600 wild rivers and streams have been turned over to corporations for private power projects, forcing BC Hydro to pay the corporations \$50 billion for unneeded power.



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