

Clark government turns blind eye to serious problems facing B.C.

AT A TIME OF record household debt, growing unemployment and underfunded public services, the Clark government has delivered its fifth consecutive belt-tightening budget and shifted even more taxes to ordinary families.

“In the fifth year of a slow, jobless recovery, the government should be more focused on the serious problems facing BC,” says Iglia Ivanova, economist for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

No action on health care

Under the BC Liberals, health care funding per capita has plummeted from second to ninth in Canada. This budget continues the slide.

There are no measures to improve needed home support services, to meet the government’s own staffing targets in residential care, nor to implement the Ombudsperson’s recommendations to improve care for seniors.

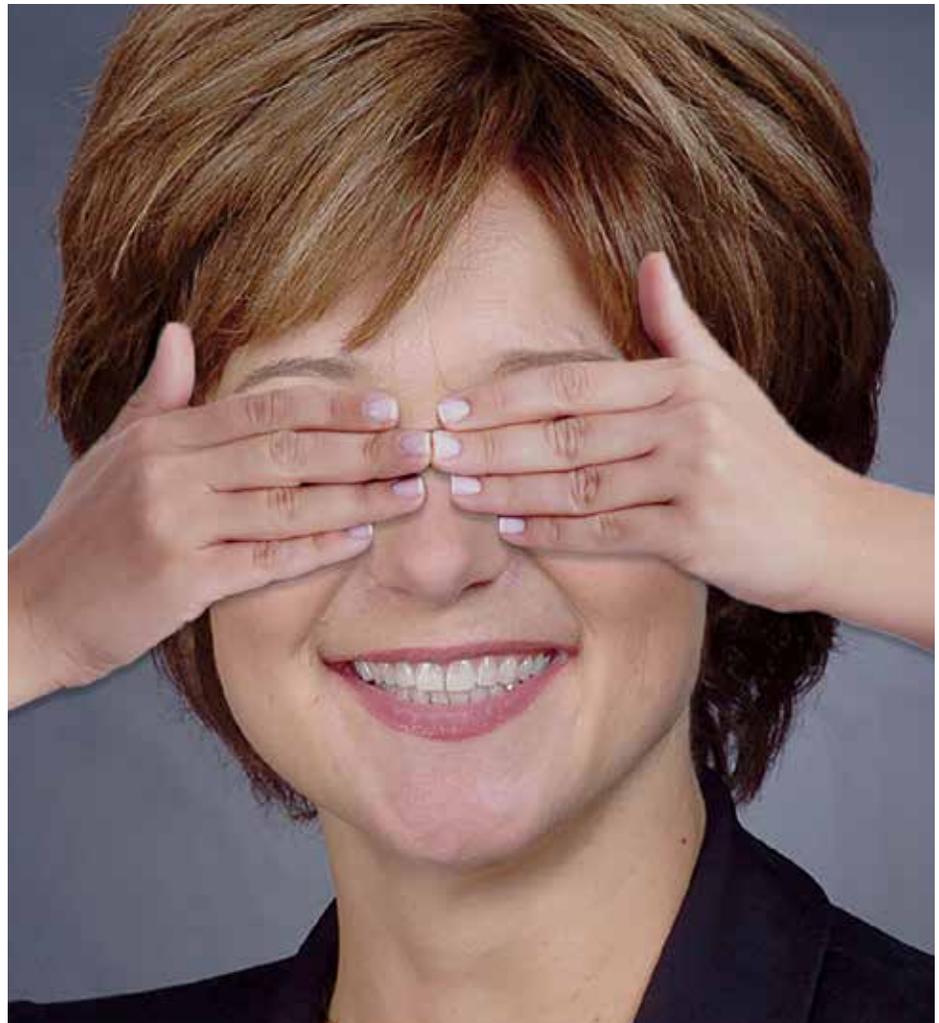
“This budget is a recipe for more hallway medicine,” says Bonnie Pearson, secretary-business manager of the Hospital Employees Union.

More public service cuts

Although BC already has the leanest public service in Canada, the Clark government will cut another 1,000 jobs.

“This budget continues to underfund public services, and does not repair any of the damage done by budget cuts and freezes over the last dozen years,” said Darryl Walker, president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union.

“Budget cuts have undermined



Premier Christy Clark has decided to continue policies that leave many seniors without needed care, deepen inequality, and ignore the serious issues that affect ordinary people.

the delivery of public services, and these cuts have a negative impact on the economy as a whole,” he said.

More unfair taxes

The government announced that it would increase fees and freeze income taxes, the sole tax based on an individual’s ability to pay, thereby guaranteeing that our tax system will become ever more unfair.

The CCPA notes that when all personal taxes are considered – income, sales, property, carbon and MSP premiums – those with the highest income already pay the lowest tax rate.

The Clark government will further shift the scales by increasing MSP premiums by 17 percent over three years, and increasing other

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In this edition

We take a close look at dementia, a cruel disease that affects thousands of individuals and their families.

There is no cure – but early diagnosis will help both the patient and their loved ones.

Our special report is on pages 8 - 9.

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BC budget takes us backwards again

Continued from page 1

fees such as BC Hydro rates, ICBC premiums and ferry fares.

Since the Liberals privatized MSP and closed offices, they have doubled premiums. We now pay as much in MSP premiums as big business pays in corporate income taxes.

Natural gas production – which Christy Clark claimed during the election will be the magic bullet that will solve all problems – is at a record high.

Yet the budget shows that revenues from this non-renewable fossil fuel are near a record low – projected at \$362 million this year compared to a peak of close to \$2 billion in 2006.

Where are the jobs?

Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour, said he is disappointed the government is projecting increasing unemployment, and cutting funding for education and training.

“What’s needed in BC is more good jobs, with better wages. That takes significant investment in education and training, and this budget fails to deliver,” said Sinclair.

The budget predicts unemployment will increase from the current 6.6 percent to 6.8 percent and remain at that level until at least 2018.

NDP finance critic Mike Farnworth said BC is dead last in private sector job growth.

Our province actually lost jobs in 2013. And 29 percent of the jobs created since the recession have been filled by temporary foreign workers.

The Clark government recently announced a 10 year skills training “action plan.” There is no funding for it in the budget.

Indeed, the budget says the number of spaces in advanced education

will be cut by 5,000 over the next three years.

“Relative spending on education is budgeted to fall nearly 10 percent over the next three years. Employment program funding is also cut by 45 percent,” said Sinclair.

Unemployment remains worryingly high among young people, many of whom are carrying huge student debts as a result of ever rising tuition fees.

The CCPA calculates that there are 40,000 fewer young people working today than before the recession.

Adding to the problem is the large number of young people with post-secondary education who have been forced into low skilled jobs where they cannot realize their potential to fulfill their dreams and fully contribute to the economy as a whole.

Poverty and inequality

As the BC Liberals have relentlessly shifted taxes from the wealthy to the rest of us, inequality has grown by leaps and bounds.

For ten years in a row, our rich province has had the highest poverty rate in the country. Homelessness has grown, especially among seniors. Far too many kids go to school hungry.

Yet the Clark government presented no poverty reduction plan, leaving BC as one of only two provinces that are failing to address this issue and the life-long barriers it creates for thousands of children.

Ivanova of the CCPA says tolerating high rates of poverty and homelessness is both unfair and unnecessary in a wealthy country like Canada.

“It’s also very expensive both for the BC government and for society as a whole,” she said.

“We spend between \$8.1 billion



and \$9.2 billion annually in lost productivity, higher costs to the criminal justice system, lower school success, and higher health costs. That’s huge. It’s close to 5 percent of the total value of our economy,” said Ivanova.

Clark’s eyes firmly shut

In addition to going backwards on health care, public services, jobs, skills training, tax fairness, poverty and inequality, the Clark government has closed its eyes on many other pressing problems.

There is no action on climate change, nor investments in creating a greener economy.

Investments in the infrastructure needed to support a growing economy, including transit and municipal services, will be reduced over the next three years.

There is no new action on quality, affordable child care which now costs up to \$20,000 a year – more than university tuition – and could free many parents to contribute to our economy.

There is also no action to support forests and resource dependent communities that have been ravaged by the pine beetle.

Canada Post slashes service, hikes prices, plans thousands of layoffs

DIANE WOOD, PRESIDENT of BC FORUM, has told the Harper government to scrap plans to hike the cost of postal service and replace door-to-door delivery with community mailboxes.

“Some of our members have challenges with mobility. Walking or driving to a community mailbox will be difficult for them,” said Wood in a letter to the minister responsible.

“One of the leading causes of injury for seniors is slips and falls. We are very concerned that Canada Post’s plan will result in an increase of injuries to seniors,” she said.

“We strongly disagree with any move to end door-to-door letter carrier delivery.”

Wood said BC FORUM members are angry about the suggestion made by Deepak Chopra, president of Canada Post, that seniors would benefit from the exercise of walking – through heat and rain and snow – to collect their mail.

“BC FORUM is also concerned that the dramatic increase in postage rates will result in seniors not being able to send letters,” said Wood, noting that many seniors live in poverty and depend on the mail for communications.

“For all these reasons, BC FORUM is asking in the strongest possible terms that you immediately rescind Canada Post’s recently announced ‘five-point plan’ and begin consultations on how Canada Post can remain a viable and vital public institution,” she said.

In late January, Olivia Chow, the NDP critic for Canada Post, rose in the House of Commons to present a motion to maintain door-to-door mail delivery. The motion was defeated by the Harper Conservatives.



Good exercise for seniors, says Canada Post as it moves to eliminate home mail delivery, cut 8,000 jobs and expose even more Canadians to the growing incidence of stolen cheques, lost memories, and identity theft from community mail boxes.

“By voting against the NDP motion, the Conservatives are ignoring the wishes of ordinary Canadians and small businesses,” said Chow.

“Instead, they are listening only to Canada Post’s CEO who claimed that seniors need to get more exercise. What nonsense,” she said.

Chow pointed out that Canadians have depended on Canada Post for more than a century, but instead of working to improve service, the Conservatives will cut mail delivery, hike prices, reduce rural post office hours and kill jobs.

“A responsible government would have proposed solutions to improve service and attract new customers,” said Chow.

“Other countries have utilized innovations such as e-commerce and financial services to generate more revenue. Now, under the Conservatives, Canada will be the only G7 country without door-to-door mail

delivery,” said Chow.

Also speaking to the motion, Chris Charlton, NDP MP for Hamilton Mountain, said Canada Post has made more than \$1.7 billion in profit over the last 17 years – with the only deficit occurring when postal workers were locked out in 2011.

Charlton said the deep cuts will make it harder for seniors and persons with disabilities to get their mail. Low-income Canadians, charities and small and independent businesses will also be disproportionately affected.

“For law enforcement officials, security at community mailboxes is a concern because they are keenly aware of reported incidents of mail and identity theft. And of course postal workers are concerned about jobs and working conditions. All of these concerns are legitimate, and they should have been considered before Canada Post moved ahead with these drastic cuts,” he said.

June 11– mark your calendar now

YOU ARE INVITED to attend the 2014 Annual General Meeting of the BC Federation of Retired Union Members.

This year's meeting will be held Wednesday June 11, at the BCGEU's Norman T. Richards Building, 4911 Canada Way, Burnaby.

This is a change from the location where the last few annual meetings have been held, so please make a note of both the date and the address.

The annual meeting is your opportunity to debate resolutions on issues that affect older and retired workers and our families. The board of directors will report to you on BC FORUM's activities during the past year. You will hear informative presentations from keynote speakers.



The BC FORUM AGM is an opportunity for all members to speak out and call for action on the issues that matter. Make plans now to attend this year's meeting.

The meeting is also an opportunity to share a cup of coffee with old friends, renew acquaintances, and perhaps win one of the generous door prizes donated by our supporters. We look forward to seeing you there!

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Conservative budget lacks vision

The Harper government is abandoning the middle class, says CLC

THE PRESIDENT OF the Canadian Labour Congress says the federal budget lacks any vision about how to stop growing inequality and the economic slide of middle class Canadians.

“Canadians wanted a budget that speaks to their real needs, but the Finance Minister is more interested in continuing with austerity and balancing the budget.

“If now is not the time to act, when will it be?” said Ken Georgetti.

Georgetti says the budget makes noises about protecting consumers and their pocketbooks, and it devotes some money to job training.

“The minister is just tinkering around the edges.

“We have almost three million Canadians who are either unemployed, stuck in part-time jobs, or who have given up looking for work altogether.

“This budget does little to deal with that great waste of talent and skill,” he said.

The budget continues the government’s austerity measures.

Program spending in 2014-15 will be \$250 billion, an actual decline of \$1 billion from the previous year.

The finance minister had earlier promised action on youth unemployment but the youth internship program announced in the budget will create 4,000 internships at best. In January 2014, there were about 400,000 unemployed youth in Canada.

Georgetti said that Ottawa has chosen to slash public services in order to pay for the deep corporate tax cuts it has made over the years.

“In return for tax breaks business was supposed to invest in the economy, but the evidence shows that they are instead hoarding mountains of cash and paying their CEOs fat salaries,” he said.

“People are having trouble making ends meet and they fear especially for the future of their children and grandchildren.

“Good, family-supporting jobs are the key to Canada’s economic success and we cannot get there with corporate tax cuts and government austerity.

“Canadians want a government that is committed to fairness and that is not what they are getting in the budget. It’s time for a new vision,” said Georgetti.

Federal budget marks Harper’s largest ever spending cuts

The Conservative budget includes spending cuts of \$15 billion that take effect during this fiscal year

THE LATEST BUDGET introduced by the Harper Conservatives contains the largest annual spending cuts to date, says the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

There are \$14 billion worth of spending cuts announced in previous budgets that will come into effect this fiscal year, plus another cut of \$1 billion in this budget

Those cuts will cause real damage to Canada’s fragile economy, by removing 0.7% from the country’s already anemic GDP growth, says the CCPA.

“The government is happy to re-announce the infrastructure funding from previous budgets but what it isn’t telling you is that there are \$14 billion worth of previously announced spending cuts already built into this year’s budget,” said David Macdonald, CCPA Senior Economist.

“Canadians can expect to see more and deeper cuts to services and a sluggish economy as a result,” he said.

“If previous cuts are any indication, there will be further reductions to front line services, like those in Veteran’s Affairs and the Coast Guard,” said Macdonald.

“All this so the government can implement its promise of extending income splitting to families with children—a hugely expensive tax cut that 86 percent of families won’t benefit from.”

The federal budget will do little to boost Canada’s weak labour market.

Young people, often carrying significant student debts from post-secondary institutions, are having a particularly hard time getting ahead.

“The entire decline in youth unemployment from its worst in 2009 was due to jobless young people giving up their search, not finding a job,” said CCPA Senior Economist Armine Yalnizyan.

“The 4,000 youth internships in this budget will have no substantive impact.

“This is no time for small measures.

“An entire generation of young workers is on the line and the federal government has a serious role it could be playing,” said Yalnizyan.

Harper government blocks any improvement in pension plans

THE CANADIAN LABOUR Congress is calling on ordinary citizens to help provincial governments push back against the federal government's "irresponsible decision" to block all attempts to improve the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.

"The Conservatives should be taking leadership on a matter of urgency to Canadians, but they are the obstacle," said Ken Georgetti, CLC president.

"Every time the provinces put forward proposals (finance minister) Flaherty gives them a lump of coal."

Georgetti applauded the provinces that are continuing to work for an improved CPP, but added that they need help.

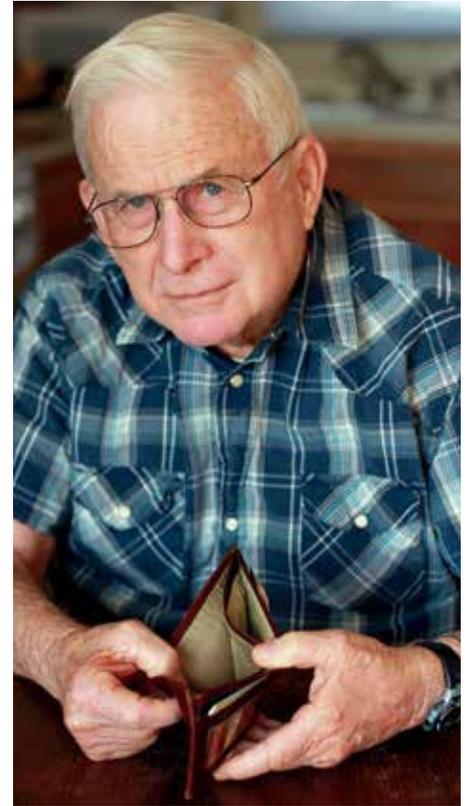
"Fully 60 percent of Canadians

have no workplace pension plan and the Conservatives do not seem to care. It is time for ordinary people to step up and tell Mr. Flaherty and his friends that they will pay a political price for their actions," he said.

The CLC has launched an online petition at www.pensionfairness.ca to demand that Ottawa work with provinces and territories to increase CPP/QPP pension benefits without delay.

NDP pensions critic Murray Rankin (Victoria) also blasted the federal government's continuing delays.

"Ensuring that Canadians can retire in dignity is a priority for New Democrats and we will continue working to make that happen," said Rankin.



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There's no cure – but acting early can help patients and caregivers

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

DEMENTIA IS A CRUEL disease. It steals the memories, thoughts, skills and emotions that make us who we are. It kills slowly.

Dementia is not only difficult for patients, who may sense that something is wrong but aren't sure what it is. It is difficult for family members and caregivers – often elderly spouses – who must watch their loved one change and ebb away.

Some spouses of patients with late stage dementia describe it as grieving a death, every day, for years and years.

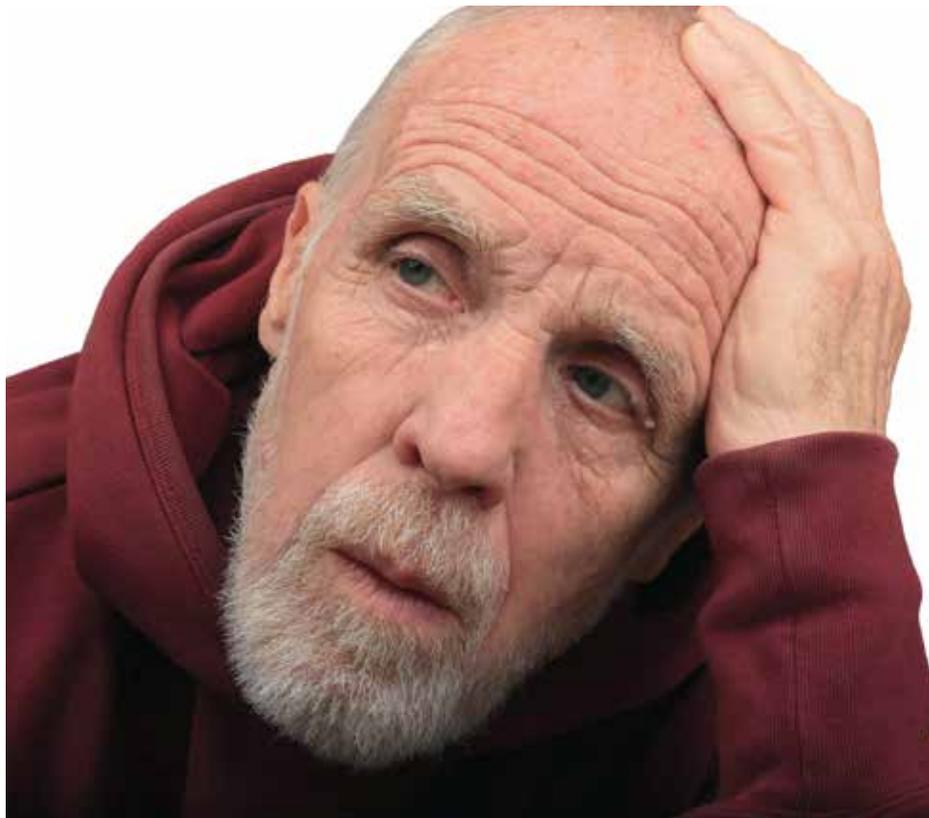
Dementia starts slowly, almost unnoticeably. A loss of interest in activities such as reading or watching TV (because the patient can no longer follow the story line). A continuing shift of cooking, cleaning and other household chores to the caregiving spouse. Forgetfulness. Unexpected mood swings. Irritability. Confusion. And sometimes physically striking out at the caregiver.

It's hard for the family or caregiver to ask for help, especially if the dementia is undiagnosed. Instead of understanding, there may be anger at the victim's behaviour.

But over a period that may span ten to 15 years, the weight on the caregiver grows heavier and heavier.

The patient may lose mobility, become incontinent, virtually stop eating, and drink so little that he or she becomes dehydrated.

Eventually, the caregiver is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, guarding a loved one who may wander and fall during a middle of the night attempt to reach the washroom.



Dementia is slow to start, and forgetfulness is sometimes easy to dismiss as a momentary lapse. Seeking an early diagnosis is the best way to ensure the patient will have the opportunity to express his or her wishes, and receive the best available care.

There is no cure. Early diagnosis won't change that. But early diagnosis can help ensure the patient receives good care. It can also help ensure the caregiver understands what is happening and receives support.

Community services are available. They are not quick to respond.

You may need a doctor's referral. A case manager. An assessment of the patient's and caregiver's needs. It takes weeks.

Putting off an early call for help is likely to result in a call to 911 instead. Ambulance attendants will be put in the unenviable position of removing from their home an elderly man or woman who doesn't understand and doesn't want to go.

This is likely to be followed by long touch-and-go days in the emergency ward and acute care. Then, if all goes well, you can expect the patient to be transferred to temporary residential care – perhaps far from home – while waiting for a more permanent residential care bed to become available.

If you are caring for someone who has dementia, or suspect may be getting dementia, don't leave it too late.

Discuss their wishes with them while they understand. Arrange a permanent power of attorney while he or she is capable of granting it.

Do it now. With dementia, tomorrow is unlikely to be a better day. It may be far worse.

Dementia is an issue that touches us all

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

The Alzheimer Society reports that 750,000 Canadians live with dementia, a number that's expected to double by 2031. It's a disease that affects so many of us.

For me, it's personal. A friend and neighbour. People I've worked with, including a former NDP premier whose inspirational voice has now been silenced. My mother.

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A relative of mine was recently rushed to hospital. She was in a coma, and not expected to survive.

She did. The emergency room doctors told the care home to stop over-medicating her.

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An audit in the UK found that 150,000 dementia patients are inappropriately prescribed anti-psychotic medication designed to treat schizophrenia.

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Across Canada, 32 percent of long term care residents are on anti-psychotics. Even when appropriately used, these drugs increase the risk of stroke and death.

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Are anti-psychotics the first-line response when dementia sufferers are difficult to manage? If so, are they prescribed to help the patient or the caregivers?

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On Nov. 4, 2013, the US Department of Justice announced that Johnson and Johnson had agreed to pay \$2.2 billion in fines. The drug giant had paid kickbacks to doctors and pharmacists to promote the use of Risperdal, an anti-psy-



The Fraser Health Authority charges long-term care patients \$25 a month for wheelchair rental and maintenance. It took persistent reminders from family members before this rubber band repair was replaced with a more permanent solution.

chotic, among elderly dementia patients. Professionals whose first duty should be to protect patients were financially rewarded for writing and dispensing prescriptions.

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New Democrats are calling on the Harper government to develop a Canada-wide strategy to deal with dementia.

"G8 countries held a special summit on dementia in December, and Canada was one of the few countries at the summit without a national dementia plan," said NDP MP Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt). "Canadians deserve better."

"Canada needs a dementia plan now," said NDP health critic Libby Davies (Vancouver East).

"Claude Gravelle's Bill C-356 supports The Alzheimer Society's call for a national dementia plan to help reduce the burden of dementia and

to support more people with the disease across Canada."

The illness costs the Canadian economy an estimated \$33 billion including millions of hours of unpaid caregiving.

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Statin medications – prescribed to reduce cholesterol levels and help reduce the risk of heart attacks – may also help prevent some forms of dementia.

Johns Hopkins researchers say that when the drugs are taken for more than one year, the risk of dementia is reduced by 29 percent.

"Medications such as statins that reduce plaque and inflammation in coronary arteries may also be having the same effect on blood vessels in the brain (thereby helping to prevent vascular dementia)," said Seth Martin, MD, the study's senior author.

Like never before, retired workers must stand up for Medicare

THIS COULD BE the year when Medicare – under attack from right-wing governments and privateers – really starts to unravel as a national program.

The Harper Conservatives refuse to provide leadership. They will not negotiate a new health accord with provinces and territories. The current accord expires March 31, effectively ending federal involvement in setting common standards of care for all Canadians.

The Harper Conservatives have also eliminated the \$6 million a year funding to the Health Council of Canada. The Council was set up to monitor progress in improving care to Canadians, as recommended by the Romanow Royal Commission. It will close its doors March 31.

In addition, proponents of privatized health care for the rich are seeking to break Medicare in the courts. Dr. Brian Day, owner of the for-profit Cambie Surgery Centre in Vancouver, has launched a direct attack on the critical principle that health care should be provided according to a patient's need, not his or her ability to pay. The case will be heard in BC Supreme Court in September.

"These are dangerous times for people who want to see public health care improved, not torn apart," says Diane Wood, President of BC FORUM.

"The Harper government is failing to defend the interests of ordinary families. We are going to give them a wake-up call," she said.

Wood said BC FORUM will be working in close cooperation with its national and provincial allies to pressure the federal government to reassume its leadership role and to focus public attention on the dan-

gerous court case launched by Day.

"Through the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC, seniors and retired workers will be visiting Members of Parliament in every constituency in the province, calling on them to support immediate negotiations on a new health accord. All governments must work together to ensure that Canadians get the care they need," she said.

"We will be working with the BC Health Coalition to ensure that British Columbians are fully informed about the legal attack on public health care. The Coalition is already planning a number of events and town hall meetings for this summer to achieve this goal.

"I am personally very grateful that both the Coalition and Canadian Doctors for Medicare have gained intervenor status in this case. Without their participation, only the BC Liberal government would be defending Medicare, and that's a very frightening thought," she said.

"At the national level, our representatives in the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada and the Canadian Health Coalition are planning a national day of action for a new health accord. I encourage all BC FORUM members to visit the website – www.healthcoalition.ca/march31 – for details of how they can participate," said Wood.

"As retired workers, many of us remember what it was like before Medicare, when a serious illness or injury could leave a family destitute. We are determined to not only preserve public health care, but to improve it. For example, there's a real need for expanded home support and a national Pharmacare program. Both could improve care and save billions of dollars," she said.



"The federal government is no longer walking away from health care. It is sprinting at full speed."

– Dr. Ryan Meili,
Canadian Doctors for Medicare



"The recent decision by the federal government to cut funding to the Health Council of Canada is a failure of its responsibility to protect and strengthen Canada's health care system."

– Dr. Anna Reid,
Canadian Medical Association



"There is no province in Canada that can or can ever be expected to play the role of the federal government. So it leads to the serious fragmentation of the system. It will basically be the end of national health care."

– Michael McBane,
Canadian Health Coalition



"(Discussion and collaboration among governments) is absolutely necessary if we are to move forward as a nation with roughly the same kinds of expectations and reformed outcomes of health care that we so desperately need. This is a really big blow."

– Roy Romanow,
head of the Royal Commission on
the future of health care in Canada



Trade deal is one more threat to health care

“Canadians view Medicare as a moral enterprise, not a business venture.”

– Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada

THE CANADIAN HEALTH COALITION has called on the federal government to ensure that public health care is exempt from the provisions of the proposed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the European Union, which the government approved in principle last October.

In a brief presented Jan. 28, 2014 to the Standing Committee on International Trade, Coalition spokesperson Michael McBane said health care in Canada is legislated as a public good, not a commercial commodity.

“Our public system is based on the Canada Health Act, where health care is delivered solely on the criterion of the need of patients, without regard for their ability to pay,” said McBane.

“The central objective of international trade agreements, including CETA, is trade liberalization. The rationale is that goods and services are to be allocated solely on the basis of purchasing power,” he said.

While there is some protection of health services in the deal, those “seriously flawed” provisions are more limited and qualified than even the provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement.



Citing a Romanow Commission recommendation for more effective protection of health care in all trade agreements, McBane urged the government to negotiate a new provision ensuring that “nothing in the CETA shall be construed to apply to measures adopted or maintained by a party with respect to health care, health services or health insurance.”

On the specific issue of prescription drugs, McBane said Canadians are concerned that the deal will result in higher costs.

“A recent independent study... says concessions by the federal government to cement the deal will

delay the arrival of cheaper generic drugs. This delay will add between \$850 million and \$1.65 billion annually – or up to 13 percent – to the total drug bill paid annually by Canadians, either directly, through insurance plans, or by provinces,” he said.

McBane recommended that all matters related to pharmaceutical patents be removed from CETA and future trade talks.

“Instead, Canada needs to impose conditions on the pharmaceutical industry to benefit the public interest and protect the common good from private monopoly,” he said.

FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH CARE

JOIN US MARCH 31ST



**NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION
FOR A NEW HEALTH ACCORD!**

The Health Accord expires **March 31st**. Since 2011, Harper has refused to meet with Premiers to negotiate a new accord. Instead, the government will cut **\$36 billion** from public health care. **Join us March 31st** as we call on Harper to get back to the negotiating table.

It's time to #Stand4Medicare.



**For details on times and locations
of events near you, go to:
www.healthcoalition.ca/march31**



www.healthcoalition.ca

Middle-income families falling behind

THERE ARE NEW REASONS to worry whether our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to succeed and have lives that are a little better than ours.

After years of tax giveaways to corporations and the wealthy, an internal Harper government report concludes that middle-income families are getting “an increasingly smaller share of the earning’s pie.”

“The Canadian dream is a myth more than a reality,” says the report prepared by deputy minister Ian Shugart, which was obtained by Canadian Press under a freedom of information request.

“The wages of middle-income workers have stagnated. Middle-income families are increasingly vulnerable to financial shocks,” said the report summarizing three years of research.

The report covers 1993 to 2007, a period when Canada had both Liberal and Conservative governments. It does not cover the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which resulted in a global recession and the loss of many well-paid jobs throughout Canada. Employment and Social Development Canada says an updated report is “not available at this time.”

The National Household Survey conducted by Statistics Canada as part of the 2011 census also revealed a wide demographic chasm between ordinary families and the richest.

“Canadian families are struggling like never before,” said Thomas Mulcair, federal NDP leader.

“Our country faces levels of income inequality not seen since the Great Depression,” he said.

It is a bleak picture. Home ownership, particularly in British Colum-

bia, is unaffordable for many.

Household debt is at record levels as families try to make ends meet.

Despite having a good education, many young people are unemployed or underemployed.

Thousands of good jobs in manufacturing, forestry and public services have disappeared, while others are filled with temporary foreign workers.

The Harper Conservatives dismiss the report prepared by their own top officials, saying they’ve cut taxes for “typical” families. This year’s federal budget says a “typical” family includes two parents earning \$120,000 a year and two children.

According to Statistics Canada, the median family income in BC is \$69,150, or roughly half what the Conservatives consider to be typical.

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COSCO elects new president

LORRAINE LOGAN, a former BC FORUM regional representative, has been elected to head the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of B.C.

She takes over from Art Kube as president of COSCO, which brings together more than 100,000 seniors from 85 affiliated groups, including BC FORUM.

Low wage jobs

THE RANKS OF the working poor are increasing. A CLC analysis of Statistics Canada labour force data indicates that part-time jobs are growing at twice the rate of full-time jobs. Over 20 percent of all jobs are now low wage, tied to a minimum wage that hasn't kept pace with inflation in most provinces.

The CLC estimates that there are close to 2.8 million Canadians unemployed, under-employed, or so discouraged they've given up looking for work.

Tax time again

IF YOU'RE 65 or older, don't forget that you may now qualify for a number of credits that could save you money. These include the age deduction and pension income splitting with your spouse, as well as the medical expenses, GST and public transit credits that are available to all taxpayers.

Friends of big banks

THE HARPER Conservatives have voted down a motion to limit ATM withdrawal fees to 50 cents per transaction.

"Canadians should not have to pay \$2.00 to \$3.00 to withdraw their own money from an ATM, especially as it costs banks as little as 36 cents



Government ignores continuing protests over ferry rate increases and service cuts

DESPITE NEARLY unanimous opposition at "public consultation" meetings, the Clark government is pressing ahead with its plans to raise rates, slash the seniors' discount and cut ferry service.

Transportation minister Todd Stone told the Vancouver media that a recently released report on the consultations confirmed the decision to cut service – making it clear the meetings were a sham, and that Stone attended none of them.

Organizers are now planning new protests to highlight how the cuts will affect the social and economic fabric of ferry dependent communities.

to process the transaction," said Glenn Thibeault, the federal NDP consumer affairs critic.

"Instead of addressing these unfair fees, the Conservatives like the Liberals before them keep handing billion dollar tax cuts to the same banks that charge them," he said.

Closing the door on fair elections

THE CONSERVATIVES have imposed closure for a record 56th time, shutting down debate on their so-called "Fair elections act."

The Council of Canadians says the Harper government refused

to consult with Elections Canada, other political parties or even voters in drafting the bill under which will:

- Strip Elections Canada of its independent power to investigate electoral fraud like the robocalls scandal.
- Make it illegal for Elections Canada to encourage people to vote.
- Bring in identification requirements that make it more difficult for seniors, young people and aboriginal voters to cast their ballot.
- Fail to hold political parties responsible when their databases are used to perpetrate widespread voter suppression or electoral fraud.

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

IF YOU DARE TO COMPLAIN:

Tim Hortons will send you home

JENIE ORENSE CAME to Canada to support her two children and her family by sending money back home to the Philippines.

With her dreams shattered, she is one of six temporary foreign workers who accuse their boss at Tim Hortons in Fernie of theft, fraud, harassment and intimidation.

The BC Federation of Labour (BCFL) and United Food and Commercial Workers 1518 (UFCW) have called on the RCMP to investigate.

"We are all too familiar with the difficulties temporary foreign workers can face in dealing with unscrupulous employers," said Ivan Limpwright, President of UFCW 1518, which has considerable experience representing migrant farmworkers employed in Canada.

"This case is yet another example of the shameful exploitation that happens with Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program," said Jim Sinclair, President of the BCFL.

The workers in Fernie said their boss drove them to the bank, gave them their paycheques, and demanded their overtime earnings in cash. If they objected, he would threaten to send them home.

He also demanded hundreds of dollars for work permits and Labour Market Opinions – costs that employers are legally obliged to cover.

Tim Hortons is Canada's largest fast food service, with more than 3,000 locations. It opens new locations at twice the rate of McDonald's and surpassed the size of that chain in 2002. Tim Hortons accounts for nearly a quarter of all fast food industry revenues in Canada, 76 percent of the market for baked goods based on customers served, and 62 percent of the coffee market, com-

pared to 7 percent for the second place Starbucks.

In 2008, a Tim Hortons representative told the federal citizenship and immigration committee that the company had more than 600 temporary foreign workers, with another 400 arriving later in the year.

"The number is going to continually increase," said Chris Thomas.

Fernie is not the only place where abuses have come to light. A Tim Hortons franchise owner in Dawson Creek has been called before the BC Human Rights Tribunal to answer allegations of discrimination and exploitation by four Mexican workers. Complaints have also been made in Saskatchewan, where six workers paid \$500 to \$600 a month to sleep on air mattresses in a basement.

Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the federal NDP, says the program has been abused by many employers to drive down wages. Originally intended to address labour shortages, it "has morphed into something completely different with 6,000 to 7,000 people being brought in to work at Tim Hortons and Canadian Tire. That has nothing to do with



Each February, Tim Hortons prints 300 million disposable cups for its roll-up-the-rim promotion.

specialized labour," said Mulcair.

Armine Yalnizyan, senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, says Canada should not "import a third world quality of life."

"This is a public policy that basically floods the bottom end of the wage pool. That's bad for the labour market as a whole," said Yalnizyan.

"The only people who are willing to do this work at those wage rates are people who are willing to live three, four and five people within an apartment," she said.

The number of temporary foreign workers in Canada tripled from 101,098 in 2002 to 300,211 in 2011.

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