

Advocate

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



Vol. 17 No. 3 June, 2014

Why is Harper crushing Medicare?

THE NATIONAL Health Accord – which set Canada-wide objectives for the delivery of public health care services – expired on March 31. The Harper government refuses to negotiate a new agreement.

On March 31, the government also shut down the Health Council of Canada. The council monitored how well governments were doing in meeting targets for improving Medicare.

These actions follow the Harper government's announcement that it was unilaterally changing the cost-sharing arrangement for Medicare by withholding \$36 billion in an anticipated funding.

In short, the Harper Conservatives have simply walked away from the table. They are not interested in collaborative federalism. They steadfastly refuse to meet with provincial and territorial representatives to discuss ways of working together to build a better Canada.

Whether it's Medicare, skills training, or the way elections are conducted, Harper won't talk to anyone unless he is forced to do so. And that's what we must do to defend public health care in Canada.

The Advocate's special report on the threat to Medicare, and what we can do to defend it, begins on page 7 of this edition.



BC
forum

OFFICIAL NOTICE:

BC FORUM AGM

The 2014 Annual General Meeting of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM) will be held:

Wednesday, June 11, 9:30 am to 1:00 pm
Tom Kozar Education Centre,
BCGEU Headquarters
4911 Canada Way, Burnaby, B.C.

All current members of BC FORUM can vote at the AGM. Renewals and new memberships will be accepted at the sign-in desk prior to the meeting.

For more details of the meeting, see page 13.

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Advocate

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

There are serious concerns about the future of Medicare as a national program. The national Health Accord has expired. Ottawa refuses to negotiate a new agreement and is steadfastly reducing its share of funding.

Our special report is on pages 7 - 10.

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BC FORUM and you: a strong team

By Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM

I WANT TO thank you. Your membership and participation in the work of BC FORUM is so important to me, our board of directors, and to our organization as a whole.

As older or retired workers, you and I have seen a lot. We know that some battles can take a long time to win, and that we are strongest when we stand together in solidarity.

Today, I want to ask for your help in making BC FORUM an even stronger voice for senior workers and retired union members.

You may not be aware that the members of our board of directors are all unpaid volunteers. They work very hard, and put in many hours to push for change on the issues that affect seniors and our families.

They are a very determined group, steeped in the traditions and values of our movement, and strongly committed to working on our behalf.

There's so much to be done. The labour movement, older workers, retired workers and our families are under constant attack. Our directors are doing all they can – but we must all work together to fight back and I hope you will take an active role in that.

The challenges are coming at us from every direction.

At the federal level, the Harper government has launched a stealth attack on Medicare, refusing to renegotiate the national Health Accord that expired March 31, 2014. It is pressing ahead with plans to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, threatening the retirement security of our children and grandchildren. It is cutting postal service and raising rates, steps that disproportionately affect seniors on

fixed incomes. And it is negotiating with Europe a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement that threatens to significantly raise the price of prescription drugs (again).

Provincially, the Christy Clark government continues to deepen inequality. By steadily increasing regressive taxes such as Medical Service Premiums, her government has created a tax structure that benefits only the rich – they pay a lower proportion of income in taxes than everyone else. Minimum employment standards remain woefully inadequate. And for people in ferry dependent communities, her government is raising rates, slashing the seniors' discount and cutting service.

I ask every BC FORUM member to join us in taking on these foul government actions.

I ask you to help us grow stronger by signing up a friend, relative or co-worker. They can join at our website, www.bcforum.ca. Or they can use the application form that's printed in every edition of *The Advocate*.

Remember that membership is open to all members of B.C. Federation of Labour affiliated unions who are 50 or older, not just retirees.

Our friends in the labour movement face challenges in organizing. Unfriendly governments make it more difficult with anti-union laws and trade deals designed to drive down wages and benefits. These difficulties are compounded by the trend to smaller workplaces, with frequent staff turnover.

It is even more difficult to organize retired workers.

There are no workplaces. There are no lists of employees to contact. There are no paid organizers. Finances are limited. There is no dues checkoff. Dues must be collected and processed from members who



Diane Wood, President, BC FORUM

must be renewed on a regular basis.

The support of the BC Federation of Labour and a number of affiliates is helping us to balance the budget, continue our activities, and pay the salary of our one person part-time administrative staff.

Their support is given in recognition of the fact that retired workers can be a powerful force for political change. We vote. We believe in a civil society. And there are more of us every day.

BC FORUM is the vehicle which can bring together retired workers. And like the labour movement, our strength depends on our numbers.

We must continue to sign up more older workers and retired workers every day. I ask for your help to make it happen.

Thank you again for your contribution to building our collective strength, and our ability to press for real change.

POSTAL BANKING

An idea that makes cents

By Marion Pollack
Director, BC FORUM

IN CANADA, people associate banks with stand-alone institutions, designed solely for the purpose of conducting financial transactions. However, in many countries including New Zealand, France, Brazil, Italy, France and Switzerland people associate banks with their post offices. This is because in all these countries people are able to carry out their bank business at their local post offices.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers believes postal banking is a good idea. That's why CUPW is calling on the federal government and Canada Post to immediately establish a task force to determine how the post office can deliver new financial services, and to establish priorities for delivering new products.

Postal Banking is the alternative to Canada Post's plan to eliminate door to door delivery.

A good idea

A recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) endorsed postal banking as a viable option. In addition to establishing that postal banking is lucrative, the CCPA study also found that there is a real need for better financial and banking services in our country.

In February 2014 in an exclusive report, the parliamentary news site Blacklock's Reporter disclosed that Canada Post spent the better part of four years conducting research, polling and focus group studies – all of which concluded the Crown corporation “could profitably launch the largest banking network in the country.”

This included a management re-

port – entitled “Banking: A Proven Diversification Strategy” – which concluded that offering public banking services through post offices would be a “win-win strategy.”

In January 2014, the inspector general of the U.S. Postal Service released a white paper that proposed the U.S. post office provide basic banking services.

Canada Post has outlets in most communities. Adding postal banking to the services they provide would make banking easier for many people, and would help Canada Post's bottom line. Postal banking is lucrative. For example, in Switzerland PostFinance generated 71 percent of Swiss Post's 2012 operating results. France La Banque Postale made 36 percent of that postal service's income before tax earnings. The New Zealand Kiwibank, which is wholly owned by the postal service made 70 percent of profits earned by that post office.

Postal banking is needed

There are real reasons to support postal banking. Firstly, many communities do not have a bank. There have been close to 3,000 bank closures since 1990. Lack of access to banking particularly hurts vulnerable seniors who may not be able to travel to locations where there are banks. In addition, some seniors do have access to or feel comfortable with electronic banking.

Many low-income individuals, including seniors do not have a bank account or have a precarious relationship with mainstream financial institutions. Some people use pay day lending and other fringe institutions that charge interest rates well above those charged by banks and credit unions. This further reduces the incomes of poor seniors.

Seniors as well as many other residents of Canada regularly send remittances to other countries to support their friends and families. Many of these money transfer organizations charge high fees which reduce the value of the remittance. Properly structured, a postal bank could send remittances at lower costs.

Support for postal banking

Polls show there is real support for postal banking. A recent Stratcom poll showed that 63% of respondents supported Canada Post expanding revenue-generating services, including financial services like bill payments, insurance and banking.

The New Democratic Party has encouraged Canada Post to deliver lucrative financial and banking services instead of cutting back on delivery. And finally, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers wants Canada Post to reconsider its focus on cutting and instead follow the example of other postal administrations around the world by expanding revenue-generating services like banking. Canada Post should expand its services rather than eliminate door to door delivery.

You can help

Postal services are important to us all. Seniors are dependent on a universal public postal service. In order to keep Canada Post viable please contact your MP and tell her/him you want Canada Post to get into the banking business. Remind your MP that you oppose the elimination of door to door delivery.

After all, postal banking makes cents – and dollars too.

Conservatives fail to address retirement crisis

AFTER YEARS of refusing to improve the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) – the most stable and secure pension vehicle available to ordinary workers – the Harper Conservatives have thrown more mud on the wall.

In April, they announced a proposal for what they call a “target benefit” pension plan.

This latest attempt to shift the debate from what’s really required could be made available for workers and employers in federally regulated industries and crown corporations.

Instead of improving the CPP to ensure that Canadians can retire in dignity, the Conservatives continue to mismanage the file by offering tax breaks to those who already have lots of money, cutting public pensions, and threatening the income security of future retirees.



Murray Rankin, NDP Pensions critic

“What the Conservatives are proposing won’t help the millions

of Canadians who will face a steep drop in their standard of living by retirement,” said NDP Pensions critic Murray Rankin (Victoria).

“In fact, it could even risk eroding existing defined benefit pensions and making matters worse.”

Pension experts, labour unions, provincial governments, and seniors organizations all agree that the best way to tackle the looming crisis is to boost benefits through CPP/QPP.

However, the Conservatives have blocked any action to boost retirement savings.

“By raising the retirement age to 67, the Conservatives are already cutting \$11 billion from Old Age Security,” said Rankin.

“This announcement is yet another Conservative step in the wrong direction.”

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.
- Individual health and dental plans that cover pre-existing conditions for retiring BC FORUM members and their families.
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- Registered Education Savings Plans for grandchildren (RESP).
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- Staff are members of USW Local 1937 or UFCW Local 1518.

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UNFAIR ELECTIONS ACT

Amendments ignore huge problems

DESPITE THE federal government backing down on some of its planned changes to the Elections Act, huge problems remain.

"I'd say it's significantly improved in about one-third of the problematic areas, but there's two-thirds of very problematic areas (the amendments don't touch)," said Craig Scott, the NDP's democratic reform critic.

"It's deeply disappointing and disturbing," he said.

The Conservative government proposed 45 amendments to its legislation in late April. It took a lot of effort to make that happen. The concessions followed months of relentless pressure from ordinary Canadians, electoral experts, and the official opposition.

The federal New Democrats grilled the government with 256 questions on the act, held cross-country public meetings, made the bill a focus of opposition day motions, and lead a major filibuster at committee meetings.

"At some level, the system worked, but it worked only because we threw everything imaginable at them," said Scott.

Duff Conacher, co-founder of Democracy Watch, said the Conservatives continue to ignore key problems with the bill.

"They are not proposing enough changes to make the bill, or federal elections, actually fair," said Conacher.

During committee debate, the only substantive amendments allowed to pass by the Conservative majority were those that came from their government.

They rejected a proposal to ensure that voter information cards are



Protesters hit the streets in the wake of the robocall scandal where someone masquerading as Elections Canada told thousands of voters their polling place had changed. The calls only went to people who did not plan to vote Conservative. The Harper government's Unfair Elections Act also targets people who tend to vote for other parties.

prominently marked to indicate that they will no longer be considered to be valid identification.

"If they won't even vote for this, then the last bit of the fig leaf, as ugly as that image is, is gone," said NDP MP David Christopherson.

"This is all about trying to get the fix in for the Conservatives in every way they can. Voter suppression is alive and well in the government of Canada," he said.

The official opposition and electoral experts have argued that hundreds of thousands of voters will be disenfranchised by eliminating the use of voter cards, as well as new restrictions on citizens vouching for the identity of others.

The new measures to make it more difficult to vote are being imposed despite election reports which

have found no evidence that vouching has been used to commit fraud.

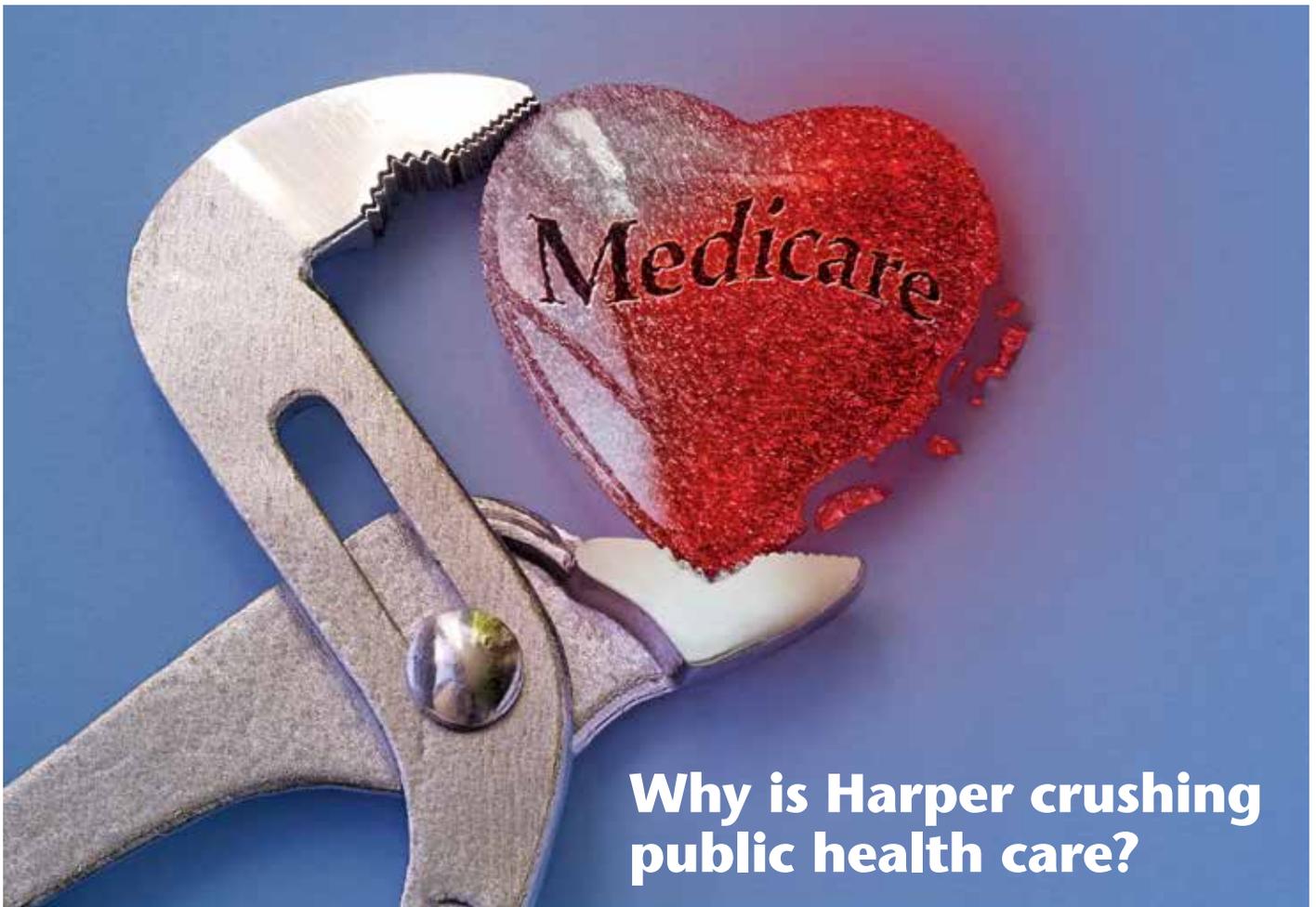
The revised bill still severely limits Elections Canada. For example, the agency has in the past run advertisements aimed at increasing voter turnout by encouraging Canadians to exercise their civic duty.

Under the new law, such ads will be illegal.

The New Democrats fought for amendments to maintain Election Canada's freedom to promote voting, and to strengthen its ability to investigate and enforce violations of the Elections Act.

The party also proposed changes to "keep big money out of politics" by maintaining, rather than increasing, the existing limits on political donations.

Fighting for public health care



"I am concerned that without leadership from Ottawa and with reduced money, we are going to see a further slowdown of reforms, more regional disparities, and a push for more private health care."

**– Roy Romanov, Chair of the
Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada**

Taking action to defend Medicare

CANADIANS MAY face bed shortages and more expensive prescription drugs now that the 10-year Health Accord between Ottawa and the provinces has expired. The federal government has walked away from the table, refusing to negotiate a new agreement.

“It means the end of any rational planning for the health care system,” said Michael McBane, executive director of the Canadian Health Coalition (CHC).

To draw attention to the importance of the issue, thousands of Canadians participated in 40 events across the country on March 31, the day the Health Accord expired.

No federal leadership

McBane said a federal voice is needed to work towards equality of access throughout the country.

“The voice of Canada is the federal government, not the provinces. So national standards – to ensure equity of access regardless of where you live or your ability to pay – is a uniquely federal role. Nobody else can play that role,” said McBane.

On the same day, the federal government shut down the Health Council of Canada which reported on health care problems and identified best practices to fix them.

“Without the Council, no one is doing that work,” he said.

The Harper government has also announced, without consultation, that it is changing the funding arrangement with provinces and territories. They have eliminated the built-in equalization mechanism, starting this year. They will cut Ottawa’s anticipated contribution to Medicare by \$36 billion, starting in 2017.

“Instead of negotiating a new Health Accord, Conservatives are



Stephanie Smith of the BCGEU, along with Diane Wood and Marion Pollack (not pictured) of BC FORUM, were among the thousands who participated in a national day of action to call for federal leadership in public health care.

downloading health care costs onto the provinces and turning their backs on a system that Canadians have relied on for generations,” said Libby Davies, NDP Health Critic.

“As a result, we will see increased disparities across the country – longer wait times, reduced front-line services, and lack of access to home and long-term care,” she said.

Rich Alberta gets more

The end of the equalization system means the federal contribution to health care will fluctuate widely across Canada.

Alberta gets an extra \$1 billion this year. B.C. loses \$250 million.

The federal share of health costs will be slashed from 20 percent to 11 percent in Manitoba. It will be increased from 15 percent to 20 percent in Alberta.

The funding changes imposed by the Harper government will undermine the provinces’ ability to meet the requirements of the Canada Health Act, said McBane.

“You can’t have a universal social program unless you have the financial means to have poorer regions subsidized or financially supported,” he said.

“The sole gainer in this is Alberta. Almost everybody else loses,” said McBane.

We need national Pharmacare

THE NEED for a national pharmacare program is becoming desperate, says Dr. Jeff Turnbull, chief of staff at Ottawa Hospital. Patients are doing without medicine that could potentially cure them because they can't afford it.

"For the first time in my career, I have patients saying: I just can't afford this. I am going to have to live with my illness," says Turnbull.

Patients are left to struggle with painful and debilitating disease for the rest of their lives because new drugs for rheumatoid arthritis cost \$30,000. The cost of drugs to com-

bat hepatitis C is in the range of \$80,000.

Turnbull despaired that doctors will have to make life-and-death decisions based on people's ability to pay.

A study by the Canadian Medical Association found that one in ten Canadians cannot afford to fill prescriptions. The record is worst in B.C. where 17 percent do without prescribed drugs.

The fragmented pharmacare systems found in Canada lack the administrative efficiency and purchasing power of a single-payer system

which could save Canadians as much as \$14-billion per year.

The Health Council of Canada, now disbanded by the Harper government, initially worked towards a pharmacare plan for catastrophic drug coverage, aiming to reduce costs through bulk federal purchasing and coordinated prescribing practices.

The Harper government, however, began to back away from this initiative shortly after the 2006 election. It is an issue that requires federal leadership. The provinces cannot do it on their own.

Health care: Now is the time

AFTER A YEAR and a half of consultations with thousands of Canadians in public forums and meetings with key stakeholders, NDP Health Critic Libby Davies (Vancouver East) has released a report that summarizes what she heard, and what needs to be done to improve public health care.

"This document outlines the concerns we heard from Canadians regarding primary care, home and long-term care, mental health, prescription drug coverage, and preventative health care," said Davies.

The work by Davies also outlines the steps that New Democrats propose to strengthen Medicare. Among the highlights, the report says the NDP will:

- Revoke the Conservatives' unilateral decision to take \$36 billion in anticipated funding out of health care.
- Support the development of new agreements with provinces and territories to improve health outcomes for Canadians.
- Invest in prevention by address-



Libby Davies, NDP Health Critic

ing the social determinants of health to ensure all Canadians have a decent income, access to healthy food, affordable housing and a social safety net.

- Ensure better value by working with provinces to make better use

of resources and fundamentally change how health care services are organized, managed and delivered.

"The federal government has a clear role in ensuring that health care in Canada remains public and accessible," says the report.

"In particular, the federal government must investigate and enforce the ban on troublesome practices such as double-billing, queue-jumping, and increased privatization of medically necessary services."

The report identifies four major pillars for action: better access to prescription drugs, better care across the continuing care spectrum, timely access to primary care and prevention.

As an example of problems in the system, the report notes that half of Canadians cannot get a same day or next day appointment with their family doctors, thereby increasing the pressure on hospital emergency rooms.

You can read the full report on the web at www.ndp.ca/health.



It's time for all of us to take action to defend public health care

BC FORUM, BCRTA and COSCO, along with other seniors groups in B.C. urge you to:

- Write, phone, or visit your Member of Parliament to call for federal leadership on health care.
- Complete the short survey below to share and register your views on what should be done to improve health care services for this and future generations.

Tell them what you think!

Make your voice count

Please complete this survey in one of three easy ways:

- Visit our website, www.bcforum.ca, or
- Mail to BC FORUM, #200-5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, BC V5R 4H1, or
- Scan and email to bcforum@bcfed.ca

1. Should the federal government negotiate a new Health Accord with provinces and territories in order to ensure there can be equal access to public health care across Canada?
Yes No Don't know
2. Should the federal and provincial governments initiate a national Pharmacare program to provide better coverage for patients, and save up to \$14 billion a year through bulk purchases?
Yes No Don't know
3. Since Medicare was implemented, the federal contribution has been cut from 50% to 20% in 2010. If current trends continue, it will drop to less than 12% over the next 25 years. Is it time for Ottawa to increase its contribution to public health care?
Yes No Don't know
4. Should home support, extended care and palliative care be brought under the Canada Health Act as essential parts of the continuum of care?
Yes No Don't know
5. Will the future of public health care be a key issue for you when you decide how to vote in the next federal election?
Yes No Don't know

Seniors Advocate appointed

DIANE WOOD, President of BC FORUM, has welcomed the provincial government's appointment of Isobel MacKenzie as the province's first Seniors Advocate.

"It's a long overdue step towards addressing the systemic challenges we see in care and services for seniors," she said.

"It's unfortunate that the government did not follow the advice of seniors' organizations to ensure that the Seniors Advocate will be fully independent. By having the office report to the minister of health, rather than the Legislature, it leaves the impression that the advocate will be subject to political interference," she said.

Wood said Ms MacKenzie will

have her work cut out for her dealing with issues like elder abuse, and the many shortcomings in home and community care identified in a comprehensive report by the independent Ombudsperson.

The BCGEU says one of the first issues it will be raising with the Seniors Advocate is the impact of contract re-tendering and contract flipping in seniors' care.

The union represents thousands of workers who provide home support, residential care and other services to seniors.

"Our members know first-hand the challenges of providing quality care given the current fiscal and regulatory environment," said BCGEU President Darryl Walker.

"Whether in residential care or home support, seniors and their families rely on the continuity of a skilled and experienced caregiver," he said.

"When health authorities and businesses change contracts with their care staff and lay off experienced workers, it hurts clients and affects the quality of care.

"We're asking the Seniors Advocate to do better by B.C. seniors and put an end to contract flipping in public seniors' care," said Walker.

MacKenzie was formerly associated with Beacon Community Services, a non-profit organization that provides home support services to clients in the South Vancouver Island region and Gulf Islands.

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A call for leadership on health care

BC FORUM has joined with B.C.'s largest federation of seniors to call on the federal, provincial and territorial governments to negotiate "a new comprehensive health accord that protects, transforms and strengthens our national health care system."

At a special meeting held in Vancouver April 11 – just days after the expiry of the national health accord – about 100 delegates unanimously adopted a declaration that quality health care must be available to every resident of Canada without discrimination, and regardless of ability to pay.

"All levels of government have a role to play in the delivery of quality and accessible health care," said Lorraine Logan, President of the 107,000 member Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C. (COSCO). BC FORUM is affiliated with the umbrella group.

"The federal government should give strong leadership in enforcing national standards, not walking away from the table and refusing to negotiate a new accord," said Logan.

"To ensure Medicare is not fragmented, Ottawa must provide co-ordination, foster innovation, and provide financial support at a level that secures the integrity of the 1984 Canada Health Act," she said.

Seniors at the meeting expressed outrage that the federal government has refused to negotiate a new health accord, effectively ending Medicare as a national program.

They were also frustrated that four B.C. Conservative Members of Parliament – including Richmond MP Alice Wong, the minister of state for seniors – have refused to meet with them to discuss these issues.



About 100 seniors – including Millie Canessa (right) and other BC FORUM representatives – attended a special meeting to call on the federal and provincial governments to negotiate a new comprehensive health accord that will strengthen public health care.

BC FORUM condemns closure of Veterans Affairs offices

THE PRESIDENT of BC FORUM, Diane Wood, has denounced the closure of nine Veterans Affairs offices and called on the federal government to re-open them.

"The closure of these offices, including two in B.C., is a slap in the face to those who have risked their lives to serve our country," said Wood.

The Prince George office, which served 1,400 veterans, was closed last year, and the case files transferred to Vancouver. Case files from Kelowna, which served 2,225, were split between Penticton and Vancouver. There has been no staff increase in Penticton, and the Vancouver staff has been cut by 10.

Wood pointed out that Veterans Affairs workers have developed long-term relationships with their clients, and are fully trained to work with veterans, particularly those who are older or living with post-traumatic

stress syndrome and other mental health challenges.

Yvan Thauvette, President of the Union of Veterans Affairs Employees (PSAC), said there are now "25 fewer case managers nearby to work with high-risk veterans in their homes, and 21 fewer client service agents in the offices when veterans need them."

Veteran Ron Clarke said the closures sent an especially bad message to veterans in light of recent news articles about suicides among returning soldiers and veterans.

"So many veterans are in crisis. Now is not the time to be taking away a crucial part of the system that is supposed to ensure they get the help they need," he said.

The closures are in Corner Brook, Charlottetown, Sydney, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Brandon, Saskatoon, Kelowna and Prince George.

You're invited!

2014 Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, June 11 – 9:30 am to 1:00 pm

Note the new location: Tom Kozar Education Centre,
BCGEU Headquarters
4911 Canada Way, Burnaby, B.C.

Our Agenda will include *debate of resolutions* on issues that affect retired workers and our families, and a report from your Board of Directors on BC FORUM's current activities.

Featured Speakers:

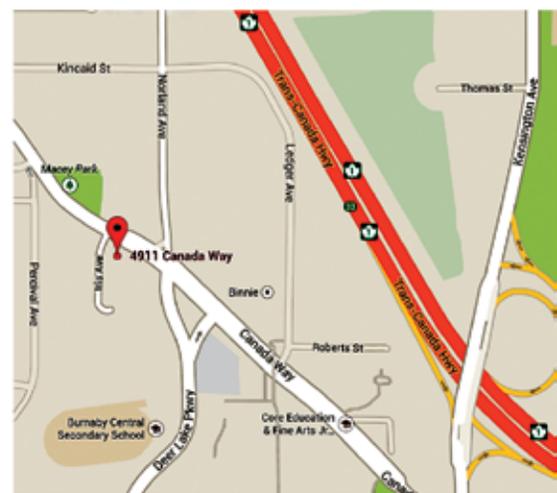
- **Katrine Conroy, MLA, Official Opposition Seniors Critic**
Katrine Conroy will discuss the issues facing older and retired workers and their families in B.C., and the many areas where improvements need to be made.
- **Rick Turner, Co-chair, B.C. Health Coalition**
Rick Turner will provide details of a dangerous legal challenge launched by private clinics and how this action, coupled with the federal government's refusal to negotiate a new national health accord, threatens public health care in Canada.
- **Jim Sinclair, Chair, BC FORUM**
The President of the B.C. Federation of Labour will discuss the challenges facing workers and retired workers alike, and how all of us – young and old – can meet those challenges by working together in solidarity across the generations.

Easy access to the BCGEU Headquarters (corner of Canada Way and Iris) via public transit and the freeway. There's free parking on Iris and behind the building.

Coffee will be served at 9:00 am. Come early and enjoy a chat with other BC FORUM members, guests and directors.

Current members of BC FORUM will have the right to vote at the AGM. We will be accepting renewals and new memberships at the sign-in desk prior to the meeting.

Great door prizes! Please join us, and feel free to bring a guest.



We look forward to seeing you!

United Way cuts services

HERE'S ANOTHER example of the danger of relying on charity to fund essential services. After a reduction in donations, the United Way of the Lower Mainland has told 31 organizations that provide services to seniors that their funding will not be renewed.

Among the casualties is the Seniors Services Society's temporary housing program, now expected to collapse in September. The society has 20 apartments used by homeless seniors on an emergency basis. The program has a 95 percent success rate in helping seniors find permanent housing.

Homelessness grows among seniors

THE NUMBER of people sleeping in the street or couch-surfing has increased by 26 percent over the last three years, according to a preliminary report on the Metro Vancouver homeless count.

The number of homeless seniors (55 and older) has increased by 38 percent since 2011 and by 75 percent since 2008. Seniors made up 18 percent of the homeless population in 2014, compared to 9 percent in 2008.

TFW abuse drives up unemployment

A FLOOD of news stories about the exploitation of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) continues to enrage Canadians.

"Every week we hear more stories of abuse of temporary foreign workers by employers while Canadian residents are losing their jobs," says Jim Sinclair, President of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

A report by the C.D. Howe Insti-



The number of seniors who are homeless has increased by 75 percent since 2008 according to this year's homeless count in Metro Vancouver.

tute says expansion of the TFW program has driven up B.C. unemployment levels by 4.8 percentage points.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) says temporary foreign workers have filled close to one-third of new jobs created in B.C. since the 2008 recession.

"It seems clear that the TFW program has been a boon to employers directly at the expense of lower skilled workers and youth, who are struggling with high unemployment levels," says Iglia Ivanova of the CCPA's B.C. office.

Inequality soars

TWO NEW studies demonstrate how the constant push for tax cuts and the erosion of union bargaining rights has led to greater inequality in Canada.

The top 1% captured about 37 percent of income growth in Canada

over the last three decades, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The study says this explains why economic growth is not leading to improved incomes for the rest of us.

The OECD calls for the reintroduction of higher marginal tax rates, and fewer tax deductions and credits aimed at the 1%.

A second study, by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, documents the growing wealth gap. It found the wealthiest 86 Canadians held the same wealth as the poorest 11.4 million Canadians combined.

For every new dollar of real wealth generated in Canada since 1999, 66 cents have gone to the top 20 percent, and 23 cents went to the upper middle class.

The other 60 percent of Canadians shared the remaining dime.

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.

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



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LAST FIRST INITIAL

Address: _____
STREET ADDRESS CITY POSTAL CODE

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

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

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

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

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

Payment: Cheque Visa MC Expiry: ____ / ____

Card number: _____

.....
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Date of application: _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

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

Horgan takes Liberals to task

IN AN EXCLUSIVE *Advocate* interview, the new Leader of the BC NDP said he has significant concerns about a range of issues that affect older and retired workers and our families.

John Horgan, whose mother passed away four years ago, spoke of “the challenge of finding home care that was stable, and had some level of continuity.”

“We’re seeing disruptions in residential care facilities with the corporate cut-rate approach, and the firing and re-hiring – maybe, maybe not – of staff,” he said.

“But home care requires continuity as well. The biggest challenge is finding the right mix.

“I know you can’t tailor-make every situation, but I think we have a responsibility to provide care to seniors that is respectful and allows for dignity,” said Horgan.

The Opposition Leader criticized the “woeful” job the BC Liberals have done in living up to their 2001 promise to build 5,000 new residential care beds.

“They still haven’t even come close to meeting the commitment they made for their first four year mandate.

“I’m not surprised that seniors are looking at this government with a great deal of skepticism and concern because without investments – not just capital investments, but human investments – we’re not going to have the people in place to serve the growing community. That’s going to lead to a deterioration of care, a deterioration of the dignity that we want for ourselves and our parents as we go forward.

“There has to be a concerted effort, almost on a war footing, to address the need for housing and care. I don’t see any evidence that the



John Horgan was officially sworn in as the new Leader of the BC NDP at a special inauguration ceremony held May 4 in Vancouver. Hundreds of New Democrats attended the event.
– *Advocate photo courtesy of Bill Bell*

government of Christy Clark even remotely understands that. If it’s not LNG, they’re not interested,” he said.

Horgan also highlighted the affordability challenges that face retired workers on fixed incomes, citing a 28 percent increase in BC Hydro rates and higher rates for seniors on BC ferries.

“It’s a government that claims to be family friendly but is certainly far from it,” he said.

Horgan noted that while 142,000 people are looking for work, thousands of jobs are being filled by temporary foreign workers.

“Many seniors and older British Columbians see nothing but grief on the horizon for their children and grandchildren.

“That’s not the British Columbia that I want to see. I want to see a province where everyone can prosper, where everyone has access to opportunity,” said Horgan.

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