

Advocate

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

Vol. 25 No. 4, Winter, 2021

Tips for healthy DIGITAL HYGIENE

**WE NEED A UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE
HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS**

Thinking of “Travel”:

*Looking for Out of Country Medical,
make sure to read the fine Print*

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In this edition

On behalf of the volunteer Directors and Regional Representatives of BC FORUM, we wish you a healthy and safe New Year. We look forward to working with you as we continue our efforts to improve the lives of retired workers, future retirees and our families. We have much to do. By sharing our experiences, by working together to push for change, by speaking out on important issues, we can help build a fairer, more civil society for all.

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BC FORUM continues our advocacy work!

By Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM

This is the first edition of our *ADVOCATE* issued without the work of our long serving Editor and friend Soren Bech. Soren's recent passing has been a huge loss to so many organizations which he supported. For BC FORUM, Soren was so much more than our Editor of the *ADVOCATE*. Soren has been active in BC FORUM since our formation. He initially was our part-time Executive Director, a position which has not existed for many years due to loss of funding. Soren was our wise Elder. So many of us could reach out to Soren, ask for his advice, thoughts or help and he would thoughtfully and practically come to our aid. Not one to ever seek centre stage or have the bright lights shine on him, he was content to just be there for all of us, through the good times and the bad times. He helped us all hold our hand firmly on the tiller to help guide us through many storms. We remember and mourn our Brother Soren Bech.

Sadly, we had another passing in September, a former President and Life Member of BC FORUM, Alice West. Alice was a long serving Director on BC FORUM's Board representing the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). Alice rose to become the PSAC National Director representing BC, Yukon and Northwest Territories. I was so fortunate to serve with Alice as an Officer of the BC Federation of Labour and on our BC FORUM Board of Directors when she was President. In 2013, Alice was recognized with the Rosemary Brown Award for Women to recognize her extraordinary contribution in the area of Women in the Labour Movement. She was a femtor to so many women including myself. Rest in power Sister Alice.

This is our first edition of our *ADVOCATE* since the Federal election. I am proud of the work that BC FORUM did leading up to the election in so many areas of important advocacy to effect important changes. Our last edition sent to members before the election set out some of the areas where change is needed whether it be making the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, a future with health care that puts us first, where life is more affordable including housing, national standards for long term care, supporting older persons to "age in place" with more home support, closing the gaps in Medicare e.g. Universal Pharmacare and Dental Care, Patented Medicines Price Review implementation, finding the courage to act on climate change before it's too late! Sadly, we still wait on so many where building a more civil society and filling the gaping holes in the social safety net is a continued area of our work.

By the time you receive this edition of the *ADVOCATE*, we will have had a Throne Speech and to have heard what the commitments are of this government as to what changes will come and where we are needed to continue our advocacy for the necessary changes to make life better, more equitable and inclusive for the people of our Canada. At BC FORUM, we hope for the best and plan for the worst.

Our work continues at the Provincial level. BC FORUM made a submission in response to the BC government's call for consultation on the 2022 Budget. Our submission covered many recommendations calling for: a provision to increase the rent ceiling used in the calculation of SAFER to reflect the actual costs of rent in BC, budget increases to build



Diane Wood

both affordable housing for seniors and seniors subsidized housing, better access to public transportation for seniors, include basic dental health care services for seniors, provisions for long-term core funding for community based non-profit senior serving organizations, provisions to allow seniors to access equipment and devices they need, including but not limited to glasses, hearing aid and mobility devices through the Fair Pharmacare program, to champion national long-term care standards and commit to applying those standards in BC and the provision of increased support for seniors to "Age in Place".

COVID has taken its toll in so many sad and tragic ways over the past and we are hopeful that 2022 will bring better days. We live in hope that we can be with family and dear friends over the holidays. Be safe and be well.

Newly elected Parliament must deliver for workers

By Bea Bruske

President of the Canadian Labour Congress

The past two years have been a time of major upheaval -for Canada and for the world. We're currently dealing with the worst public health crisis in a century and the worst economy since the Great Depression.

On Election Day, September 20, an overwhelming majority of Canadians voted for a progressive recovery.

It is now up to us in the labour movement to continue to fight for what we know is right: a worker-centred pandemic recovery plan.

You, as long-time activists, know better than any of us that labour

unions are the key to defending workers' rights. We need your voices, experience, and power more than ever.

We are fighting to strengthen public health care, including taking better care of our seniors by removing profit from our long-term care, and actually implement pharmacare so affordable medicine is within reach for everyone.

The recovery must replace millions of lost jobs with better ones and permanently improve our EI system, so workers aren't left behind in tough times. We must invest in education, affordable housing, just transition and affordable, high-quality child care.

We need you – activists who are experienced, trained, and committed – to share your skills and experiences and help us build the strength in the movement we need to get the job done.

There is a lot of work ahead, and you can expect to hear from the CLC team regularly, and don't forget that you can always reach out to us too.

Sign up at canadianplan.ca to receive campaign updates and get involved Follow Bea on Facebook or on Twitter



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Health care team reunited!

Contracted hospital workers to be brought back in-house

By HEU Fall/21 GUARDIAN

“I’m close to retirement, and people ask, ‘Why do you stay?’ I stay because I know we can make things better for those who come behind us. For the people who will need to do this job in the future – so they can support their families while doing this work.”

Those are the words of HEU activist Catalina Samson, a food service worker, whose job was contracted out in 2004.

Samson shared the stage at an August press conference, where the B.C. government announced thousands of hospital housekeepers and dietary workers – employed by private multinational companies – would return to health authority jurisdiction. Workers will be covered by the facilities subsector collective agreement once the transition back in-house occurs.

This is an emotional victory for many HEU members, who fought long and hard for fairness and justice for all health care workers.

In 2002, the B.C. Liberal government introduced legislation that stripped health care workers’ collective agreements of job security provisions, and excluded them from the full protection of provincial labour laws.

More than 8,000 health care workers – mostly women and highly racialized – were fired, as health authorities contracted out hospital support services. Those workers were invited to reapply for their jobs, at half the wages, by the private corporations that won lucrative service contracts with the BC Liberals.

HEU immediately launched a



TOGETHER AT LAST | HEU members working for private contractors in hospitals celebrate the announcement that after almost 20 years, their jobs will return to the public sector.

massive organizing drive, including the Living Wage Campaign. Within three years, thousands of support service workers had rejoined the union. The hard work of negotiating first contracts with the private employers began.

Three more rounds of bargaining followed, with slow but steady gains.

In 2018, the B.C. legislature voted unanimously to repeal the 2002 law (Bill 29) that enabled contracting out, paving the way for the recent announcement.

“This is a significant act of solidarity with a group of workers who’ve been pushed to the margins by 20 years of privatization,” said HEU secretary-business manager Meena Brisard.

“It’s a move that will improve recruitment and retention rates for these critical jobs, and will ensure greater worker and patient safety.”

There are 21 commercial contracts that will be cancelled, representing more than 4,000 regular and casual workers (2,900 full-time equivalents). The transition process will begin this fall on a site-by-site basis.

“This has been decades of injustice that health care workers have gone through. Of not being treated fairly, of not being given benefits consistent with being someone who serves the



public in a public health care system, and not recognizing the profound value of their work.

This [change] will allow health care workers affected by these contracts to receive the same wages and benefits as other health care workers in other health authorities, who are paid to do exactly the same work.

So, this is about better care. This is about justice for people. This is about fairness, and this is about building a health care system that will continue to serve people in the decades to come.”

B.C. Minister of Health Adrian Dix, speaking at the announcement to bring privatized hospital workers back in-house.

Breaking the stranglehold of Big Pharma

By Donya Ziaee

It's a page out of the classic playbook: a Liberal government proposing progressive policies to appease voters then engaging in endless delay tactics when it comes to implementation.

The federal Liberals have been promising pharmacare for almost 25 years. It's no surprise why: the idea is overwhelmingly popular with the public. A poll last year found that almost nine out of 10 Canadians support a national pharmacare program.

But despite their rhetoric, successive Liberal governments have been buckling under the pressure coming from Big Pharma, which has been pulling out all the stops to prevent the realization of universal pharmacare.

In 2018, Prime Minister Trudeau appointed an advisory council for the implementation of pharmacare. And he made that promise a central part of his campaign when he ran for re-election in 2019. But in the two years since, he took little meaningful action to move Canada towards a national program. Liberal MPs also refused to support a private member's bill from the NDP in early 2021 that would set the legal framework for a provincially-run, universal, public pharmacare system.

Most recently, in the lead-up to the 2021 federal election, the Trudeau government announced a partnership with PEI that it says is "the first agreement to accelerate national universal pharmacare." While that deal will enhance the province's drug plan for those already covered, it is a far cry from universal pharmacare. The Liberal 2021 election platform also contained no new spending or timelines dedicated to moving forward on national pharmacare.

Multinational pharmaceutical companies have used their outsized



power to stall or undermine the implementation of pharmacare at every turn.

A search of the lobby registry reveals that federal government officials had a total of at least 555 contacts from Big Pharma, private insurers, and pharma-funded patient advocacy groups in the year 2020 alone.

In their most recent push, corporate lobbyists have aggressively targeted plans by the Liberal government to lower the price of patented drugs – the biggest reform to Canada's drug price regime in more than 30 years and a crucial step towards the realization of a publicly-paid national pharmacare program.

Since the government first proposed these regulations in 2019, Big Pharma has flooded the parliamentary committee studying these changes with objections, even issuing veiled threats about the availability of COVID-19 vaccines at the height of the pandemic.

The pharma lobby's aggressive push appears to have had the desired effect: the federal government has now three times delayed the implementation of these drug-pricing changes.

The power of the Big Pharma lobby also helps explain the government's stubborn refusal to support a waiver of intellectual property protections on COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organization – even after the United States joined more than 100 other

countries in supporting that call.

But the pandemic has also been an abject lesson about the dangers of leaving life-saving vaccines and treatments in the hands of the free market. Allowing pharmaceutical companies

to dictate how they are manufactured and distributed around the world has kept vaccines out of reach for billions of people in lower-income nations.

And while many of us sat in awe of the formidable power of science and innovation in saving lives at record speed, the pandemic also quickly taught us that we are at the mercy of pharmaceutical companies for getting that research out of labs and into people's arms.

But even as the pandemic exposed the dangers of Big Pharma's power over our lives, Trudeau's government worked to tighten that grip even further. Rather than expand publicly owned domestic production capacity in Canada – building on Canada's legacy as a leader in vaccine development and distribution – the government pumped even more public money into deals with pharmaceutical giants like Sanofi, Moderna, and Emergent BioSolutions.

We can't entrust private multinationals, whose sole motive is to maximize profits, with protecting human life. For that, we need elected leaders who choose to serve us, not corporate lobbyists.

Donya Ziaee is a Research and Analysis Officer at the Council of Canadians. This article first appeared in the Fall 2021 issue of Canadian Perspectives, an annual magazine published by the Council of Canadians. For more information, visit canadians.org.

Bottled water: a colossal waste

By Mark Calzavara

Bottled water is polluting, frivolous, and wasteful.

The vast majority of people who buy bottled water in Canada have easy access to exceptionally pure tap water for literally less than 1/1000th the price. And even at that exorbitant mark-up, they are not paying anywhere near what bottled water truly costs – for our aquifers, atmosphere, rivers, and oceans.

Blue Triton – formerly Nestlé – trucks hundreds of millions of single-use plastic water bottles to every corner of Canada (and even the United States) from their two bottling factories in Hope, British Columbia, and Puslinch, Ontario. Its Hope plant takes as much as 300 million litres of precious groundwater every year. A significant portion of that is sent to the U.S., for sale as Arrowhead brand bottled water.

The millions of litres of groundwater that Blue Triton removes every day fell as rain decades ago. It was filtered and purified by its slow journey down into deep underground aquifers. Shortly after Triton's pumps suck it up, that precious groundwater is packaged in plastic, wrapped in more layers of plastic, trucked as far as 3,000 kilometres away, and sold and drunk. Then begins the empty plastic bottle's thousand-year life in the local dump.

What a colossal waste. But this is what happens when water is commodified without any consideration for the real costs.

Triton has asked the Ontario government to renew their permits to take groundwater for 10 more years, allowing the company to sell billions of bottles over the next decade. Laid end to end, those single-use plastic bottles



would stretch around the planet over 130 times!

Groundwater resources are finite. Droughts, climate change, and over-

extraction continue to impact our limited water sources. At this pace, communities will not have enough for their future needs.

It's time to phase-out single-serving, disposable bottled water products for good. Whether we're fighting Nestlé, Blue Triton, or any other corporation, the most powerful tool against the commodification of water is an informed and organized network of people committed to safeguarding water.

Thank you for standing with us as we continue this fight. Please take a moment to sign our Pledge to Protect Water and Say No to Bottled Water. Go to canadians.org/actions.

Mark Calzavara is a Water Campaigner at the Council of Canadians. This article first appeared in the Fall 2021 issue of Canadian Perspectives, an annual magazine published by the Council of Canadians. For more information, visit canadians.org.

We asked some of our members and chapter volunteers to look at where the Blue Triton/Nestlé Pure Life bottled water sold in their communities was shipped from. Here is what they found:

SOURCE	FOUND FOR SALE IN	DISTANCE BY ROAD AND FERRY
Hope, B.C.	Whitehorse, YK	2,245 km
	Yellowknife, NT	2,126 km
	Flin Flon, MB	1,964 km
	Regina, SK	1,648 km
	Fort McMurray, AB	1,438 km
Puslinch, ON	Clarenceville, NL	2,974 km
	Stephenville, NL	2,409 km
	Lunenburg, NS	1,949 km
	Bridgewater, NS	1,939 km
	Pembroke ON	446 km
	Napanee, ON	293 km

ARTICLE

Tips for healthy DIGITAL HYGIENE

By Robert Matas

Jewish Seniors Alliance Magazine

- Don't pick up if you don't recognize the phone number; hang up if anyone asks for your credit card or bank details, or starts threatening you.
- Don't click on links in email or text from unknown senders. Ignore attachments and pop-ups. Go to the website to check out information instead of clicking on the link in email or a text.
- Set up alerts on bank accounts for withdrawals or transfers over a set limit. Don't use the same passwords on different sites. Change passwords regularly.
- Install anti-virus/malware software and spyware blockers; update operating system whenever available.
- Scammers play on your fear or appeal to greed. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. Be suspicious about anonymous callers who want to give you something for free. Resist the pressure to act immediately.
- If you are a victim, don't be too embarrassed to report it. Sunshine is the best disinfectant.

Additional Resources:

Search Online for the Websites

- **Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre** should be your first stop if you are a victim of fraud
- **The Little Black Book of Scams** is an easy-to-read booklet setting out what to watch for and where to report the scams.
- **Canadian Bankers Association** put together an informative cyber security toolkit.
- **RCMP** has a guidebook on security, and how to avoid frauds.
- **British Columbia Securities Commission and BC Seniors Advocate** have a five-minute video - *Understanding Elder Financial Abuse* - on how seniors could recognize, reject and report fraud.



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Thinking of "Travel"

Looking for Out of Country Medical, make sure to read the fine Print

By David J.A. Porteous EPC

Yes, after 20 months many have decided to Travel. While the COVID-19 Pandemic is not over and the risk is still here, most of us have been house bound for so long and the "need" to travel is great. For those of us who have decided to travel, the risk has been mitigated to a certain extent by having been vaccinated.

The good news is most Insurance companies are now selling out of country Medical Insurance to fully vaccinated travelers (and children under 12). Many are now quoting \$ 10,000,000 - that's right TEN Million! To some this may sound high but if you ended up in a US hospital with COVID or for some

other reason, the \$10,000,000 would probably be needed.

If you are fortunate to have a Group Travel Plan, make sure to purchase a Top Up out of Country Plan especially if your Group plan has a low limit as most do. You should at least get a top up to \$5,000,000. But \$10,000. Is preferred if traveling to the USA. Top Up plans are usually cheaper, because depending on the amount of coverage your Group plan has, the Top Up will most often become a second payor. This means your group plan limit is used up first and then if money is still owing it's paid under the top up plan. There is one exception: if your Group Plan is with Pacific Blue Cross and

you purchase a top up travel coverage through PBC the travel insurance policy becomes the first payor and a claim on the travel policy does not touch your group benefits.

Finally, be careful if you decide to purchase on line. We find most medical denials are with individuals who decided to purchase on line! Our recommendation is to call a licensed advisor who can shop the market and make sure your medical information will not jeopardize a claim.

David is a Licensed Insurance Nominee, Elder Planning Counselor, and a charter member of the Canadian Initiative for Elder Planning Studies. (CIEPS)

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REDress Project

By Lori Travis

On October 3, 2021, three members of SOAR 3-14, President Kay Noonan; Vice President Lori Travis and Secretary-Treasurer Fred Girling proudly stood in support with the Hospital Employees Union and Cupe 728 honouring and sadly remembering the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit People (MMIWG2S) at Bear Creek Park in Surrey, BC.

There were many red dresses hanging in trees symbolizing representation of those who never came home or are still missing.

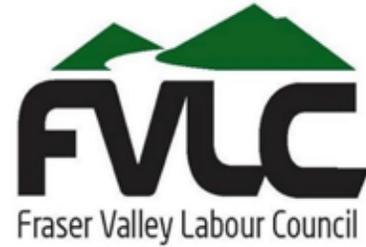
We were warmly welcomed with a drumming song, listened to an amazing, moving speech and enjoyed three songs by two talented sisters.

SOAR Chapter 3-14 stands proud to honour, remember, and acknowledge these Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit People.

We all know how important we all are—no matter colour, language, religion, or ethnicity.

Please never forget or ignore.

*Submitted by Lori Travis
VP SOAR 3-14
Lake Babine Nation
Beaver Clan*



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Who are we?

We are 10,000 strong, retired steelworkers and partners, organized in 34 local chapters across Canada.

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Annual dues are reasonable at \$12 for individual membership and \$15 for a couple.

Contact District 3 SOAR Coordinator Fred Girling: 1-604-999-7938 fredgirling@shaw.ca

usw.ca/soar

We need a United Nations convention on the human rights of older persons

By Diane Wood

Older women and men have the same rights as everyone else: we are all born equal and this does not change as we grow older. Even so, older people's rights are mostly invisible under international law.

There is currently considerable support at the United Nations, including in the office of the U.N. Secretary General, for the proposition that a Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons is needed in order to fill a gap in current international human rights protections.

Right now, women, children, the disabled and Indigenous persons all have U.N. recognized human rights but older persons have no such protections. The importance of a Convention is that, once it has been passed into law by a member nation, it becomes enforceable in that country through legal claims of human rights violations which are heard in the courts, and in this way, attract public attention.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Rights conventions apply to all persons regardless of age. HOWEVER, age is not listed explicitly as a reason why someone should not be discriminated against.

Some of the Rights of Older Persons to be protected by a U.N. Convention would include: quality health and residential care, housing, transportation, access to justice, freedom from abuse and protection from scams.

A United Nations Convention would:

- provide a reporting and accountability mechanism for U.N. Member States' actions towards older people
- provide a system of redress for

the violation of the rights of older people

- encourage ongoing dialogue among Member States, civil society organizations, Non Governmental Organizations, the older people themselves, through the monitoring of its implementation
- provide clarity on what older people's rights are and the minimum standards and actions necessary to protect them

As well, a Convention would:

- oblige ratifying states to adopt non-discriminatory laws
- provide the basis for advocacy, public awareness and education on the rights of older persons
- help older people live lives of dignity and provide minimum standards and actions necessary to protect older people

Adoption by the U.N. of a Convention requires the action of member nations. Sadly, our federal government has not seen fit to support a Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons, and so the government, through our local Members of Parliament need to be pushed and prodded by older persons

until it appreciates the importance of establishing this new international recognition of human rights.

The BC Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM) has met with NDP MP Peter Julian to raise, inform and discuss this issue and to ask for his support which he has given. Peter has committed to move this issue forward. BC FORUM is grateful for his support. All of us need to raise our voices whenever and wherever possible on this issue. BC FORUM is working with our allies on this provincially, nationally and internationally. Most recently BC FORUM worked with the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO) to develop a resolution to the National Pensioners Convention (NPF) held in September of this year calling for a U.N. Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons. The resolution was passed.

Please join us in supporting a U.N. Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons.

New address? New e-mail address?

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



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