



NewsBulletin

Volume 38, Number 1

March 2014



Fighting Bill 45
UNA files Charter challenge
Page 3

**Protecting
our pensions**
Pages 5-9

Hundreds pack bargaining meetings

Local 121 Rockyview Hospital members Cathy Atkinson, left, and Del Flach at the Calgary bargaining town hall meeting on January 27. Story and more photos on pages 12 and 13



It's almost spring and things are warming up – and it's more than just Alberta's weather

By Heather Smith
President, United Nurses of Alberta

With the festive season and most of winter behind us, things are warming up – and it's more than just the weather!

In January, members of UNA's Provincial Negotiating Committee met with RNs and RPNs at seven locations across Alberta. We discussed the status of negotiations, including the implications of Bill 45 and Bill 46 and changes the finance minister intends for the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP).

Members were justifiably concerned and angry. The unprecedented measures against unions contained in Bill 45 and Bill 46 and the regressive and unnecessary slashing of LAPP benefits made many wonder why the government is attacking Alberta's working people.

But it is not just workers like nurses, firefighters and government employees who are angered by these legislative and policy decisions. A group of seniors, opposed to changes to their pharmaceutical benefits, staged a sit-in at Health Minister Fred Horne's office. Post-secondary institutions are still reeling from budget cuts.

The Labour Coalition on Pensions is one of the groups preparing for the spring sitting of the Legislature. The unjustified assault on public sector pensions affects hundreds of thousands of Albertans. The Coalition submitted a written response to the proposed changes, held a telephone town hall, aired radio ads and created the website TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca to inform members and the public.

Rallies and community actions are now planned. Individuals are encouraged to write, email and meet their MLAs. The common message is that Albertans do not agree with these actions and will not forget when the next election rolls around. Watch for details about events at your worksite and in your community.

As for UNA's negotiations, they continue slowly. Bargaining dates have been set into May. Employers continue to seek rollbacks to several provisions that would allow elimination of the RN/RPN in-charge rule, see part-time employees lose designated days of rest, and allow regressive schedule changes across the province. Details are available on UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca/.

I thank members for participating in our Wear White Wednesdays professional advocacy campaign. Alberta Health Services has not officially expanded its "Scheduling Optimization" or "Workforce Transformation" plans, but rumors abound there will be more changes.

This NewsBulletin includes photos from Local 79's WWW walk January 29 at the old Edmonton General Hospital site. Snow that day reminded us UNA members are hearty souls. Spring will offer warmer opportunities to participate in worksite WWW walks. *Stay tuned!*

In solidarity,

Heather Smith, President, UNA

Provincial Office

700-11150 Jasper Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T5K 0C7
p 780-425-1025/1-800-252-9394
f 780-426-2093

Southern Alberta Regional Office

300-1422 Kensington Road NW
Calgary AB T2N 3P9
p 403-237-2377/1-800-661-1802
f 403-263-2908

www.una.ab.ca
nurses@una.ab.ca

[facebook.com/unitednurses](https://www.facebook.com/unitednurses)
twitter.com/unitednurses

Executive Board

President: Heather Smith H: 780-437-2477 W: 780-425-1025

1st Vice-President: Jane Sustrik C: 780-915-8367 W: 780-425-1025

2nd Vice-President: Daphne Wallace C: 780-991-4036 W: 780-425-1025 or 403-237-2377

Secretary/Treasurer: Karen Craik C: 403-510-5163 W: 780-425-1025 or 403-237-2377

North District: Roxann Dreger ♦ Susan Gallivan **North Central District:** Terri Barr

♦ Teresa Caldwell ♦ Jennifer Castro ♦ Susan Coleman ♦ Christina Doktor ♦

Jenna Knight ♦ Karen Kuprys ♦ Keith Lang **Central District:** Dianne McInroy

♦ Sandra Zak ♦ Wanda Zimmerman **South Central District:** Marie Aitken

♦ Kathy Bouwmeester ♦ Marie Corns ♦ Denise Palmer ♦ Leslie Perry ♦

JoAnne Rhodes ♦ Cameron Westhead **South District:** Maxine Braun ♦ John Terry

Published by the United Nurses of Alberta five times a year for our members

Editor: David Climenhaga **Production:** Kelly de Jong

Directors

Labour Relations:

David Harrigan

Finance and Administrative Services:

Darlene Rathgeber

Information Systems:

Andrew Johnson

PUBLICATIONS MAIL
AGREEMENT #40064422

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE
CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

UNITED NURSES OF ALBERTA
700-11150 JASPER AVENUE NW
EDMONTON AB T5K 0C7

Fight against Bills 45 and 46 and other possible legislation impacting other unions to continue in the courts



UNA President Heather Smith with union lawyer Ritu Khullar on January 8, moments after UNA filed its statement of claim with the Alberta Court of Queen's bench in Edmonton.

DESPITE the success of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees winning an injunction against Bill 46, it is likely 2014 will be a year of legal action against the Redford Government's legislative attacks on unions and workers' rights, including a challenge of Bill 45 by United Nurses of Alberta.

On February 14, Mr. Justice Denny Thomas of the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench slapped an injunction on the Alberta government, indefinitely suspending the law that could have forced 22,000 civil servants represented by AUPE to live with a contract imposed on them by legislative order.

"My analysis of the evidence presented here raises the issue that Alberta did not meet its obligation to bargain in

good faith," the judge wrote in his strongly worded decision, which is intended to remain in force until AUPE's constitutional challenge of Bill 46 has made its way through the courts – a process that could take years.

The law passed by the Legislature on December 11 is now known as the Public Service Salary Restraint Act. Premier Alison Redford has vowed to challenge the injunction and defend the law in the courts.

Justice Thomas's ruling means AUPE's right to binding arbitration, eliminated by the act, has been restored. AUPE immediately applied for the arbitration process to resume, while it continued bargaining with the government.

wear white Wednesdays



United Nurses of Alberta members braved the cold during an information walk on January 29, 2014 to raise public awareness about the impact nurse layoffs will have on safe patient care in our province.

The group of nurses gathered outside the Edmonton General Continuing Care Centre included members of UNA Local 79 (Edmonton General and Grey Nuns Community Care Centre), Local 301 (University of Alberta Hospital), Local 85 (Sturgeon Community Hospital), Local 196 (Edmonton Community), Local 302N (Cross Cancer Institute) and Local 154 (Youville Home).

continued from page 3

Meanwhile, On January 8, United Nurses of Alberta filed a court challenge of the other piece of Tory anti-union legislation, Bill 45, known as the Public Sector Continuation Act since it was passed on the same date.

Bill 45 attacks the association rights and collective bargaining rights of unionized public employees and the free-speech rights of all Albertans. With its draconian penalties, severe restrictions on free expression and drastic limits on the power of government to act without concern for natural justice, it may be the most serious attack on unions and their members in Canada since Confederation.

UNA Lawyer Ritu Khullar filed UNA's statement of claim arguing the law violates fundamental freedoms protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in addition Alberta's ban on all public service strikes, which predated Bill 45, also breaches the Charter.

UNA is seeking a declaration from the court that because parts of the act and the Alberta Labour Relations Code violate sections of the Charter they are of no force or effect. UNA's action was the first direct challenge to Bill 45.

In addition to its court actions, AUPE has challenged Bill 46 before the Alberta Labour Relations Board, arguing

the existence of the law amounted to bargaining in bad faith and in the courts it violates AUPE members Charter protections.

Bill 46 smashed the historic compromise legislated by the government of Premier Peter Lougheed in 1977, which took away AUPE's right to strike but replaced it with compulsory interest arbitration by an impartial arbitrator. This has since been applied to other unions, including UNA.

Bill 46 strips AUPE's right to arbitration but keeps the ban on strikes, effectively neutering the union and eliminating the collective bargaining process in any meaningful sense.

AUPE's fight should be a matter of serious concern to UNA members.

David Harrigan, UNA's Director of Labour Relations, told members at bargaining update meetings throughout Alberta it is widely thought similar bills with the AUPE scratched out and the names of UNA and HSAA penciled in sit in Labour Minister Thomas

Lukaszuk's desk drawer should those unions be so bold as to stand up for their members' rights in negotiations.

As a result, he said, AUPE's fight should be a matter of serious concern to UNA members.

A copy of the statement of claim is available on UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca



Fight to halt Redford Government attack on our pensions continues and grows

MAJOR rallies, information pickets, continual lobbying of MLAs and stepped-up letter writing are all part of the campaign by United Nurses of Alberta and other public sector unions against the government's plan to gut member pensions.

A major rally in Edmonton's Churchill Square was held March 2, after NewsBulletin went to press, the day before the current session of the Alberta Legislature opened. A smaller event was held at the opening. At press time, thousands of Local Authorities Pension Plan and Public Service Pension Plan members from across Alberta were expected to take part in both rallies.

A Day of Action with small rallies at worksites and public locations throughout the province is planned for March 20.

Approximately 300,000 Albertans would see their retirement security impacted by the changes – about two thirds now working for public employers and about a third already retired.

A major MLA lobbying campaign is also under way, with the Alberta Federation of Labour coordinating and preparing members for visits to their own MLA's constituency office to push back against the completely unneeded changes Finance Minister Doug Horner announced September 16.

The lobbying campaign received an encouraging start on Jan. 21, when the Labour Coalition on Pensions organized a province-wide "telephone town hall" with more than 8,500 participants listening in to the 85-minute broadcast.

continued on page 6 ►

Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan addresses a pension town hall at Edmonton's MacEwan University on March 2. Seated from left to right: HSAA President Elisabeth Ballermann; AUPE President Guy Smith; CUPE Alberta President Marle Robertson; and UNA President Heather Smith.

Redford Government's planned LAPP Changes:

Among the changes planned to the Local Authorities Pension Plan and other public service pensions by the government this spring are:

- Elimination of early retirement incentives for workers covered by the plans, including complete elimination of the "85 factor" – employees will have to work much longer to get much less
- Elimination of guaranteed cost-of-living adjustments, meaning the erosion of the value of pensions over time
- A cap on contributions that could result in cuts to retirees benefits if we face another international financial crisis like the one in 2008

For more information and to use the calculator, visit: TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca/.



continued from page 5

#ABpension

During that call, close to 640 people used the pension calculator on the Coalition's website – TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca – and 170 used the letter writing tool to send a letter to Premier Alison Redford expressing their unhappiness with the changes. Many indicated their willingness to email, write, telephone or visit their MLA.

Thousands more have used the pension calculator since.

In addition to UNA President Heather Smith, CUPE Alberta President Marle Robinson, HSAA President Elisabeth Ballermann and AFL President Gil McGowan, the town hall panel included Brendan George, a partner in Vancouver-based George & Bell Consulting, an independent, professional actuarial firm.

UNA President Smith urges all members to take this issue very seriously, write letters and take part in public events.

The George & Bell report all but demolished the government's talking point that the province's public service pension plans need major rollbacks – which would slash the value of public service pensions by more than 25 per cent on benefits earned after January 1, 2016.

The independent study shows Alberta's largest public-sector pension plans are healthy and well on the way to returning to fully funded status.

UNA President Smith urges all members to take this issue very seriously, write letters and take part in public events.

"If the government's proposals aren't stopped, hundreds of thousands of Alberta public-sector workers will have to

work longer and pay more out of their own pockets to receive pensions that are significantly smaller and less secure," she said. "For younger workers, who will work most of their careers after the government's changeover date of January 1, 2016, the cuts will be particularly severe." ❧

UNA members in Jasper for AFL's Winter Labour School

MORE than 70 members of United Nurses of Alberta were in Jasper National Park from January 13 to 18 to participate in the annual Alberta Federation of Labour Winter Labour School.

Participants at the labour school spent their week immersed in a wide-range of course topics that included collective bargaining, duty to accommodate, labour history, leadership, occupational health and safety and dealing with inter-generational conflict.

UNA was also represented well among the class facilitators. UNA Secretary-Treasurer Karen Craik presented the "transforming conflict" course and Education Advisor Murray Billet was on hand to teach classes on facilitator training and host the Global Café. ❧



Attack on public pension plans can't be justified: Heather Smith

On January 27, 2014, the following opinion article by UNA President Heather Smith appeared in the Calgary Herald in response to a January 21 editorial in that newspaper supporting the government's plans to introduce major changes to the pensions of UNA members and other public employees.

IN an editorial supporting Alberta Finance Minister Doug Horner's plan to gut the pensions of tens of thousands of Albertans, the Calgary Herald got many facts wrong and twisted almost everything said by the unions representing approximately 290,000 members of the province's public service pension plans.

In mid-September, Finance Minister Doug Horner announced that major changes would be made to Alberta's four public-sector pension plans, including the largest, the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP), in which almost all of the members of United Nurses of Alberta are enrolled.

The Herald's Jan. 20 editorial accuses Alberta public service unions like UNA of advising the government to "twiddle its thumbs" while future pension commitments become "an overbearing burden on taxpayers."

Nothing could be further from the truth. What the unions have told Horner and the government is that the pension plans are healthy now and measures have been put in place by plan members and employers to return them quickly to fully funded status.

So plan administrators are not blindly relying on investment returns to improve, as the Herald falsely claims, and no one in any of these plans is "rolling the dice" on financial market performance.

What the unions do argue is that the actions Horner and the government propose to take will undermine the future viability of the pension plan members paid for.

To support this argument, the coalition of affected unions engaged the services of an independent professional actuary to examine the

plans – and it was that impartial study by Vancouver-based George & Bell Consulting that showed the changes proposed by Horner were neither justified nor sensible.

So when the Herald says, "hope is not a strategy," it is being disingenuous, because the LAPP and other pension plans' boards have already adopted practical and effective strategies – action that Horner's plans will undermine.

It is true, as the Herald asserts, that "Horner has clearly and repeatedly stated that although there is no crisis today, the long-term sustainability of these plans must be addressed now."

Yes, Horner has said that. The trouble is, it's quite misleading – as the minister must know.

This is because the long-term sustainability of the plans has been addressed by members and employers, as the impartial actuarial study shows. That's the same view, by the way, as the one held by the professionals who now manage the plans. So Horner is, in fact, "manufacturing a crisis" for the government's own purposes.

The Herald also denies Horner's proposed changes are "draconian" and describes them as "reasonable measures to prevent future pension commitments from becoming an overbearing burden on taxpayers."

Never mind that taxpayers aren't directly on the hook for pensions paid for by members and their employers, Horner has proposed a cut of 25 per cent or more in benefits earned after January 1, 2016, and if that isn't "draconian," it's hard to imagine what is.

Someone's doing some "spinning" all right, just as the Herald claims, but it's not union leaders!





green corner

Green practices at Mazankowski Heart Institute not all hot air

THERE'S lots of interest nowadays in green practices in health care – particularly in efficient operation of large regional hospitals.

UNA members may not be aware that the University of Alberta Hospital's Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute, which began operations in 2009, is a world leader in energy efficiency and environmental design.

The facility should be able to put more than \$1 million a year back into patient care thanks to the environmentally friendly design of the facility, Alberta Health Services said in 2011.

AHS says utility costs are today expected to run at around 5 per cent of a modern hospital's operating cost, but the heart institute is able to do better thanks to design features that include:

- Room occupancy sensors that turn off each of the building's lights and reduce ventilation when a room is unoccupied.
- Six heat-recovery wheels in the building's airstream that strip heat from the air before it leaves the building and preheat air as it enters
- Capture of heat from medical equipment, such as X-ray machines and MRIs so it can be fed back to pre-heat cold winter air before it enters the building 🍷

Green corner, on environmentally friendly topics likely to be of interest to UNA members, is brought to you by the Education, Communication and OH&S Committee.

continued from page 7

Imagine how the Herald would scream if Horner, instead, had decided to raid the bank accounts of RRSP owners to avert some imagined future crisis! Yet, when you consider the true source of pension contributions, his plan is not really that different – other than the fact public employees are easier to victimize.

It is also untrue, as the Herald and Horner claim, that retirees now collecting the pensions they paid for “won't be affected.”

The Horner plan also proposes the imposition of hard contribution caps on plan members. If we encounter another financial crisis like the one that happened when the bankers went wild in 2008, the only way to respond and keep the plans viable will be to cut benefits!

Younger workers will be hit first, but cuts to benefits for retirees will inevitably have to be considered in such a crisis – which is bound to happen sooner or later.

The Herald even tries to muddy the waters by pointing to vague problems in other jurisdictions – where, in some cases but not all, pension plans really are in trouble. But that's a question of management, and Alberta's plans have been soundly managed. So plan performance elsewhere is irrelevant here.

So, in the end, what's the Herald's bottom line?

Well, it quotes the Fraser Institute, a far-right “think tank” supported by donations from multinational corporations with an interest in destroying pensions for all workers and encouraging a globalized race to the bottom, saying these Alberta employees should be taken down a notch.

To support this, Herald cites the disgraceful fact that many other Albertans do not have fair pensions, something of which the Fraser Institute apparently approves, to make the untrue claim these are the people who “will end up footing the bill.”

And it disingenuously tries to pass off pensions that earn their owners an average of less than \$15,000 a year as “lavish.”

Someone's doing some “spinning” all right, just as the Herald claims, but it's not union leaders!

It's the government of Alberta and its supporters, and they ought to be ashamed. 🍷

Auditor General's report illustrates need to halt changes to public service pensions

THE report of the Auditor General released February 13 reinforces and supports the argument of public sector unions that changes to public employee pension plans are premature and have not been properly analyzed.

The approach taken by the Redford Government lacked consultation and testing of outcomes as recommended by the Office of the Auditor-General in its February 2014 report. The government clearly failed to make the case that its proposed changes are needed.

The Labour Coalition on Pensions, made up of public sector unions with members and retirees in Alberta public sector pension plans, urged Finance Minister Doug Horner to consider the recommendations by the Auditor General and ensure that proper consultation and outcomes testing has taken place before major changes to the plans are introduced.

“Unions have consistently recommended changes to governance of the plans that would improve stakeholder involvement in plan design changes to manage risks, as recommended by the Auditor General’s report, and that these changes have not been implemented by the government,” the Coalition release stated.

The Coalition noted specifically that the Auditor General concluded on page 31 of the report that it is “unclear whether the proposed reforms significantly increase the likelihood of the plans’ sustainability.”

Among the points made by the Auditor General’s report are the following:

- The Government of Alberta has not properly engaged plan stakeholders – the employees and employers who pay for the plans
- The government has not fully considered effects of the changes it is pushing through

Treasury Board and Finance—The Department's Oversight Systems for Alberta's Public Sector Pension Plans

SUMMARY
Why we did this audit
 We were directed in 2011 by the Auditor General to audit the Department's oversight systems for Alberta's public sector pension plans. As part of this audit, we met with those involved in Alberta's public sector pension system, including plan officials from the department and others. We wanted to understand:

- the roles and responsibilities of the various parties within Alberta's public sector pension system
- the oversight systems used
- the risk management systems used

During our audit planning, we decided to focus on the scope of our audit on the oversight systems used to manage risk within Alberta's public sector pension plans. We did not audit to have and functioning risk management processes in place for the plans, with clear systems and objectives for the oversight systems used to manage the risks of the plans. The oversight systems used to manage the risks of the plans are the responsibility of the department, which is the trustee and administrator of the plans. The oversight systems used to manage the risks of the plans are the responsibility of the department through the department's public sector pension legislation and oversight.

In September 2012, the minister asked plan boards to conduct a review of the plans and to submit proposals to improve the plans control systems. The department asked us to consider adding a layer of oversight to the department's oversight systems.

We knew the sustainability review conducted by the department with the assistance of the Auditor General would provide the department with the information needed to make the necessary changes to the plans. We wanted to ensure that the department's sustainability review would provide the information needed to make the necessary changes to the plans.

What we examined
 We audited the Department of Treasury Board and Finance's oversight systems for the following pension plans:


- Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP)
- Management Employees Pension Plan (MEPP)
- Public Service Pension Plan (PSPP)
- Social Services Pension Plan (SSPP)

Report of the Auditor General of Alberta

FEBRUARY 2014

- The government has not planned how any changes would actually be implemented
- The “hard cap” on pension contributions proposed by the government can in fact harm the plans’ sustainability

The government’s rushed process to major pension plan changes needs to be halted until appropriate consultation with stakeholders and rigorous analysis of the impacts of the government’s proposals has been completed, a process that cannot happen in a few weeks, the coalition said.

Approximately 300,000 Albertans, about a third of them retirees, and their family members are direct stakeholders in Alberta’s public sector pension plans. They are front-line workers in Alberta’s hospitals, schools, cities and towns. Most of the more than 27,000 members of United Nurses of Alberta are members of the Local Authorities Pension Plan. 

Student loan forgiveness available to nurses in some rural communities

NEWLY registered nurses may still be able to take advantage of a federal program that began accepting applicants in April 2013 to have part of their student loans forgiven if they are prepared to work in rural communities.

Under the program, nurses – as well as family doctors and residents, and nurse practitioners – can apply for partial Canada Student Loan forgiveness if they agree to work in one of more than 4,200 designated rural and remote communities with populations below 50,000. Designated locations include communities that provide health services to First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations.

Nurses are eligible to receive up to \$4,000 per year in Canada Student Loan forgiveness. For more information, nurses should contact the Canada Student Loans Program, found online at CanLearn.ca. Use the search terms “loan forgiveness” to find a link to a 2012 news release and an application form. 🍷

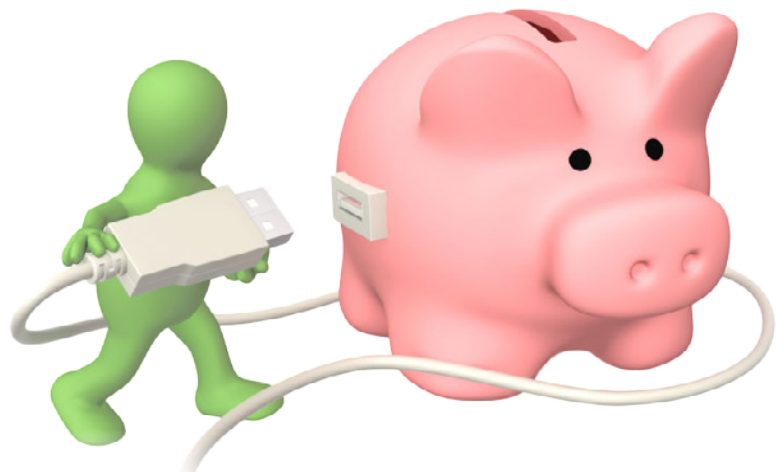
Nurses are eligible to receive up to \$4,000 per year in Canada Student Loan forgiveness.

UNA members encouraged to check their vacation rates on e-People

UNA members employed by Alberta Health Services are encouraged to check their vacation rates before and after their payroll transitioned to the e-People system.

In 2012 and 2013, AHS transitioned payroll services to the e-People payroll system and some employees soon expressed concerns that their vacation rates had not been properly transferred to the new system.

If an employee suspects their vacation rates are incorrect, the employee should contact her UNA Local Executive or Labour Relations Advisor. UNA can request that AHS Human Resources conduct a manual audit of the employee's earned vacation time. 🍷



Seniors hold sit-in at health minister's Edmonton constituency office

AFTER a January 16 occupation of Health Minister Fred Horne's Edmonton constituency office by members of the Public Interest Alberta (PIA) Seniors' Task Force, the group challenged the minister to stick to the facts in his response to their arguments.

The group of a dozen or so seniors spent the day and evening in Horne's office to protest the Alberta government's plan to eliminate the province's drug program for seniors in favor of a means-tested system after both the minister and Premier Alison Redford had previously committed not to eliminate the plan.

Since the fall, members of the group have been unsuccessfully seeking a meeting with Horne to find out the basis of the government's claim it can save \$180 million by changing the program, as it announced in last March's provincial budget.

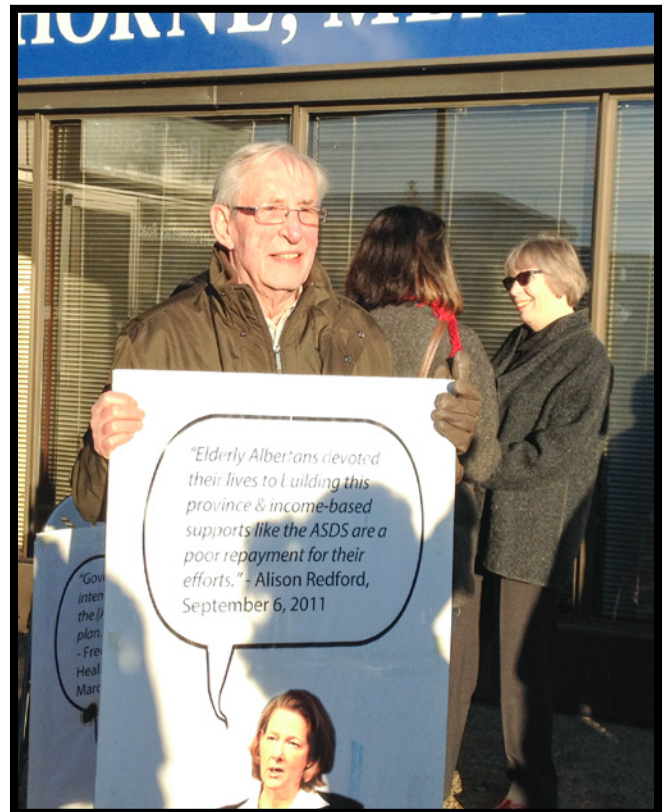
The sit-in ended just before 1 a.m. when Horne's Chief of Staff called the Edmonton Police and the seniors agreed to leave.

Horne's response on January 17 was "vague and disingenuous," PIA said in a news release the day after the sit-in.

Horne's claim that the government is not cutting benefits is "clearly erroneous to anyone who has been following this story in the media since the plan was announced in the 2013-14 provincial budget," the PIA release said.

"The government has consistently stated they will save \$180 million with their new pharmacies program and he has been quoted in the media and legislature talking about using an income-based system similar to the one in British Columbia," it said.

"If the Redford government is getting rid of the current universal seniors drug plan and replacing it with an income-based system, where seniors above a yet to be announced low-income threshold are expected to pay 100-per-cent of the cost of their drugs, then that can only be described as a cut in seniors benefits," said Task Force Chair Noel Somerville.



Public Interest Alberta Seniors' Task Force Chair Noel Somerville shortly before the sit-in began.

He asked: "If, as the Minister states, 'this initiative is not to cut benefits or costs as has been suggested' then why does the provincial budget say 'the new Pharmacare program is expected to generate \$45 million in savings in 2013-14 and annual savings of \$180 million beginning in 2014-15'?"

Horne agreed to meet representatives of the group. 🇺🇦



EDMONTON



MEDICINE HAT



GRAN



LETHBRIDGE



CA

RED
D
E
E
R



FORT MCMURRAY

Hundreds of UNA members pack bargaining town halls throughout province

HUNDREDS of UNA members packed meetings in hotel meeting rooms in major Alberta Centres in January to hear updates about the state of provincial negotiations and the government's proposed changes to their pension plans.

At town hall meetings in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Red Deer throughout the month, UNA members heard updates from President Heather Smith and Director of Labour Relations David Harrigan about these hot topics.


The employers have proposed significant rollbacks to the UNA collective agreement

Harrigan explained how the constant changes in Alberta Health Services senior management have slowed down the pace of negotiations and how the Redford Government's new anti-labour laws impact Alberta's nurses.

The employers have proposed significant rollbacks to the UNA collective agreement that would remove the designated day of rest, eliminate in-charge requirements and lead to a significant decrease in salary over the next four years, Harrigan explained.

UNA's negotiating committee currently has dates scheduled to meet the employer bargaining committee in February and March 2014.

At the meetings, Smith urged UNA members to contact Finance Minister Doug Horner and their MLA about the proposed changes to the Local Authorities Pension Plan.

See pages 5-9 of this News Bulletin for more information about the proposed changes to your pension plan. 



GRANDE PRAIRIE



CALGARY

Royal Alex RN and her paramedic husband help out in the Philippines

Terry Inigo-Jones

WHY did Beverly Parker go to the Philippines 10 days after deadly Typhoon Haiyan swept through the islands in November 2013?

Parker, a Emergency Room Registered Nurse in Local 33 at Edmonton's Royal Alexandra Hospital credits her training. "It's for the same reason we went to school to learn how to do our jobs in the first place. It's because we want to help people."

Parker and her husband Michael, a paramedic and member of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, went to the Philippines as part of a 15-person team put together by Canadian Medical Assistance Teams (CMAT) after the typhoon killed more than 6,000 people and left about four million homeless.

"I don't go to work every day because I get a paycheque," Beverly explains. "I do it because I want to help people." The mission was "the same kind of thing."

Two other UNA members were also on the same CMAT team. One, Teresa Berdusco, also of Local 33, described the trip as "a humbling experience." The team was the first medical personnel many of the typhoon victims had seen. "We did a lot of good."

The other, Lydia Chang of Local 301, who works on the Human Organ Procurement and Exchange program at the University of Alberta Hospital, said this was her first disaster medical exchange. "We were very impressed with the resiliency the people there showed the world in the midst of such circumstances where their lives were shattering," she said.

She recalled a sign they saw: "Roofless, homeless, but *not* hopeless!"

The deployment to the Philippines was the second CMAT mission for the Parkers. Their first deployment was to Pakistan after deadly flooding in 2010.

Beverly Parker during her mission to Pakistan. Background: Devastation in the Philippines.



A colleague had told Beverly he was going to Pakistan to help – and something clicked. Michael Parker remembers: "That evening, Bev had this look in her eye that said, 'I need more, I need to do more than working at the hospital in Edmonton.' ... I said: 'If you're going, then I'm going, too.'"

Three weeks later, they were in Sukkur, Pakistan, an area where the Taliban was active working out of a large guarded medical clinic.

The CMAT mission to the Philippines took a different approach, because the countryside is safer and most survivors had land to stand on.


Based in Ormoc City on Leyte Island, the 15-member team hit the road early every the morning and

headed to remote hamlets in pickup trucks to set up a clinic. Patients lined up all day. In their 21-day mission, the team saw nearly 2,000 patients.

Work and living conditions were tough. "It was hot and wet. The temperature was about 40 C and it didn't cool at night. It took about 45 gallons of water a day to keep our team hydrated," says Michael.

But the work is rewarding. The unofficial slogan for the locals became "*bangon* Philippines" or "*bangon* Ormoc" and it could be seen everywhere on hand-made banners and signs. "*Bangon*" means "rise up."

The Parkers came back to Alberta full of appreciation for their friends and colleagues who made it possible for them to take part in the mission by caring for their house and dogs, and even putting up a Christmas tree.

Beverly had to find colleagues to take over her work shifts at short notice to get the time off to go. She posted a plea on Facebook and 10 shifts were snapped up in only two hours. 

Nurses should be concerned as Conservatives move forward on anti-labour, anti-democratic agenda with nothing for health

By Anil Naidoo, CFNU

SINKING in the polls and facing the possibility of more bad news to come from the Senate/PMO scandal, the Harper Conservatives are desperate to “change the channel.” Using the Winter Olympics and the wonderful effort of Canada’s athletes as cover, the government has presented its budget – pushing a disturbing agenda while hoping Canadians are paying no attention.

The budget itself is hollow and designed merely as a set-up for next year’s election. But the Conservatives introduced two bills that are even more troubling than the scandals and cover-ups: C-525 (the Employee’s Voting Rights Act) and C-23 (the Fair Elections Act).


C-525 is the most recent and dangerous of the Conservative attacks on labour, imperiling the rights of workers in the federal sector by attacking union certification and making it much easier to decertify unions. This bill deems all workers who do not take part in a certification vote to have voted against the union. The bill is so flawed, even corporations that deal with the federal government oppose it. They realize that Canada’s long-standing system of bargaining and negotiating with unions works well and serves everyone.

The ability to organize into unions, bargain collectively, negotiate and win rights for workers has led to better health and safety, wages and quality of life for Canadians. All workers benefit from what organized labour negotiates. C-525 dramatically stacks the deck against workers, first in the federal sector, but also as example to spark a “race to the bottom” among provincial governments.

Bill C-23, the so-called “Fair Elections Act,” is the Conservatives’ response to federal court and Elections Canada investigations of their party’s defiance of the rules in the “In-and-Out” and Robocalls scandals. The bill strips most powers from the independent Chief Electoral Officer and prevents Elections Canada from trying to increase voter turnout, now at historic lows. Instead, the Commissioner of Elections, responsible for enforcing election laws, would no longer be independent but would report to partisan politicians.

Meanwhile, scandals and attacks on Canadian institutions also mean the Conservatives’ failure on health care policy has not received the attention it deserves. The budget all but ignores health care beyond minor research and education funding. Transfers of funds continue to decline and the 2004-2014 Health Accord will not be renewed, impacting both funding and universality.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions continues to press politicians of all parties for positive action on health. On February 4, with nurse union presidents from across the country, CFNU held a very successful Parliamentary breakfast at which MPs and Senators heard evidence supporting the \$11-billion potential savings of a national pharmacare program. Canada is the only developed country with universal health care to not have a national drug program.

On March 31, as the Health Accord ends, public actions coordinated by the Canadian Health Coalition will be held across the country highlighting support for medicare and the failures of the Conservatives. Nurses need to take part and show their support for improving, rather than downgrading, public health care in Canada. 





OH&S and PRC concerns: understanding the difference

By Dewey Funk
UNA OH&S Advisor

REGISTERED Nurses often wonder, what is the difference between an Occupational Health and Safety Concern and a Professional Responsibility Concern?

Consider this example:

On February 17, 1976, at the Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, three nurses decided not to admit another patient to the ICU where they were working due to their professional responsibility to provide proper care to the patients there were looking after.



*Overcapacity at Rockyview Hospital, Calgary in 2009
Furniture and equipment partly obscures a fire exit.*

The basis of their argument was that if another patient had been admitted to the unit, it would have become unsafe for the other patients under their care.

They were disciplined for insubordination, and the dispute involved arguments over whether professional responsibility concerns trumped direction by a manager.

The nurses grieved the three-day suspensions they had been handed and their grievances went to arbitration. The arbitrator ruled that since management rights were defined under the collective agreement, the situation the nurses had faced fell under the “work now grieve later” rule and

the discipline should stand. One member of the arbitration panel dissented.

Of note in that 1976 Ontario arbitration was the nurses’ contention that they were professionally responsible for the safety of their patients.

However, the arbitration ruling said the “safety exception” could not be extended “to protect persons who are not parties to the collective agreement from personal danger.”

This in turn prompted the union to bargain to have professional responsibility provisions included in their collective agreements. Mount Sinai Hospital agreed and the a PRC clause became part of their collective agreement in 1977.

What this means is that OH&S Concerns are about hazards nurses or other workers themselves may face. PRC concerns are about patient care.

This does not mean there is never any overlap. An example of overlap between PRC and OH&S concerns is overcapacity beds.

Questions that might be raised include:

- Is there appropriate equipment in the room to provide proper patient care? This is a PRC.
- Are there call bells? Can the nurse access the call bell in the case of an emergency in which her safety might be at risk? In this case, the call bell question could be raised as both PRC and OH&S concerns.

Occupational Health and Safety is a legislated right for employees. The right to raise Professional Responsibility Concerns is negotiated under the collective agreement.

United Nurses of Alberta won the right to PRCs in the UNA Provincial Agreement after the strike of 1980. 🍷

“AHS needs to stop pushing employees who are sick to come back to work too quickly.”

Heather Smith

UNA president urges caution as influenza season sees outbreak of calls for mandatory vaccinations

THIS winter’s influenza season was marked by another outbreak of calls by legislators, health care managers and journalists for flu vaccinations to be made mandatory for all health care workers.

In response, United Nurses of Alberta stated clearly it supports calls for an increase in overall vaccination rates among health care employees, but urged the government of Alberta not to fall into the trap of focusing on the wrong issue.

“Influenza immunization is only a shot in the arm for infection control,” UNA President Heather Smith in early January.

That is, vaccination programs are only a small part of the overall response that is required to prevent exposure to influenza and the spread of this serious disease in health care settings. Other components include routine hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, isolation policies, and sufficient capacity in the system to meet a surge in patients and adequate staffing.

Health Minister Fred Horne told journalists on January 3 that fewer than half of Alberta’s health care employees have been vaccinated and pointed to the need for higher rates of flu vaccination among health workers as the best way to control the disease this season.


“We also need to be diligent about the other aspects of influenza control,” Smith responded that afternoon. “UNA was pleased Mr. Horne rejected the idea of a mandatory vaccination program, which we believe is both unethical and likely to be ineffective.”

UNA encourages the minister to emphasize other measures, especially ensuring there is adequate capacity in the health care system to handle the surge of patients expected every flu season, Smith said.

She also urged Horne to encourage Alberta Health Services to stop pressing employees who are ill to return to work too quickly because of staffing shortages.

“Obviously, going to work when you have the flu is going to spread the flu,” she said. “AHS needs to stop pushing employees who are sick to come back to work too quickly.”

Smith questioned the cost and complexity of tallying the number of health care workers who have been immunized at hundreds of worksites and providing regular updates to the public, which Horne promised to do.

“If resources are limited, we need to concentrate on front-line health care, not on trying to blame working people for structural flaws in the system caused by underfunding and poor planning,” she stated. 





Members of the UNA Local 415 executive at South Health Campus attended their orientation last month at the new facility in Calgary. From left to right: Tim Bantle (president), Barb Campbell (secretary), Bobbi Sheppy (vice-president), Joanne Steedsman (treasurer), and Denise Palmer (South Central District representative).

The newly formed UNA Local 415 currently represents more than 760 employees at the south Calgary facility, which opened in 2013.

Health Coalition warns of danger if Health Accord lapses

THE Canadian Health Coalition (CHC) is raising the alarm over the impending end of the Canada Health Accord and calling for public health care supporters in Canada to take part in a national day of action on March 31, the day the accord expires.

The CHC, a national public advocacy organization dedicated to the preservation of medicare in Canada, warns that expiry of the national Health Accord means the end of federal leadership in health care and cost of \$36 million to health transfers over the next decade.

March 31 will be the last day national health care standards can be enforced across the country, and the loss of the \$36 million will provide a pretext for provincial governments in the hands of market fundamentalist parties to enact a broad program encouraging private and for-profit health care.

March 31 events throughout Canada will be posted on the CHC website – www.healthcoalition.ca – and Alberta events in which UNA is involved will also be posted on our union website – www.una.ab.ca. 🍷

Get ready for 'Sunshine List' exposure to come to AHS

THE Alberta's controversial "Sunshine List" of civil servants who earned base salaries above \$100,000 per year will soon be coming to Alberta Health Services as well.

The list of top-paid direct government employees release at the end of January will be extended to include employees of AHS and the province's universities and colleges, Accountability, Transparency and Transformation Associate Minister Don Scott said on February 4.

The original list of 3,100 names released to the public included only 88 members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, which represents close to 2,000 direct employees of the government. Most of the rest are senior civil service managers.

Of the 88 union members, almost all were research scientists employed by various government departments and all but one or two earned base salaries well under \$110,000. The highest-paid AUPE member on the list earned \$127,000

Scott said AHS and universities and colleges will be given time and guidance before they are required to contribute names and pay details to the list.

Alberta Health Services told media it is making preparations to comply with the disclosure policy and is waiting for the government to set out its timeline for compliance. 🍷

Know *your* Rights

Report from Director of Labour Relations **David Harrigan**



Current Employer salary proposal would amount to rollback for UNA members

ALBERTA Health Services and the other employers subject to the UNA Provincial Collective Agreement opened the 2013 round of bargaining with monetary proposals that if agreed to would result in a rollback in salary for employees represented by United Nurses of Alberta.

A new offer from the employer has been put on the table, but would also result in a pay cut for UNA members.

The employer initially proposed an agreement that would have seen no pay increases in the first three years of a four-year agreement, with a 2-per-cent increase in the final year.

The revised employer position would see no pay increase in the first year, a 1-per-cent lump-sum payment in the second year, a 1-per-cent lump-sum payment in the third year on the condition UNA agrees to elimination of designated days of rest for part-time employees, and a 2-per-cent pay increase in the final year.

The employers' proposed 1-per-cent lump-sum payments would be approximately half of what UNA members receive *every six months* under the current agreement. This would


mean an actual 2-per-cent pay reduction for UNA members – the only public sector union for which the employer proposes to actually cut pay.

In addition, according to the most recent release from Statistics Canada, Alberta saw its annual inflation rise by

2.1 per cent in December – a much higher increase than in the rest of the country. So combined with the elimination of the lump-sum payment, the employer proposal equals an immediate reduction of 4 per cent.

All indications are that the cost of living in Alberta will continue to increase over the next four years.

All indications are also that the cost of living in Alberta will continue to increase over the next four years. Statistics Canada reports the average weekly earnings of Albertans rose by 15.4 per cent between 2008 and 2012. The Alberta Government forecasts an increase of 3.5 per cent in average weekly earnings throughout the current year. In addition, the average weekly earnings of other Albertans are expected to rise during 2014.

The effects of the rollback proposed by the employers would be intensified when added to employer proposals to remove designated days of rest and eliminate charge pay. 

This article was based on the most recent of a series of factsheets on UNA's 2013-2014 round of bargaining with AHS and other employers. Employers are still seeking significant rollbacks in several areas important to Alberta's nurses.

Copies of this factsheet are available by clicking on the Negs 2013 icon on UNA's web page – www.una.ab.ca.

wear white Wednesdays

OUR profession © OUR jobs



www.una.ab.ca
facebook.com/unitednurses
twitter.com/unitednurses

