

October 2013



United Nurses of Alberta
NewsBulletin



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By Heather Smith
President, United Nurses of Alberta

UNA won't roll over and let nurses' retirement savings be eviscerated

IN the last edition of the NewsBulletin, I wrote about destructive changes affecting our profession and undermining the safety of patient/resident/client care.

In response, United Nurses of Alberta launched the WWW campaign (Wear White Wednesdays) as a visible statement nurses are standing up for our profession, our jobs and our collective agreement. A huge thank you must go out to Local Executives and individual members for your support of WWW.

RN and RPN pins have now been sent to every Local. Local Executive members are distributing the pins directly to nurses in worksites across the province. If you have not yet received your pin, check with your Local President.

As I expected, no bargaining occurred during July or August. We have bargaining dates for the end of September, then two or three days in each of October, November and December. Watch for Negotiations 2013 fanouts in your workplace, and check UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca – for information about the status of bargaining. The Negotiating Committee has asked Local Presidents to update the phone fanout and



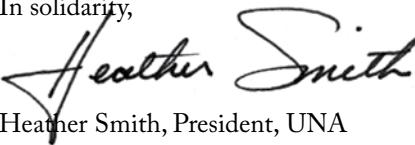
email information of all members. If we need to share urgent information with you about negotiations, it is imperative we have correct contact information.

While not at the bargaining table, an immense change has occurred to employee benefits. I am referring to the unnecessary and vicious assault on the Local Authorities Pension Plan announced by Finance Minister Doug Horner.

Please read the information on page 3 of this NewsBulletin. Our union coalition, which includes UNA, the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL), Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), is now considering our fightback strategies.

Stay tuned because we are not just going to roll over and allow the minister of finance to mislead the public and eviscerate the retirement savings nurses and other workers have contributed to for years.

In solidarity,


Heather Smith, President, UNA

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Government's radical changes to your pension plan will do grave harm

Speaking up for public pensions, from left to right, UNA President Heather Smith, CUPE Alberta President Marlie Roberts, Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan, HSAA President Elisabeth Ballermann and AUPE President Guy Smith



ON September 16, United Nurses of Alberta and other Alberta public sector unions finally received word from the Redford Government on what it actually intends to do with the province's four public sector pension plans. Finance Minister Doug Horner had been hinting for weeks big changes were coming – but he had kept mum on what those changes would be.

Horner's announcement at Government House in Edmonton was clothed in soothing phrases, but the reality was not encouraging. The government intends to implement many provisions that will seriously undermine the Local Authorities Pension

Plan (LAPP), which includes many of UNA's present members and may also affect those already retired.

"The government's proposal would radically change the defined benefit nature of the plan..."

And while Horner said the government is willing to talk, and promised to consult the unions between now and the end of 2013, the key points in his plan were not really up for negotiation. If unions didn't want to go along with his changes, Horner said confidently, he personally was ready for the fight.

The tightly scripted September 16 announcement was designed to let Horner control the agenda, the assumptions and the entire narrative of the alleged need for changes to the LAPP, the Public Service Pensions Plan, Special Forces Pension Plan and Management Employees Pension Plan.

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In fact, the cuts outlined in Horner's strategy are not necessary. A plan is already in operation under which LAPP workers and employers are sharing the cost of balancing the LAPP's pension plan deficits over coming years.

Nor are the deficits in reality that serious. LAPP has more than \$23 billion in assets to pay for the pension promises already made. While the current 82-per-cent funded status is a concern, it is normal for the funded status of defined benefit plans to fluctuate. The additional contributions from employers and employees should move the plan to full funding in 15 years or less. The finance minister himself has admitted the plans are not in crisis.

How extreme are the government's proposals? Among the changes the government plans to swiftly implement, by January 1, 2016, are:

- Elimination of the “85 Factor” by the start of 2016, which would mean severe reductions for plan members who retire before age 65. Members with 30 years of service can now retire at age 55 with unreduced benefits. But any member with service after January 1, 2016, will see some reductions. Plan members whose service is entirely after January 1, 2016, could still retire at 55, but their pension would be reduced by 60 per cent.
- Elimination of the early retirement benefit is another reduction for members who retire before age 65. Under the old plan, their pensions were reduced by 3 per cent each year their age was less than 65, or their combined age and years of pensionable service were below 85. For example, a person retiring at 60 with less than 20 years service would have their pension reduced by 15 per cent. Plan members whose service is entirely after Jan 1, 2016, would have their pension reduced 6 per cent



a year, meaning a 30-per-cent reduction in pension income in this example.

- No more guaranteed cost-of-living increases for pensioners for future service. Instead of guaranteeing annual cost-of-living increases (currently 60 per cent of inflation), these increases will now be capped at 50 per cent and will only be granted if the plan's funding is at a level determined by the government to be appropriate. So life will get tougher for UNA members relying on the LAPP as they grow older.
- A cap on pension premiums paid by plan members. This will starve the system of revenue in difficult times. It could result in more cuts later on – including cuts to pensioners' incomes.

The government's proposal would radically change the defined benefit nature of the plan, not just for future employees, but for future service by current employees who wish to stay on the job. The proposal also dramatically shifts risk from the government and employers to plan members.

Because of LAPP participation rules that will not change under the government's plan, many new part-time employees may in the future question the security and value of the plan and choose not to exercise their option to join – threatening both the LAPP's long-term viability and the benefits of retirees.

The government says benefits that have already been earned will not be affected. But the cuts will hurt newer and younger workers. They will also be damaging for anyone who retires after January 1, 2016. The government-imposed contributions cap also means that if the plan faces any financial challenges, existing benefits including pensions may have to be cut.

Despite the government's earnest talk about sustainability, the effect of the changes will potentially reduce future contribution rates by 3 to 4 per cent a year.

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UNA's 2013 AGM:

The time is now, more than ever!



THE time is *now, more than ever!*

- **Now more than ever** unions are essential to nurses and to all working people.
- **Now more than ever** public health care is imperative to the well being of all Albertans and Canadians.
- **Now more than ever** nurses' professional responsibility is a key to preserving quality and safety in health care.
- **Now more than ever** fair pensions are the key to the dignified retirement Canadians who have toiled and contributed deserve.
- And **now more than ever** – unfortunately – all of these positive aspects of our lives as nurses, health care workers, union members and Canadians are under assault by right-wing governments, corporations and their tireless publicists.

That is why "*Now More than Ever*" – with the hands of a ticking clock visible in the image – is the theme and

logo of the 2013 Annual General Meeting of the United Nurses of Alberta.

UNA's 36th AGM runs this year from Tuesday, November 19, to Thursday, November 21. At press time, speakers had not yet been chosen, but the tone of the event is bound to be focused, businesslike and serious with the difficulties and dark government hints faced by nurses in bargaining, and the Redford Government's assault on fair public service pensions announced on September 17.

Advocacy for nurses, nursing and a healthy society will be the underlying theme of the speakers, who are expected to include representatives of the National Nurses United in the United States and Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions President Linda Silas – who can be expected to provide some hopeful thoughts on how we can move from the challenging present to a positive future.

In addition to the serious business of bargaining and defending benefits that UNA members and other trade unionists fought long and hard to preserve, the 2013 AGM will be the occasion of several important elections. 

OUR profession → OUR jobs

wear white Wednesdays



Wearing the white gains momentum among Alberta's nurses

THE decision by hundreds of Alberta nurses to wear white at work on Wednesdays – and through the rest of the week – to demonstrate their concern with Alberta Health Services plans to replace regulated nurses with unskilled and unregulated aides continues to gain momentum.

Hundreds of nurses have taken part in “Wear White Wednesday” information walks at health care facilities throughout the province, and many more are wearing white uniforms and RN or RPN pins at work.

Info walks have taken place in such communities as Olds, Wainwright, Okotoks, Westlock, Drumheller,

Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton, St. Albert, and many more are planned.

“We continue to urge UNA members to wear white and to wear appropriate pins because it is an effective way to demonstrate to patients and their families how many front-line nursing jobs are being done by unregulated personnel,” said UNA President Heather Smith.

“Wearing white at work sends a powerful message about our profession, our professionalism and the danger Albertans will face if our jobs disappear,” she concluded. 

Photo: UNA Local 415 at the South Health Campus wore white at rally in support of Global Nurses United Wear White Worldwide event on September 17, 2013.

'Workforce transformation' a radical and dangerous experiment

IT'S been called by a number of innocuous sounding names: "workforce transformation," "clinical workforce strategic plan," "scheduling optimization."

United Nurses of Alberta President Heather Smith has termed it an effort to "de-skill the work done by Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses and substitute them with less-skilled nurses or unskilled health care aides."

Former Alberta Liberal Leader David Swann, a physician, described it as "a radical health care experiment ... to see how few Registered Nurses can be employed in the health care system before it breaks."

Alberta Health Services says it's nothing to worry about, just a pilot project at a couple of hospitals seeking ways to find the right mix of health care providers.

But there's every reason for Alberta's nurses to be gravely concerned by the pilot "workforce

transformation" experiment being conducted by AHS in four Edmonton wards, two at the Royal Alexandra Hospital and two at the University of Alberta Hospital.

The result in those two surgical and two medical wards, says UNA Researcher Judith Grossman, is a decrease of 25 to 40 per cent of the regulated health care employees working with patients. A total of 23 RNs are known to have seen their positions eliminated as a result.

The same wards have also seen the addition of 12 out-of-scope employees to manage the new workforce — a replacement of skilled and regulated nurses with unregulated aides and unneeded managers.

Extrapolated across the health care system, that could mean hundreds, or even thousands of RN and RPN layoffs — a health care experiment as devastating as the one wrought by Ralph Klein's government in the mid-1990s.

This is why Heather Smith warns Albertans to beware of "disappearing nurses." And it's why large numbers of Alberta RNs are wearing white and RN and RPN

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Members of UNA Local 33 at the Royal Alexandra Hospital held an information walk on September 18, 2013.



Members of Local 38 in Wainwright.



Members of UNA Local 73 in Westlock

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tags at work on Wednesdays and through the week – so that patients and their families can clearly see how the numbers of regulated nurses are being eroded by AHS experimentation.

For its part, AHS argues that such conclusions cannot be extrapolated from what it's doing in the Edmonton wards, but Alberta's Registered Nurses – and anyone interested in cost-effective and safe health care – should be seriously concerned.

There is plenty of evidence that eliminating nurses and replacing them with non-professional aides lowers the quality of health care and increases risks for patients.

To make matters worse, AHS has combined this dangerous policy with offensive bargaining proposals that appear to be designed to facilitate more of the same

in contract negotiations with nurses. At the same time as they have a \$106-million surplus in the AHS budget – enough to hire well over 1,000 more full-time experienced RNs for a full year.

"Workforce transformation' potentially amounts to a massive reduction in care for Albertans in the health care system," Smith says. "That's why we're wearing white, so Albertans can see what's really happening here."

Even in the days of Ralph Klein, she observed, the government's plans were at least obvious and not being done by stealth as if they were a mere management strategy.

"We've got to let people know what's happening," she concluded.



UNA Local 302N members at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton



Members of UNA Local 120 held an information walk in Lethbridge

More than 2,700 people ask health minister to drop ‘transformation’ scheme

LITERALLY thousands of Registered Nurses and their supporters have written Alberta Health Minister Fred Horne to urge him to abandon a dangerous experiment in “workforce transformation” if it means the elimination of large numbers of regulated nurses from health care worksites.

Using an on-line form set up by UNA in July on the specialty website NursesMakeTheDifference.ca a total of 2,763 people had sent an email to Horne by press time urging him not to staff hospital wards with too many unregulated and non-professional employees.

“Dear Minister Horne,” says a online letter on the site, which may be modified to suit the writer’s views and form of expression, “I hope that you will pay attention to the warnings of Alberta’s nurses and direct Alberta Health Services not to do any more to harm the safe, quality front-line heath care Alberta’s nurses provide.”

The letter also warned the minister “reliance on unregulated and non-professional staff will result in danger



An image of NursesMakeTheDifference.ca

and far worse health outcomes for patients, who could be any one of us.

“It is really irresponsible of Alberta Health Services and the Redford Government to allow such serious degradation to front-line health care to go on,” the letter says.

Visit NursesMakeTheDifference.ca to contribute your own thoughts to this debate.

AHS promises no nursing jobs will be lost at High River Hospital

ALBERTA Health Services has made a commitment to maintain all Registered Nursing jobs at the High River General Hospital.

AHS and the government have stated that all services at the facility have been returned to pre-flood levels despite the plan to close 25 long-term care beds in the facility and replace them with a lower level of care in a private-sector facility.

However, AHS has indicated the bed closings will not impact the number of RN jobs at the hospital. AHS CEO Dr. Chris Eagle made the commitment in discussions with UNA in early August.

Eagle recognized the hard work and dedication of the membership of UNA Local 80 during and after the flooding that ravaged High River. He committed to working with the leadership of Local 80 to ensure all Registered Nurses working in High River continue to work in the hospital and that services are restored as quickly as possible.

AHS and the operator of a new private-sector facility in High River have confirmed that the 25 long-term care beds slated to close in the High River General Hospital will be replaced in the private facility by Designated Assisted Living beds.



WCB accepts second-hand smoke as cause of 'compensable disease'

By Dewey Funk
UNA OH&S Advisor

I RECENTLY received a copy of the April 2013 list of occupational disease fatalities accepted by the Workers' Compensation Board of Alberta.

Among the descriptions of the deaths suffered by Alberta working people as a result of occupational disease was the following: "A 77-year-old former psychiatric ward nurse died from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) as a result of over eight years of exposure to cigarette smoke in the workplace."

I have since filed a FOIP request to find out details to see if any UNA members are affected by this decision. The following information is taken from the FOIP request.

The Special Investigation Unit of WCB did an entitlement investigation of the case noted above. The investigation confirmed "extensive exposure to second-hand smoke." It is not known if the nurse smoked.

Information considered for the decision came from the WCB Policy Manual, based in part on Policy 02-01 Part 1 (Arises Out of and Occurs in the Course of Employment). This policy states in part: "To be considered compensable, an accident must meet two conditions: it must arise out of and occur in the course of employment."

Policy 03-01 Part II (Occupational Disease), Section 5, states in part: Respiratory disease claims are adjudicated like any other occupational disease claim. However, when a worker has a respiratory disease due in part to occupational factors and in part to non-occupational

factors, the overall disability is presumed to be related to employment.

The relationship of the victim's illness to work was determined through interviews with co-workers and former patients that produced evidence the workplace did not have a policy on smoking at the time, that patients smoked in their rooms and bathrooms, and that there was a smoking room next to the Nurses station.

The smoking room was not ventilated. Outside the building, smoke could visibly be seen, people could smell and breathe the smoke. Smoking went on even after a smoking policy came into effect on February 20, 2001

It is unconfirmed how long the nurse was diagnosed with COPD or if the COPD forced this nurse onto Long-Term Disability. What is known is that the nurse's unfortunate death was in part work related and that WCB accepted the claim post mortem.

I am bringing this forward because UNA could have members who are affected by lung disease because they worked in smoking areas in the past.

Members who have health issues similar to what has been described in this article should contact their Labour Relations Advisor for advice. 



Burying the Truth About Alberta Workplace Injuries

When the Government of Alberta talks about workplace injury, it typically discusses only the most serious injuries, about 53,000 annually. Yet a bit of digging reveals this number significantly underreports the true level of injury, which averages about 500,000 injuries per year.

Alberta workplaces are 10 times more dangerous than the Government of Alberta wants us to know.

Injuries reported by the Government of Alberta	
Lost-time claims	28,688
An injury reported to and accepted by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) that caused the worker to miss one or more days of work.	
Modified work claims	24,625
An injury reported to and accepted by the WCB that required the employer to modify the worker's job duties.	
Total reported claims	53,313
Injuries <i>not</i> reported by the Government of Alberta	
Medical aid-only claims	95,854
An injury reported to and accepted by the WCB that required medical intervention.	
No WCB Coverage	(Estimated) 22,289
13% of workers in Alberta were not covered by workers' compensation.	
Unreported injuries	(Estimated) 114,304
40% (on average) of injuries eligible for WCB compensation go unreported.	
Unreportable injuries	(Estimated) 214,240
Minor injuries and injuries that do not have to be reported to the WCB.	
Total not reported	446,687
Total reported and not reported	500,000

Graphic created by the Parkland Institute.
parklandinstitute.ca

The rates presented are for 2009.

Source: The Validity Of Alberta Safety Statistics: http://www.justlabour.yorku.ca/volume19/pdfs/01_barnetson_press.pdf

Alberta under-reports workplace injuries by factor of 10: researcher

ALBERTA is under-reporting workplace injuries by a factor of 10, according to information released on September 26 by the Parkland Institute. The non-partisan research institute at the University of Alberta also concluded unions protect workers from unsafe workplaces.

A fact sheet written by Athabasca University professor Bob Barnetson shows the province only counted approximately 53,000 injuries in 2009 that resulted in lost or modified work. The total number of workplace injuries the same year was 10 times larger.

"The reason for the discrepancy," Barnetson in a press release, "is that the only injuries the government discusses in public are the disabling injury claims. ... They are under-representing the true rate of injury by a factor of 10."

Making it Home: Alberta Workplace Injuries and the Union Safety Dividend also shows the best way to reduce

injury rates is direct worker participation in Occupational Health and Safety efforts. This is a key reason unions provide workers with a significant safety dividend.

Union membership also encourages worker safety by:

- Supporting workplace safety education
- Empowering workers to exercise their right to refuse unsafe work
- Representing workers at compensation hearings
- Providing a voice to lobby for improved safety legislation

In October, the Alberta government will begin issuing fines to enforce occupational health and safety rules, but Barnetson said that is unlikely to make a significantly reduce total injury rates.

"But the data certainly shows that unions provide a significant safety dividend that benefits all Alberta workers," he concluded. 

Is it time to 'green' your home?

All issues, they say, are local. But being concerned about the environment can be *really* local!

At least, if you're concerned enough to want to reduce your footprint on the environment, what could be more local than starting right in your own home?

Minor changes at home – especially if they happen in the same time in a lot of homes – can add up to a significant benefit for the health of the planet and save money as well. According to calculations by the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the United States produces almost two kilograms of waste for every person in the country every day!

B.C. Hydro advises its customers to start the process by thinking of their entire home as a system – that way, it says, “it becomes easier to see the value of passive energy saving practices, like closing curtains to keep heat in (or out) draftproofing, having the correct sized home for your needs and upgrading insulation.”

Just turning down the thermostat reduces energy use – each degree below 20 Celsius during colder weather typically can save 3 to 5 per cent heating energy.

Many ideas for greening your home are free – and don't require a major renovation. Areas for easy and inexpensive gains in household efficiency – and a greener home – include the following:

- **Lighting:** turn off lights when you don't need them, switch to energy efficient lighting, rely on natural light when you can, and use LED lights for holiday displays.
- **Heating:** manage your thermostat, shade your windows, seal the gaps that let in drafts, think about closing off your fireplace if you don't use it and throw an extra blanket on the bed.
- **Water:** run full loads in the dishwasher and laundry (this will reduce energy use too), fix leaky faucets and think about a garden that requires less watering.
- **Appliances:** Wash laundry in cold water, think about unplugging that second fridge or freezer (which is usually older and less-efficient anyway), and try cooking with a crockpot.
- **Electronics:** Use rechargeable batteries, switch off your computer and entertainment devices instead of letting them run on standby, and take a look at your computer's settings to reduce energy use.
- **Gardening:** Use compost instead of synthetic fertilizers, use native plants that grow well in your climate, and stop using chemical pesticides.
- **Painting:** Think about using paint that's low in solvents, toxic metals and volatile organic compounds – available from many paint shops. 

green corner

Green Corner is brought to you by UNA's Education, Communication and OH&S Committee.



CFNU President Linda Silas

Labour and social activists dog premiers at 'shadow summit'



UNA First Vice-President Bev Dick and Second VP Jane Sustrik shelter under a symbolic health care umbrella at the "shadow summit" in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

HUNDREDS of labour leaders and social activists showed up in force to a meeting organized by the Council of Canadians and the Canadian Health Coalition in Niagara-on-the-Lake this summer.

Rallying at a "shadow summit" held at the same time as the annual Council of the Federation meeting of premiers, nurses union leaders, including United Nurses of Alberta vice-presidents Bev Dick and Jane Sustrik, called on the provincial leaders to renegotiate a new national health accord with the federal government.

The current Canada Health Accord is set to expire in 2014 and the federal government has expressed no interest in negotiating a new accord, instead offering a non-negotiable funding offer to the provinces.

According to a Nanos poll commissioned by the Canadian Health Coalition, nearly 80 per cent of Canadians want Prime Minister Stephen Harper to call a First Ministers' Meeting to secure a plan for the future of health care in Canada. Asked for their opinion on the effect of expanding private for-profit healthcare in Canada, 54 per cent of Canadians think health care would be weakened while only 28 per cent think it would be strengthened.

Despite the federal government's unwillingness to negotiate a new health accord, nurses are hopeful that newly appointed Health Minister Rona Ambrose will be open to supporting positive changes in the health care system.

"As nurses' organizations representing frontline health care workers, we would welcome the opportunity to work with every premier and minister of health to ensure a strong future for public health care in Canada," said Linda Silas, president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

Nurses' union leaders also met during the July 24-26 event with provincial premiers and their advisors to discuss the creation of a national pharmacare plan. Such a plan could help reduce perception drug costs for Canadians, who already pay some of the largest out-of-pocket costs for pharmaceuticals in the developed world. Canada is the only western country without a national pharmaceutical program. 

CFNU to engage on the future of health care, key labour rights

OVER the next few months, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions will be engaging on issues critical to the future of health care and preserving labour rights in Canada. Both will face some key tests, in Parliament and the courts.

Labour rights in Canada are under attack through two anti-union bills.

As the representative of unionized nurses throughout Canada, the CFNU strongly opposes Conservative bills C-377, "An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Requirements for Labour Organizations)," and Bill C-525, "An Act to Amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Public Service Labour Relations Act (Certification and Revocation — Bargaining Agent)".

Unions welcomed the Senate's rejection of bill C-377. Unfortunately, the federal Conservatives will continue to promote these attacks on the rights of workers and as the next session of parliament begins, we can expect to see further attempts to pass anti-union legislation.

CFNU affiliate unions are also very concerned about an upcoming court case where Dr. Brian Day is essentially seeking to have our universal health care system deemed unconstitutional because it decides access to care based on need and not on the ability to pay.

If Day is successful, this challenge would strike down provincial health legislation that limits for-profit delivery of medically necessary services, claiming these rules violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This case will go to trial on January 15, 2013.

Although this challenge is being heard in British Columbia, it is very likely that the case will be appealed, whichever side wins this first round, and will therefore end up in the Supreme Court of Canada. This could produce the defining Charter interpretation that would apply across the country – and it could be a ruling that destroys equal access to health care in Canada.

These attacks and the ongoing austerity mentality that is driving cuts in public services, including health care, demands a strong response. Nurses are well positioned to take a strong stand, both for labour rights and public health care. Our voices need to be heard now more than ever. 

CNFU Notes, a report from the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions on CFNU's activities and concerns in the previous two months, will now become a regular feature of UNA NewsBulletin. The report is prepared by the staff of CFNU.

WHEN KNOWLEDGE MEETS KNOW-HOW



Labour Day Message:

Protecting our agreement helps protect all working people's rights

ALBERTA nurses' collective agreements negotiated since 1977 are a significant part of the legacy created by all union members since trade union membership was made legal by the government of Sir John A. Macdonald in 1872, UNA President Heather Smith reminded members in her 2013 Labour Day message.

Huge gains for all working people have been made in that 141 years, she said, as union members fought for such benefits as public health insurance, public hospitals and health care, overtime pay, child labour laws, workers' compensation, occupational health and safety laws, employment insurance, fair pensions and even the weekend.

Unions continue to work hard on behalf of Canada's middle-class families, she added, "which is the answer to the question posed by those who ask, 'But what have you done for me lately?'"

"Fair wages, requirements for proper notice, the right to take vacations and holidays, overtime provisions, professional responsibility protections, the requirement to have an RN on duty on all units, layoff and recall rights, posting of vacancies, hours of work and scheduling – all

these provisions of UNA's collective agreements are part of the vast legacy of rights won by unions for working people."

Unfortunately, she said, in UNA's current round of negotiations with health care employers, every one of these provisions is under assault – part of a broader pattern of anti-union activities by governments and corporations throughout North America.

In many ways, Smith said, in 2013 UNA members face the toughest labour relations climate since the Depression of the 1930s.

"This is why it is important for UNA members to resist these efforts by our employers to roll back our hard-won gains," she stated, lauding the campaign by UNA members to show their pride and professionalism by wearing what at work.

As this tough round of negotiations continues, she concluded, "we need to remember that our workplace safety, childcare laws, and equal pay – and even our right to stay home for the Labour Day long weekend – won't last long without active, committed UNA members determined to defend the agreements their predecessors in our union fought to create."

Visit UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca – to read the entire Labour Day message. 

"...union members fought for such benefits as public health insurance, public hospitals and health care, overtime pay, child labour laws, workers' compensation, occupational health and safety laws, employment insurance, fair pensions."



Volunteers at the Edmonton and District Labour Council's 2013 Labour Day Picnic.

Health care queue-jumping inquiry finds no 'smoking gun'

IN late August, retired justice John Vertes released the final report of Alberta's Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry, marking the conclusion of the semi-independent investigation into Alberta's health care system.

The final report released on August 21 found no smoking gun or Watergate-type connections between senior politicians and preferential access in Alberta's health care system.

Although the scope of Justice Vertes' inquiry was narrower than originally promised by Premier Alison Redford, with no investigations into the alleged intimidation of medical professionals, Vertes said there were no signs of any cover-up.

The final report questions the quality of the responses from those questioned during the inquiry hearings: "many witnesses, even though called to testify under oath, exhibited a regrettable failure to recollect events and activities that should not have slipped so easily from memory." 



Retired Justice John Vertes

Anti-union bill faces uncertain future

A piece of anti-union legislation faces an uncertain future after Prime Minister Stephen Harper prorogued Parliament until mid-October.

Bill C-377, a private members' bill introduced by British Columbia Conservative MP Russ Hiebert passed through the House of Commons last year but was amended by disaffected Conservative Senators, who believed the proposed law was too extreme.

Led by Ontario's Hugh Segal, more than a dozen Conservative Senators supported amending Bill C-377 to increase the mandatory disclosure on union spending from \$5,000, as the bill initially proposed, to more than \$150,000. Similarly, mandatory salary disclosure increased from \$100,000 to \$444,000. And the amended bill would now only apply to unions with 50,000 members or more.

When Parliament was prorogued, it was expected that a strange technicality in parliamentary procedure would see the

bill return to the House of Commons unamended. Now, lawmakers in the House of Commons and Senate are reportedly arguing that Bill C-377 should remain as amended in the Senate.

According to Ottawa news media, Labour Minister Kellie Leitch has expressed indifference over the labour bill before the Senate, even misplacing it in the legislative queue.

Labour groups, professional associations, and opposition parties voiced their opposition to the bill, arguing it would impose expensive and overzealous auditing practices not required in other sectors.

On October 17, 2012 UNA President Heather Smith wrote to Members of Parliament, urging them to oppose the passage of Bill C-377. "UNA does not believe this law is well drafted, carefully thought out or designed to address an existing legislative need in Canada," wrote Smith. 



Parkland's fall conference to examine 'facts, fiction and politics of truth'

THE Parkland Institute's 17th annual fall conference in November will examine the role control, suppression, and manipulation of information are playing an in all aspects of our society.

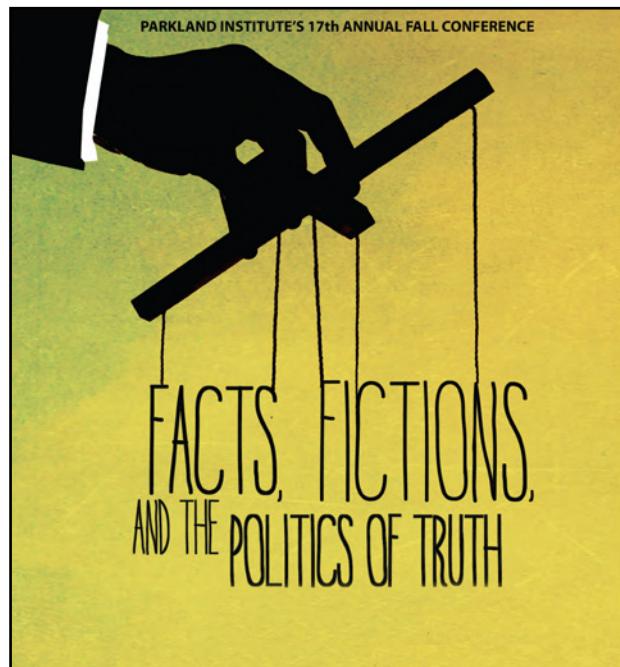
Considering such examples as the Canadian government's recent attempts to muzzle federal scientists as well as to defend important data and information collection projects, organizations, and initiatives, speakers at the event will address such question as whose truth we are hearing and if we are watching the death of evidence-based decision-making.

The event, which will run from November 22 to 24 on the University of Alberta campus in Edmonton, will include a keynote speech by Pulitzer Prize winning author Christopher Hedges on "Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt."

The closing speaker will be internationally syndicated columnist on technology law issues, Michael Geist. Other speakers will include former Chief Statistician of Canada Munir Sheikh, scientist Katie Gibbs, environmental journalist Arno Kopecky, UNA Communications Advisor Dave Cournoyer and former MLA and university teacher Kevin Taft, a former director of the institute.

The non-partisan Parkland Institute, based at the U of A, studies economic, social, cultural and political issues facing Albertans and Canadians, using the perspective of political economy.

For more information of the conference, visit parklandinstitute.ca/fallconf2013



Professional Responsibility a top concern for UNA members

In UNA's Professional Responsibility Concerns (PRC) workshop, nurses develop the knowledge and skills to provide information, support and encouragement to members who report concerns, and to engage confidently with management representatives to achieve an effectively functioning PRC Committee.

Photo: UNA Professional Responsibility Advisor Donna Smith with UNA members at a PRC workshop.

Low-wage employers importing poverty

Alberta Federation of Labour

MORE than 240 employers in Alberta have received approval to bring in Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) for poverty wages, bad news for all workers.

Alberta is home to the lowest minimum wage in Canada – \$9.95 an hour – and there are at least 243 employers in the province unwilling to pay a penny more.

Most are in food service. The list includes Boston Pizza, Ricky's All-Day Grills and a variety of sushi restaurants and pubs. Most of these approved Labour Market Opinions permit holders hire multiple TFWs.

The list of employers using the TFW program at minimum wage is evidence the program is being used to undermine wages. Low-wage employers no longer must respond to labour market pressures. They just bring in workers who are easier to exploit.

People campaigning against minimum wage increases argue it's a starting point. But government statistics show

"The long list of employers using the TFW program at minimum wage is evidence the program is being used to undermine wages."

continued from page 4

Other than saving money, the government may also be responding to pressure from right-wing special interest groups and think tanks, which constantly publish "studies" that purport to show public sector defined benefit pensions are too generous and dependent on taxpayer contributions.

In reality, LAPP members' pension are not "gold plated." They are very modest. The average LAPP pension is just under \$14,958 per year – and only after years of work and tens of thousands of dollars in pension contributions.

The government has indicated willingness to discuss joint sponsorship of the pension plans – but only after the plans have been effectively severely reduced.

Affected unions have been calling for joint sponsorship for more than 20 years – and in fact past Conservative governments have promised this, then reneged on their

about one in seven workers on minimum wages remain there more than five years.

For TFWs, the moment their wages go up, they are replaced with new TFWs.

On September 1, Alberta's general minimum wage rose from \$9.75 to \$9.95, but remained the lowest in Canada, well below the poverty line.

Of the 30,000 Alberta residents earning minimum wage, 13,000 work full-time. Working 35 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, someone earning Alberta's new minimum wage will earn \$18,109 annually before taxes. The Low Income Cut Off for a single wage earner with no dependents is \$23,298.

The AFL has called for Alberta to institute a minimum wage that would allow those working full-time to earn a minimum of \$23,298 – \$14.05 without benefits; \$12.08 with benefits.

Canada is a country built on immigration. When employers need people, we should ensure they are immigrants with the same rights and protections as other workers.

Alberta has the most vibrant economy in the country. Its benefits need to be shared by all workers. The first step is a decent minimum wage. 

agreements. But why would unions now be interested in joint sponsorship of severely reduced plans that are bound to shortchange their members?

In other jurisdictions where similar plans were given joint trusteeship a decade ago, for example in Ontario and British Columbia, the plans are effectively fully funded today. Here in Alberta, affected unions are working together for now to change the government's mind.

In addition to UNA, the coalition includes the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the Alberta Federation of Labour. We will keep you updated on our progress. 



Know your Rights

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



Should employers be able to ignore employees' rights when it's time to post jobs and fill vacancies?

SHOULD the rights of existing employees be able to be ignored when it comes time for employers to post and fill vacancies?

Based on a new proposal from Alberta Health Services and the other employers subject to the UNA Provincial Collective Agreement, it would appear that's what employers think.

AHS and the other employers opened the 2013 round of bargaining with UNA with a non-monetary proposal that would bring major changes to the way jobs are posted and vacancies filled to allow the rights of existing employees to be ignored. The Employer has proposed several changes to Article 14, Promotions, Transfers and Vacancies.

The Employer proposes:

1. To give the employer the right to hire externally whenever it pleases, even if there is a qualified internal candidate. Right now, under Article 14.01 of the Provincial Collective Agreement, the Employer must post job openings and hire a qualified internal candidate if existing employees apply. The Employer wants changes that would permit it to hire any qualified candidate it wishes, even if there was another internal candidate who was qualified to do the job. [See pages 29–30 of the *Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal*.]
2. To introduce changes allowing cuts or increases in employees FTEs. The Employer wishes to amend the Provincial Collective Agreement with the result that employees would no longer have an assured FTE. Employee FTEs could

change week to week, and an employee could be gradually reduced to effectively being unemployed. [See page 39 of the *Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal*.]

3. To drop the provision that says only if the employee requests will her FTE be reduced. This proposed change to Article 14.15 could deprive employees of the right to have their wishes considered in a change of FTE. [See page 35 of the *Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal*.]
4. To be able to simply move employees to other units at the same site, or even other sites. This would allow the Employer to fill vacancies without any posting. [See pages 39 and 153 of the *Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal*.]
5. To delete the requirement to indicate hours per shift and shifts per cycle. This would allow the Employer to unilaterally change daily hours. [See page 30 of the *Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal*.]

As a result of other changes, posting would become meaningless, because hours outlined in the posting could be changed arbitrarily and external candidates could be arbitrarily placed in jobs. The combined effect of the changes would be to no longer require the Employer to post vacancies. This would return UNA members to the workplace conditions of the 1970s and 1980s.

A copy of the Employer Ingoing Non-Monetary Proposal can be downloaded from UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca.

This article was based on one of a series of factsheets on UNA's 2013 round of bargaining with AHS and other employers. The employer is seeking significant rollbacks in several areas important to Alberta's nurses. Each factsheet deals with one topic area and provides references to the relevant pages of the employer's Ingoing Proposal. Copies of all relevant documents are available on UNA's website – www.una.ab.ca.

Alberta's Nurses...

**PROUD OF OUR profession...
PROTECTING OUR patients...**



As Alberta's professional nurses, we work every day to protect their patients and their professional practice.

We support a properly staffed and supported health care system that guarantees safe, quality care for patients, residents and clients.

On Wednesdays, many of us are wearing our traditional white nursing uniforms to make the public, patients and their families aware of the impact of ongoing and planned staffing changes by Alberta Health Services that will harm the quality of care and patient safety throughout Alberta's health care system.

**It's hard to make nurses "disappear"
if they are visible and distinctive!**