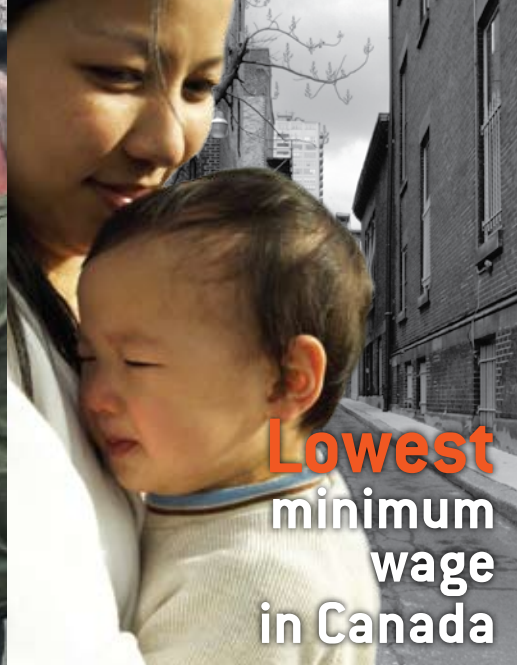




Longer wait times in emergency rooms



55 mills permanently closed, **25,000** unemployed



Lowest minimum wage in Canada

GUARDIAN



SPRING 2009 • VOLUME 27 NUMBER 1 • THE VOICE OF THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

On May 12, make your vote count.



5,000 seniors' care beds not delivered



177 public schools closed. College and university tuition fees **doubled**



Highest child poverty rates in Canada

Change can't happen...

...without you.

On May 12, make your vote count!

AGREEMENT NUMBER 40007486

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- for **health care**
- for **decent jobs**
- for **public services**
- for **seniors**





Can you imagine

communities where all people can get the support they need, when they need it?

We can. Every day, HEU members are helping people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds deal with life's challenges.

PAGE 12

Strong communities, decent jobs and quality public services

By the time this issue of the *Guardian* arrives on the doorstep of HEU members' homes, B.C.'s provincial election campaign will be in full swing.

And in their bid for a third term, Gordon Campbell and his BC Liberals will try and convince the electorate that they are best able to manage the economy in the face of a global recession.

But for HEU members, who work and live in the real economy, these claims are hard to swallow.

After all, the economic health of our communities has been badly undermined by the highest child poverty rate in the country – and the lowest minimum wage. Mills and mines are shutting down. Schools and long-term care facilities have been closed. Public services have been cut.

The province spends less on the health care of its citizens today than seven other Canadian provinces. B.C. was in second

place when the NDP last held government.

Tens of thousands of health care workers are still recovering from the wage cuts of Campbell's first term. Thousands more are consigned to low-wage work in privatized health support services, and must work two or three jobs just to make ends meet.

And all this happened under the Campbell Liberals' watch – when times were good.

Look at all that happened under the Campbell Liberals' watch – when times were good. How will British Columbians fare under this government when times are tough?

How will British Columbians fare under this government when times are tough?

This election is about finding a better way to deliver health care, to protect decent jobs, to look after our seniors, and to ensure that British Columbians have access to quality public services.

In this election edition of the *Guardian*, we

look at the record of the Campbell Liberals in these areas – and propose our alternatives.

The choices couldn't be clearer.

More privatization? Or proven public solutions like public surgery clinics?

The lowest minimum wage in the country? Or decent jobs with living wages that support families?

Can we continue to tolerate crushing workloads and inadequate hours of care for seniors in our care facilities?

Or do we bring in enforceable standards of care and a commitment to build more non-profit, long-term care beds?

And do we stand by while schools are closed, our confidential information is put in the hands of foreign corporations, and our natural resources, like hydro, are sold off?

Or do we make sure that public services and our natural resources are managed for the benefit of average British Columbians?

Those are the choices in front of us. And HEU members have the power – and the numbers – to make a difference on May 12.

VOTE MAY 12 VOTE MAY 12 VOTE MAY 12 VOTE MAY 12 VOTE MAY 12



JUDY DARCY

Clear focus for tough times

It's less than a year before public-sector contracts are set to expire, but HEU's preparations for bargaining are well underway.

Occupational and sectoral conferences and the union's wage policy conference are being scheduled now, for the fall,

to ensure we are well-equipped with a strong bargaining mandate from our members. And the union has set aside significant resources to profile members' work and promote our demands as we head into contract talks.

What will be particularly important for successful negotiations in this next round of bargaining is to build on the gains made during 2006 contract negotiations and to have a clear focus on what can be achieved – even in tough economic times.

In 2006, we made sure politicians, employers and the public had a very clear understanding of the diversity of work HEU members do throughout every area of health care.

In addition to a strong advertising campaign in advance of bargaining, members from several different classifications were invited to come to the table and speak directly to employers about the challenges they face on the job and the solutions they bring to the system overall.

While there's no doubt we will face a tough round of bargaining, no matter who wins this provincial election, we have an approach and new tools that will serve us well.

Those personal and professional testimonials provided employers with a very clear understanding of just how critical HEU members are to resolving health care's challenges. And that approach put HEU members in a much stronger bargaining position.

While there's no doubt we will be facing a tough round of bargaining, no matter who wins this provincial election, we have an approach – along with new tools – that will serve us well.

Thanks to our *Bill 29* negotiations last year, we have regained the right to negotiate on issues like job security and contracting out.

As a result of policy tables established through 2006 bargaining, we have a strong working relationship with employers, government and other stakeholders on nursing issues that we will carry through to the bargaining table.

We will also build on the overwhelming success of the FBA Education Fund by seeking further investments in skills development and training for HEU members.

Of course, there are many occupations within HEU for which we can and will make a strong case for special adjustments.

And our members have told us repeatedly how important their benefits are to them and their families.

Over the next few months, we will be sharpening our focus on the issues that matter most to members and ensuring we arrive at the bargaining table with a strong and achievable mandate.

voice.mail

Thank you for the care and support

This letter is a huge thank you to Cowichan Lodge. My mother-in-law (Marion) was a resident there for four-and-a-half years. It was her home. She passed away last month in a place she called "home", surrounded by people who truly cared for her.

The staff didn't just care for her because it was their job. Cowichan Lodge is a place where love and duty go hand-in-hand. The staff go to work every day knowing the work is difficult and physically exhausting, but also knowing the seniors who live there are human beings who need tender loving care, and that's what they deliver.

I know this because I used to work at the Lodge, and I saw the love and care shown to Marion every day, and not just by the nursing staff. The dietary and housekeeping staff, even the hairdresser,

treated her with love and respect.

Marion was happy at the Lodge. When we visited, she talked about her life there. How much she enjoyed the music of Bev and the Gang; how Rita brought her ice cream; how much she looked forward to Lisa helping her to bed in the evening; how she and Debbie had talked about the grandchildren this morning, and lately it was how much she liked to see Meaghan.

These people were her family, and they made her feel special. We can never truly express how much we appreciate all the wonderful staff at Cowichan Lodge. "Thank you" just doesn't seem to be enough.

Cowichan Lodge is not just a building out on Tzouhalem Road; it's not just a facility for seniors who can no longer live on their own; it's a beautiful, loving home with heart.

If VIHA goes ahead with its plans to close the Lodge in August, the Cowichan Valley will lose a jewel that can never be replaced.

Thank you again to all the fabulous staff at the Lodge for making Marion's final years happy ones.

NORAH MURPHY
Duncan



Feedback: Members on edge about supply chain plans

Late last year, the health minister announced an ambitious plan to save \$150 million through province-wide consolidation of health authority supply chain services.

These services include purchasing, warehousing and distribution of all products used in health care facilities.

But on the ground, HEU members have been left wondering what these plans mean for their jobs.

And straight talk from health employers and the new Shared Services Organization has been in short supply.

Here's what more than 140 supply chain members are concerned about, according to a recent online survey conducted by HEU:

- 93 per cent are very worried or concerned about wage and benefit cuts;

- 87 per cent are very worried or concerned about job cuts;
 - 85 per cent are very worried or concerned about loss of seniority and bumping rights;
 - less than half thought that management kept workers up-to-date;
 - 31 per cent thought jobs would be eliminated in their workplaces;
 - more than half say employers are having trouble recruiting and retaining staff;
 - nearly one in five are considering leaving health care because of the uncertainty of supply chain consolidation, and
 - 45 per cent of respondents have over 10 years' service in the supply chain.
- Up-to-date supply chain news is available at <www.heu.org>.

GETTING READY TO BARGAIN

HEU members are ramping up for the next round of collective bargaining for public-sector contracts that expire on March 31, 2010.

In SEPTEMBER, the union will hold a series of OCCUPATIONAL CONFERENCES to identify priority issues for FACILITIES bargaining. In NOVEMBER, HEU will hold its WAGE POLICY CONFERENCE.

HEU facilities locals have been asked to schedule meetings in JUNE in order to select delegates to the Wage Policy Conference and to the various Occupational Conferences.

Check with your local for meeting times and dates.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES and COMMUNITY HEALTH are holding separate bargaining conferences.





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New report exposes the impact of failed policies in seniors' care

By now everyone knows that seniors' care is in serious trouble. And HEU members know it better than most because they deal with the fallout from government's failed policies every day.

Now, a new study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) – *An Uncertain Future for Seniors: The Impact of B.C.'s Restructuring of Home and Community Care* – spells out just how massive the problem has become and how we got here.

For years, the BC Liberals have been playing fast and loose with the numbers behind their broken promise to build 5,000 badly needed, long-term care beds. It has even claimed to have met and surpassed its target.

Not so says the CCPA. Today, there are actually 804 fewer residential care beds than when the Campbell government was first elected to office in 2001. That's because they closed more than 2,500 long-term care beds in their first term, and the vast majority of new beds are "assisted living."

"Assisted living is just that. It supports seniors with lower care needs, who can live relatively independently and who can direct their own care," explains HEU research director Marcy Cohen. "But it's not an option for those seniors with higher health needs

who are waiting to get into long-term care."

The CCPA study also points out that even when you look at the total numbers of net new beds and include assisted living in the count, the Liberals have still fallen short of their 5,000 bed promise by more than 1,400.

But the lack of residential care beds is only one part of the perfect storm that's been brewing in seniors' care.

Between 2001 and 2006 there was a 60 per cent increase in the death rate in residential care, not because of poor service, but because of delays getting into care.

According to the study, B.C. has now fallen well below the national average in the provision of home support services. In the mid-90s, B.C. was a leader in this area.

A particularly disturbing part of the report shows how the lack of these and other services has created a situation where seniors end up entering residential care with higher health needs and are more likely to need

palliative care. But the system is unprepared to meet those needs.

In fact, the study says there was a 60 per cent increase in the death rate in residential care between 2001 and 2006 – not because of poor service – but because of delays getting into care.

And yet, most residential care homes are unable to get funding to provide this specialized care for the rising numbers of seniors who are dying in the province's long-term care facilities.

The report also points out how privatization and contracting out have negatively affected long-term care.

Under the BC Liberals, there has been a 20 per cent increase in the number of for-profit residential care facilities and a drop of more than 11 per cent in non-profit facilities. The result is that most new residential care facilities are now private and for-profit.

Cohen says numerous studies both here in B.C. and internationally show that private-for-profit facilities provide a lower quality of care.



According to the CCPA study, there are 804 fewer residential care beds than when the Campbell government was first elected to office in 2001.

"This is largely due to lower staffing levels. When you don't have enough staff to monitor people's health, provide assistance with feeding, ensure people are well-hydrated, or regularly turn those who are bed-ridden, you are naturally going to have higher rates of hospitalization."

The report also criticizes government for giving employers unlimited rights to contract out direct care and support services in residential care facilities, through *Bill 94*, which it passed in 2003.

Since then, some employers have terminated and re-tendered contracts repeatedly where staff have advocated for improved wages and working conditions.

The CCPA is not alone in raising concerns about home and community care. Other organizations – including the BC Medical Association, the B.C. Auditor General, the B.C. Care Providers Association, and the Centre for Health Services and Policy Research at UBC have all reported that the system is seriously compromised.

Check out the full report at <www.policyalternatives.ca>.

Union preparations now in full swing for November wage policy conference

HEU locals in the facilities subsector will hold meetings in June to kick off the union's preparations for the next round of collective bargaining.

Facilities locals will be selecting delegates and discussing and submitting proposals to the union's wage policy conference in November. These locals will also hold occupation-based meetings in order to select representatives for a series of occupational conferences in September.

At each occupational conference, participants will decide on priority bargaining demands, and the HEU Provincial Executive will submit these demands to the wage policy conference.

Community health locals will also hold meetings by

the end of June to select their representatives to a bargaining conference for their sector in the early fall.

A community social services bargaining conference has already been scheduled for June 3 and 4.

"In tough economic times, we will need to be strategic and we will need to be focused in our approach to bargaining," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "And we need to ensure that the diversity of our members' work is reflected in our bargaining objectives."

Darcy says the union will build on the success of occupational and sectoral conferences held in the lead up to 2006 bargaining where members had unprecedented access to the bargaining process.



COFFEE BREAK

With the Campbell Liberals continuing to privatize public power, we're all facing higher costs – with no end in sight. Here are some tips to help you conserve energy, reduce harm to the environment, and lower your hydro bills.

- Take shorter showers, install low-flow showerheads, and repair leaky faucets or pipes.

- Only run dishwashers with a full load. And don't leave the water running while brushing your teeth or washing the dishes.

- Unplug appliances. If an appliance is not in use, it still draws energy from the electrical outlet. Microwaves or toaster ovens use less energy than conventional ovens. Use power-saver modes on computers and other devices.

- Make the most of natural daylight. Consider replacing household light bulbs with compact fluorescent ones, which reduce energy consumption by 75 per cent. Dimmers, motion-sensors and timers also lower energy use.

- Switch to rechargeable batteries. They last longer and are better for the environment than disposable ones.

- Draft-proof your home: check windows and door frames for proper seals. Window coverings also provide insulation. Heat strategically: save energy and money by lowering your thermostat in rooms that are rarely used, or when you're not home.

- Be energy-efficient by washing your clothes – full loads – in cold water, and reduce your electric dryer use. If you can, hang your clothes to dry on an indoor clothing rack or outdoor clothesline.

Reduce, re-use, recycle

Recently, the B.C. government has put restrictions on disposing many electronic devices, as our landfills are inundated with hazardous waste products that negatively impact human health, wildlife, water and global warming. Check out Recycling Council of British Columbia at <http://www.rcbc.bc.ca/> for information in your community.

Court rules controversial gag law unconstitutional

The B.C. Liberal government's controversial election "gag" law has been ruled unconstitutional by the B.C. Supreme Court.

Specifically, Justice Frank Cole found that *Bill 42's* restriction on third-party election advertising before the official 28-day election period violates the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the decision is a huge victory for free speech and a clear indictment of the B.C. Liberal government's attempt to silence its critics. "Like *Bill 29*, this law violated British Columbians' constitutional rights and it deserves the same fate."

Bill 42 was introduced by the Camp-

bell Liberals last spring and was rushed through the legislature despite massive public opposition. The law also placed new limits on ID requirements for voter registration that disadvantage low-income and homeless people in our communities.

The government is appealing the decision.

Know your rights

How the grievance process works

Every collective agreement, regardless of the sector you work in, has a grievance process, although the procedure may differ from contract to contract. It's always a good idea to consult with your site rep or shop steward.

The following is a step-by-step procedure, under Article 9 of the facilities subsector collective agreement, to assist members to file and resolve grievances.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK MY RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED?

The first step is to talk to a shop steward or site representative for advice. Explain the situation in a clear, concise manner so that your union representative can determine if indeed a violation has occurred – and which article in your collective agreement is in question.

Interpreting contract language is one of the skills union stewards bring to the table when dealing with employers. The more information your stewards have, the better equipped they are to advocate on your behalf.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO RESOLVE A GRIEVANCE?

The grievance process takes time, depending on the issue. If there's been

a contract violation, then your union steward will start a Step One – which involves a meeting with your supervisor or manager in an attempt to resolve the issue.

You can represent yourself, but it's highly recommended to have a shop steward present. Step One must occur within seven calendar days of the violation. Many grievances get resolved at Step One, but if not, then it moves to Step Two. If, however, the grievance is the result of a suspension or termination, it's initiated at Step Three.

WHAT HAPPENS AT STEP TWO?

In Step Two, the grievance becomes formalized in writing on an HEU Grievance Form. Your shop steward will outline the details of the dispute, cite the contract provision allegedly violated, and propose a remedy.

You – the grievor – and your union steward should both sign the Grievance Form, although it's sufficient to have your shop steward sign it on your behalf. The employer will sign and date the Grievance Form upon receipt, and then has seven calendar days to respond in writing.

WILL MY GRIEVANCE GET RESOLVED AT STEP TWO?

Step Two is a filing and gathering information process, and usually moves

to Step Three, where it's presented to the Committee on Labour Relations, or Labour-Management, during a formal meeting with the union. Documents and written facts supporting each party's side are presented to one another.

If the grievance is still not resolved at this level, then it can be referred to arbitration by either party.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING ARBITRATION?

A grievance may be referred to an arbitration (Article 11), an expedited arbitration (Article 10), or an industry troubleshooter (Article 9.09), where each party presents its case in a hearing before an independent, third-party arbitrator.

Arbitrations are usually heard within two months of the referral, and are assigned to a rotating list of arbitrators.

Once assigned to a case, the arbitrator will set a hearing date, and issue his or her decision within seven calendar days after the hearing concludes (this deadline may be extended, upon mutual agreement).

The arbitrator's decision is final and binding.

Always refer to your collective agreement, or consult with your shop steward, for clarification.

<<newsbites>>

Dirty hospitals linked to patient illness and death

A recent research report commissioned by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) links sub-standard hospital cleaning to compromised patient health and even death.

While studies indicate that hand-washing is one preventative step in combating health care-associated infections (HAIs), the CUPE report says it's counteracted by non-sterile environments.

"We can demand and audit hand-washing all we want, but without a clean environment, hands will quickly become re-contaminated," says CUPE National President Paul Moist. "The

best defence against HAIs is strong cleaning and support services. Yet across Canada, these very services have been cut, and in many provinces, privatized."

This landmark, Canadian study is the first to document the link between hospital-acquired infections – like MRSA, VRE and *C. difficile* – and cleaning and support services, over-crowding and privatization.

"Scotland and Wales have actually contracted in hospital cleaning in order to reduce spiking infection rates," says Moist. "They've learned that contracting out leads to cuts in staff,

high turnover, less training, and less communication between clinical and support staff."

The report also finds that infection rates have decreased in hospitals where funding for cleaning and infection control services have been increased.

Health care-associated, or hospital-acquired, infections are the fourth leading cause of death in Canada. One in every nine hospital patients contracts an HAI, and 8,500 to 12,000

Canadians die of HAIs each year.

The full report is available on CUPE's website <<http://cupe.ca/>>.

Hospital-acquired infections are the fourth leading cause of death in Canada

Union hears from LPNs on practice, compensation, and representation

Almost everywhere you look in health care, licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are taking on more professional responsibilities – including specialized, supervisory and leadership roles.

It hasn't been easy. It's required years of hard work from LPNs and significant union advocacy to overcome resistance from RNs, nurse managers, health employers and government.

In recent years, however, there has been a significant shift in perspective coming from senior health authority and government representatives.

Although the struggle continues for better compensation – to keep pace with new responsibilities and an expanded scope of practice – it's clear LPNs are playing a key role in solving the province's nursing shortage.

"It's taken years of standing up to those who have tried to stop the advancement of our profession," says Joanne Dickie, an LPN working at Lions Gate Hospital, who is also a member of HEU's bargaining committee. "But most LPNs that I've met with don't know that history. And they don't know about the most recent gains made in 2006 bargaining."

At press time, a province-wide consultation with HEU's nurses was underway. Dickie and others were meeting with LPNs to get their direct feedback on everything from professional practice and compensation issues to union representation.

"Compensation is key, there's no question about that," says Dickie. "At one time, HEU had the best wages for LPNs in the country. But that's no

longer the case. Our wages have not kept pace with our expanded scope of practice.

"What's also coming across loud and clear is that people are not aware of some of the major changes that have occurred in recent years," says Dickie. "They are surprised and pleased to hear that we now have an independent voice at our own policy tables, where we are meeting directly with government and health authority representatives, employers, Chief Nursing Officers (CNOs), and other stakeholders to continue to advance our professional practice."

LPN Sylvia Neden from West Coast General Hospital in Port Alberni sits at the policy table. "Frankly, these tables have brought HEU's nurses into the 21st century. It's here that we are able to directly influence and shape the policies that impact our profession."

She says it's also been a major learning curve for herself and her colleagues. "Working directly with government and other decision-makers has been very enlightening. These policy tables have equipped us with more tools, critical relationships, and a place to identify solutions to the problems we encounter in advancing our professional practice."

A ground-breaking report from the joint policy committee – *Effectively Utilizing B.C.'s Licensed Practical Nurses and Care Aides* – outlines the barriers LPNs face and the opportunities needed to utilize LPNs more effectively.

It also acknowledges the importance of compensation issues for

Although the struggle continues for better compensation, it's clear LPNs are key to solving the province's nursing shortage.



LPNs, and recommends several strategies to enhance LPNs' professional practice.

Those strategies, which are supported by CNOs from each health authority, include transition to practice opportunities for new graduate LPNs, professional development and educational opportunities for LPNs, leadership training and leadership opportunities for LPNs, and opportunities for LPNs to participate in formal decision-making and collaborative practice initiatives.

LPN Jacqueline Zilkie, who also sits on the policy committees and is a member of HEU's Provincial Executive, says keeping LPNs up-to-date and informed about new developments is a tough challenge for the union.

"It's not enough to post information on the website. Or even to have the occasional story in the *Guardian*. It really takes face-to-face conversations, like the ones we're having now, to understand LPNs' issues and bring

them forward to the provincial policy tables," she says.

Dickie says recent overtures from the BC Nurses' Union, inviting LPNs to take out "associate memberships" are being met with a variety of responses.

"But from what I'm hearing, many are confused about why this sudden interest in LPNs," she says. "And they're very surprised to learn that associate memberships are a way to reach unorganized workers, not members of an existing union."

Zilkie questions the timing of BCNU's membership drive, "coming, as it does, when we have been able to use our independent voice, as LPNs, to achieve greater influence over our future as professional nurses."

"Really, associate memberships are a way for the BCNU to develop a list. LPNs should think twice before signing up," she says.

For more information, visit the union's website at <www.heu.org>.

PATTY GIBSON

Feeney records tribute to Bill 29 Supreme Court victory

Singer/songwriter Anne Feeney, described by working-class hero Utah Phillips as "the best labour singer in North America", is known across the continent and Europe for her social activism.

Feeney's recently recorded song "We Fought Back" is a tribute to HEU's charter challenge of *Bill 29*, the Campbell Liberals' 2002 contract-busting legislation, and to the union's ultimate win in the Supreme Court of Canada – a win that made collective bargaining a protected right under our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Less than one month after the Court had struck down key sections of the *Health Services Delivery Improvement Act* as unconstitutional, and trade unionists across Canada were still celebrating the victory, Feeney performed the song for HEU members attending the union's summer school in July 2007.

Now, members can add this tune, and 14 other Feeney tracks, to their music libraries by purchasing her latest CD *Dump the Bosses*.

Or HEU locals could buy it to play at their own events. Interested? Order it directly by going to <www.annefeeney.com>.



SACRED SMUDGE CEREMONY

To commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – on March 21 – Women Against Violence Against Women along with the Squamish Nation, HEU members, and women's anti-violence, Aboriginal and multicultural groups joined together for a Sacred Smudge ceremony and march along the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

COLIN I. MILLS PHOTO

Bargaining conference a huge step forward

For me, CUPE's first national women's bargaining conference was a full-circle moment, to quote Oprah.

It was one of the recommendations that came out of the National Women's Task Force in 2007 and adopted at the following convention.

At the time, I was one of many who were extremely disappointed that the structural recommendations put forward by the task force were defeated. However, this first bargaining conference, held in mid-February in Montreal, proved to be a huge step forward.



“When women get together and keep their eyes on the goal, there's nothing we can't achieve.”

It was inspiring, powerful and ground-breaking in every way. And with the recent downturn in the economy, it couldn't have been more timely as we all know that those most affected by a deepening recession will be women and other equity-seeking groups.

But judging from the natural leadership abilities I saw in action throughout the three days we were together, I know we have everything it takes, and more, to carry on the fight for women's equality in our union, at the

bargaining table, and in society.

That point was well made by several speakers – in particular, Gloria Mills, a keynote speaker from UNISON in Britain. She reminded us all that women bring a broad range of natural skills to the bargaining table because we negotiate with so many people in one form or another every day.

Her message was crystal clear: rights and opportunities have never been handed to us, women have only gotten to where they are by being willing to fight for them collectively.

Leading Toronto economist Armine Yalnizyan was down-to-earth and motivating for all who heard her. She warned that those who have pensions will become the “new whipping post” because it's less overt than lowering wages. And she told us that our fight is not only about money – it's also about “social wages” such as health care, transit, community services, education, and all the things that keep us healthy.

And, of course, there was our own secretary-business manager Judy Darcy, who underlined how important it is to get beyond the stereotypes of what it means to be a good negotiator by making sure we bring women to the bargaining table, which is key to building women's leadership within the union.

That point was made again and again throughout conference sessions. For many of us, we just don't realize how much knowledge and skill we already have. It's more a matter of gaining hands-on experience in contract negotiation and building the confidence we need to take on key leadership roles, both at the bargaining table and beyond.

All in all, the entire conference reminded me of the power of sisterhood. When women get together, and keep their eyes on the goal, there's nothing we can't achieve.

DONISA BERNARDO
HEU FINANCIAL SECRETARY



KEN ROBINSON

PRESIDENT'S DESK

The personal is political

In all the places where HEU members have gathered in the past three months – at regional meetings, at our first-ever political action conference, in union training sessions, at the walk for community social services – I'm

seeing a renewed sense of unity taking shape.

It started during our last convention and it just keeps on growing. What I'm hearing is this: everybody knows what the problems are. Everybody knows who's caused them. And everybody knows what needs to happen on May 12.

That's no surprise. Every day, HEU members work in the reality Gordon Campbell has created. They feel the disrespect. They see the inefficiencies. They deal with the fallout from low-staffing and poor training. They know that corners have been cut and how it's affecting quality care.

None of this is theoretical for HEU members. It's all personal. And it's having a motivating effect, not only in the lead-up to this provincial election, but also in how we work together as a union.

At recent strike-vote meetings taken by our Big 3 members, I was heartened to see members in our facilities subsector come out to show their support. Why? Because they see how their union sisters and brothers who work for Compass, Aramark and Sodexo are being pushed down on a daily basis. They know it's wrong.

They also see the increased infections, the increased use of isolation rooms, and the increased length of hospital stays – that's resulted from privatizing hospital cleaning services. They also feel the frustration of not being able to communicate directly with these fellow workers, on the job, as they always had in the past.

In a different venue, at the March 28 Walk for Community Social Services, I saw HEU members from all parts of our union and community come out to support workers in this sector. Why? Because they know these workers and their clients are being treated badly. They know the setbacks that have occurred in this sector since Campbell took office. And they know that community services are something we all rely on.

Again. It's not theoretical. It's very, very personal.

I'm reminded of a new shop steward I met in Victoria. After 30 years as an HEU member, she's gotten involved in her union for the first time. When I asked why, she said, “I'm tired of being treated like a second-class citizen.”

That pretty much sums it up. It's exactly what's been happening in our workplaces over the last eight years. And it's personal.

So, I encourage you to make a personal commitment to support a change in direction for ourselves and all British Columbians on May 12. I urge you to become involved in your local union, now and beyond the ballot box, to vote smart, and work with your Provincial Executive to create positive changes for the future.

Every day, HEU members are working in the reality Gordon Campbell has created.

<<newsbites>>

Jailing kids for cash

Two corrupt judges in Pennsylvania have been found guilty of receiving kickbacks from the private prison owners and builders, who benefited from imprisoning up to 2,000 children in their for-profit prison.

The judges, who pleaded guilty, collected \$2.6 million for locking up children, who often had no access to a lawyer. The “crimes” included an 11-month imprisonment for a 14-year-old girl's argument with a friend, and a three-month sentence for a girl posting a website parody

of her school's assistant principal.

As many as 5,000 children were found “guilty” by these judges. Two separate class-action lawsuits have been filed on behalf of the imprisoned children. And this case sheds an unflattering spotlight on the flourishing, private prison industry in the United States.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, “prison companies are preparing for a wave of new business as the economic downturn makes it increasingly difficult for federal and state government

officials to build and operate their own jails.” (RABBLE.CA)

If Ontario can do it, why can't B.C.?

In the midst of a growing economic recession, the Ontario government has announced it will make good on its promise to raise the province's minimum wage to \$10.25 an hour next March.

On April 1, Ontario's minimum wage increased to \$9.50 an hour, while Prince Edward Island minimum-wage earners will see their hourly rate climb to \$8.20

on June 1. That will leave B.C. with the nation's lowest minimum wage.

“Gordon Campbell started his term in office with the highest minimum wage in Canada, an appropriate level for the most expensive place to live,” says B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair. “Today, we are still the most expensive place to live, and we have the lowest minimum wage in the country. That's simply shameful.”

He repeated the call for an immediate increase to B.C.'s minimum wage, to bring it to \$10 an hour, and applauded

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty for his commitment to low-waged workers.

Care aide-turned fire fighter recognized

HEU member Russell Scott made the local news in March for his role in tracking down and extinguishing a fire in the cardio-respiratory unit of Abbotsford Regional Hospital.

When Scott arrived on the scene, one patient was walking unsteadily, while their bed was engulfed in flames and oxygen from the valve on the wall continued to feed the fire.

Health critic spells out NDP's agenda

There's no question that health care is a top election issue for British Columbians. The *Guardian* recently talked with Opposition health critic **ADRIAN DIX**, MLA for Vancouver-Kingsway, about the Campbell Liberals' record, and what an NDP government would do to strengthen public health care.

Nobody knows better than HEU members that problems in health care have gotten worse over the last four years. Why has this happened?

I think the government favours for-profit solutions, which cost more money. As a consequence, there's less money for public health care responses to issues such as waitlists, crowded emergency rooms, and the lack of seniors' care.

When you're making choices and always choose the most expensive, for-profit option – that crowds out what you should be spending on – more efficient, public-sector solutions that are proven to produce better health outcomes.

Under the BC Liberals, privatization has accelerated, but we're still dealing with long surgical waitlists, over-crowded ERs, and rising rates of hospital-acquired infections. What will an NDP government do to remedy these problems?

On the issue of for-profit health care, all of the evidence suggests that for-profit health care provides a lower level of care at higher cost than non-profit and public options.

We should keep the control of our public health care system in public hands so that we have the power to make the decisions we're going to need to make, as our population ages and as our public hospitals and health care system need to be transformed.

On the issue of hospital infection, the official government position is that the cleanliness of hospitals is not linked to the spread of infection in hospitals. I think we need a new approach that's an evidence-based, province-wide approach. Having clean hospitals will make patients in hospitals and those working in hospitals safer.

Overall, there has to be an emphasis on quality in health care as well as expenditure in health care. I think what's needed is a province-wide commitment to quality in health care, and we plan to present that to the voters in the election.

The closure of Cowichan Lodge and other care homes has made headlines across B.C. What would the NDP do to improve access to long-term care facilities?

We would keep the government's commitment to build 5,000 new, long-term care beds.

We need to increase staffing levels so that seniors are receiving the appropriate level of care for their needs. And we need an independent seniors' representative that seniors, staff and others can go to with their concerns.

This government says it can make huge savings through its new Shared Services Organization by consolidating services like the supply chain, payroll and others. What's your take on this? What would a Carole James government do differently?

The place to start, with respect to saving money and sharing services, is to talk to the people who work in the system, who know how to save money, who know where efficiencies can be made.

Listen to them and make those efficiencies. That will only happen if we end this attitude of contempt that the government has shown toward many of the people working in health care.

Everywhere you look, Gordon Campbell is pushing P3s to build public infrastructure. Where does an NDP government stand on P3s?

There are arguments to be made against public-private partnerships in other sectors, but in health care I think they're particularly wrong-headed. To sign a 30-year, P3-hospital contract that financially commits taxpayer funding to private companies for aspects of a facility's operation assumes that we know today what health care needs in B.C. will be in 2039.

From a planning perspective, it doesn't make sense.



And it's clearly more expensive.

We cannot do anything where the B.C. Liberal government has signed P3 contracts.

An NDP government can do something about Comox. We can do something about Campbell River. We can do something about St. Paul's. That's what makes this election one of the most important to the future of health care that we've ever had.

What do you say to those who question the NDP's abilities to manage the economy overall?

We're going to make our economic case to voters that we have a plan that will address their concerns and support them in difficult times. We need a government that will protect health care in difficult times. We know that demands on our health care system will increase in difficult economic times.

We need a government that will invest in education because there is a strong link between the level of education and economic development – and with virtually every other social measure that you can find.

What we have now is a government that has failed to deliver on economic policy. They didn't see the financial crisis and current recession coming, and they've taken no action to help British Columbians through it. I think the risk to the economy is the re-election of a government that has so failed us in so many ways.

MARGI BLAMEY

"You don't have time to think, you just go and do," says Scott. "I wasn't thinking about the danger. I was concerned with getting the patients out, and the oxygen off."

In total, 16 patients were evacuated in the span of 15 minutes. In that time, Scott returned to the room five times, and was subsequently treated for smoke inhalation. He was expected to return to work in a few weeks.

Scott has worked as a care aide for the past seven years. He says this incident shows what the health care

team can accomplish working together.

Big 3 members deliver strong strike mandate

Recently, approximately 3,500 HEU members working for Sodexo, Aramark and Compass (the Big 3) had turned out in high numbers to deliver a strong strike mandate to their bargaining committees.

The union took action after the employers presented final or settlement offers that included five-year terms with little or no increases to wages, benefits or sick time.

Currently, most workers employed by the Big 3 corporations earn \$13.05 an hour, with only six sick days per year and no pension plan. Other key issues at stake in this round of bargaining include improvements to health and safety practices, training, workload and short-staffing.

The union is hopeful that a strong strike mandate from members will bring contractors back to the table, and encourage government to take responsibility for the crisis in contracted-out health care services.

Essential services levels were being negotiated through the Labour Relations Board at press time, but no decision had been made about potential job action.

Sodexo, Aramark and Compass have contracts to provide housekeeping and dietary services in the Vancouver Coastal, Fraser, Vancouver Island and Provincial Health Services authorities.

An HEU housekeeper at Cowichan Lodge helps send a message on the impact of low-waged work.



JEN EFTING PHOTO



Change can't happen... without you.

IT'S something no one person can accomplish alone. But collectively, it is possible to elect a majority of politicians who are ready to change direction on everything from seniors' care, to child poverty, to the environment.

After eight years with Gordon Campbell's Liberal government at the helm, there are probably as many reasons to get out and vote on May 12 as there are people living in the province. But the most important reason is this: change can't happen without you.

In this election, make no mistake, every vote counts. The fact is, B.C. has reached a crossroads. And the choice is clear. Continue down the same political path that has brought our province to a place where we have

“B.C. has reached a crossroads. And the choice is clear.”

the highest rate of child poverty, the lowest minimum wage, and a health care system that is being privatized faster and deeper than any other province in Canada. Or, chart a new course that puts the needs of people, their families and their communities ahead of corporate profits.

What's really at stake in this election boils down to

the kind of a society we want to create for ourselves and future generations. It's as much about what we want as workers as it is about what we want as citizens.

The outcome of this election will have enormous consequences for the issues that matter most to HEU members, in their jobs, and in their communities. But by electing political leaders who are committed to public health care, economic fairness, family-supporting jobs, and who understand the needs of the people they represent, we can determine what our province will look like five years, 10 years, and 25 years from now.

Judging by the record of the Campbell Liberals over the last eight years, with another four years in government they will continue to sell off many of the province's key assets to corporations, while privatizing our public services and weakening our social safety net.

HEU members, their families, friends, and co-workers have the collective ability to make a difference in the outcome of this election. What it takes is your personal commitment to make change happen.

HEU members on what's at issue

BURNABY NORTH

“Vote for your rights. Vote for your livelihood. Vote for your municipality. Vote for your province. If you don't vote, you lose your opportunity to be heard, and you'll just have to live with whoever is elected to form the next government.”

Carol Campbell

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

Liberal	10,421
NDP	10,356
Margin of victory	65
HEU members	703

WHAT'S AT STAKE

HEALTH CARE



Our solutions

- open public surgery clinics and 24-hour public community clinics
- invest in B.C.'s health care workforce
- Abandon wasteful public-private partnerships (P3s) schemes
- Stop privatizing public health care services

MORE THAN anyone, HEU members know just how damaging Gordon Campbell's policies have been in health care. By pushing a narrow, privatization agenda – regardless of the cost, disruption or impact on quality care – this government has refused to take action to strengthen public health services.

And they've failed to put an effective and coordinated staff recruitment and retention strategy into place.

Instead of seizing upon the many proven public solutions that would reduce surgery wait times, unplug our ERs, address staff shortages, and improve efficiencies throughout the system, government has continued to put

millions upon millions of taxpayer dollars into the hands of private corporations to take over health services and hospital infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships (P3s).

Instead of opening public surgery clinics and primary care centres, they've allowed for-profit, private surgery clinics to expand at a rapid rate. Instead of providing the funding health authorities are calling for, so they can meet the needs of British Columbians, they've allowed B.C. to fall from second, to eighth, in terms of provincial health spending in Canada.

And despite all the problems that have emerged from privatizing hospital support work – such as dirty hospitals and a destabilized health care team – they are opening up more areas for potential contracting out, including direct care, information technology, logistics and supply chain, lab work, and others.

DECENT JOBS



Our solutions

- a moratorium on public-sector job cuts
- raise the minimum wage to \$10 and establish living wage policies
- support the long-term sustainability of B.C.'s forest industry
- end raw log exports
- invest in re-training and skills upgrading

out, in particular, have fuelled a lowest minimum wage in the country (and P.E.I.) and one of the highest. Many B.C. jobs keep families living.

Public-sector workers are crucial, according to a recent Statistics Canada study, the public sector – teachers, doctors, health care and social workers – typically accounts for 20 to 30 per cent of the province's economy.

In many of these same communities, the public sector accounts for 25 per cent of the economy, a significant source of decent, family-supporting jobs.

Clearly, in the face of the big changes ahead, there's never been a more important time to protect and create the jobs that support our communities and local economies.

KOOTENAY EAST

“There are just so many issues and reasons why every one of us needs to get out and vote on May 12... to protect the future of public health care for our children and our parents; to repair the damage that’s been done to our education system and our forest industry. For me, it’s simple. We just can’t afford to give this back-door dealing government another four-year term. We need a change of government.”

Adrienne Martin

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

Liberal	8,060
NDP	7,339
Margin	721
HEU members	873

COMOX VALLEY

“HEU has 43,000 members. Think about it. That’s a lot of power at the ballot box if we want to use it. We need to elect a party that is sympathetic and supportive of our goals. If we don’t, we can expect more of the same. And frankly I don’t think this province can take any more of Gordon Campbell’s policies, whether it’s in health care or anywhere else.”

Linda Hargreaves

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

Liberal	14,068
NDP	13,261
Margin	807
HEU members	902

SAANICH SOUTH

“After eight years, British Columbia needs a serious change in direction. For ourselves. For the people we support. For our communities. Voting is one of the most important rights we have. If we don’t vote, if we sit back and remain silent, we can’t get the change we so desperately need. That’s why I’m voting – because I know my vote will make a difference.”

Joanne Jarvis

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

NDP	12,809
Liberal	12,380
Margin	429
HEU members	809

VANCOUVER FRASERVIEW

“Responsible citizenship involves being concerned with the things that matter most to our communities – the places where we live and work. Voting is at the core. I encourage every member of this union to exercise their democratic right to vote on May 12.”

Tanya Rautava

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

Liberal	9,895
NDP	8,783
Margin	1,112
HEU members	1,211

CARIBOO NORTH

“This election is very important, not just for HEU members, but for the entire province. Since taking office, Campbell’s Liberals have privatized health-care services such as house-keeping, laundry, food services, lab work, direct care and the list goes on. They took 15 per cent from every worker covered by the facilities collective agreement and plan to privatize more health services. Let’s elect government that cares about health care and health care workers.”

Peggy Christianson

2005 ELECTION RESULTS

NDP	7,353
Liberal	7,084
Margin	269
HEU members	371

IN THIS PROVINCIAL ELECTION

SENIORS



Our solutions

- provide funding needed to increase staffing and hours of direct care
- build more public, non-profit residential care beds
- improve access to home support
- enforce standards and appoint a provincial advocate for seniors
- put seniors before profit

WITH THE possible exception of New Brunswick, B.C. now has the lowest number of residential care beds in the country.

Shortly after taking office in 2001, the newly elected Liberal government closed more than 2,500 long-term care beds – most of them in the not-for-profit sector – and passed legislation that facilitated the privatization and contracting out of care and support services.

Those changes have caused bed shortages, repeated layoffs of care staff in some for-profit facilities, and have driven down wages for many health care workers, fuelling a recruitment and retention crisis throughout the long-term care sector.

The Liberal government’s subsequent failure to build

5,000 new, long-term care beds with the non-profit sector, as promised, has meant insufficient beds overall and a virtual explosion in the number of private, for-profit seniors’ facilities in B.C.

It’s also meant that many seniors simply cannot find the residential care they need, when they need it.

This, combined with reduced access to home support services, has forced many seniors to languish in their homes or hospitals before finding a residential care bed. As a result, people are entering care more frail, less stable, and more likely to die shortly after being admitted.

But even though more seniors with complex and/or palliative care needs are coming into the province’s long-term care facilities, health authorities are not providing the funding needed for appropriate staffing levels. For care staff, it means crushing workloads. For seniors, it means not enough direct and personal care.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Our solutions

- place an immediate moratorium on any further privatization deals
- return and maintain public ownership and control of the province’s electricity generation
- increase funding for education and community social services

SELLING OFF B.C.’s public assets has become a hallmark of Gordon Campbell’s government. In eight years, it has set about privatizing everything from highway construction to liquor distribution to the management of British Columbians’ private information.

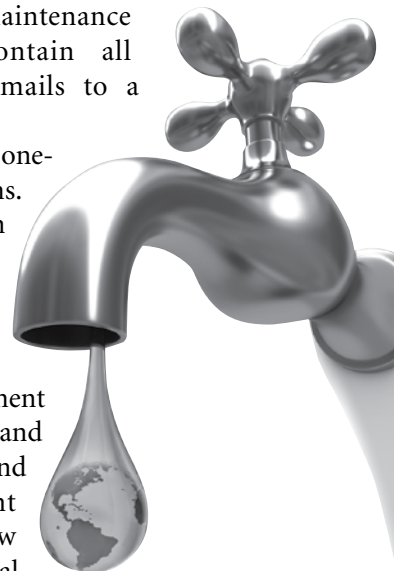
Despite increased prices, decreased accountability and privacy risks for citizens, the government has pushed its privatization agenda into every area of public services. That includes Medical Services Plan

(MSP) and Pharmacare administration, education, license and tax collection, and data management. Indeed, it just turned over the operation and maintenance of computer servers that contain all government documents and e-mails to a global multi-national.

This in addition to privatizing one-third of BC Hydro’s operations. The public utility is forbidden from developing new sources of electricity. All future power must be purchased from private producers.

At the same time, this government has sold off B.C. rivers, creeks and streams to private corporations. And with Campbell’s requirement that municipal governments review all major, provincially funded capital projects for their potential as public-private partnerships, drinking water and sewer privatization are key issues in several municipalities.

Other public services have suffered on Campbell’s watch. Chronic under-funding of community social services has caused huge waitlists throughout the sector. And public education has seen the closure of 177 public schools, along with a rise in over-crowded classrooms and insufficient funds to support children with special needs.





Historic pact protects Mexican migrant workers

A ground-breaking agreement between the Mexican state of Michoacán and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) will provide migrant labourers from that region with enhanced protections while working in Canada.

In the past, workers came to Canada under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, which excluded workers' input regarding pay rates and housing conditions, and lacked a "freedom from employer-reprisal" process to mediate workplace grievances.

This landmark, North American agreement will ensure that Michoacán workers are assisted by UFCW and the Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA) while employed in Canada.

As part of the agreement, the AWA will offer counseling and advocacy services around labour rights, housing conditions, medical claims, and other work-related issues through its agriculture workers' support centres across the country.

"The agreement is a breakthrough for the workers from Michoacán," says UFCW national president Wayne Hanley. "Now, they will be able to access more information and services about Canadian labour laws and their rights, with the clear understanding that it is their right to do so."

Workers, activists unite across national boundaries to scrap unpopular trade deal

Although U.S. President Barack Obama's commitment to "fix" the widely unpopular *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) may be a thorn in the side of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, workers and activists on both sides of the border see an opening to finally get rid of some of the treaty's most damaging components.

For years, labour unions and civil society organizations have been working across national boundaries – rallying opposition to key sections of NAFTA that threaten local and national sovereignty, public services, and workers' rights.

Now, with Obama on record wanting to ensure labour and environmental rights are respected under NAFTA, the 15-year-long struggle to scrap or amend the agreement has hit a new note.

In the face of the Obama's desire to put the treaty under a microscope, however, Harper is steadfastly defending the agreement, declaring it works well for both countries.

Prior to the U.S. president's visit to Canada in February, the American Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress sent a joint letter to both Harper and Obama, urging both countries to work cooperatively to address the current glob-

al economic crisis, to review and renegotiate NAFTA, and to adopt policies that can build a strong, fair economy for workers in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

That joint appeal, delivered from labour federations representing more than 15 million workers across North America, was backed up by the results of a bi-national poll showing 70 per cent of Americans and Canadians oppose one of NAFTA's most controversial sections – Chapter 11.

Bi-national poll shows 70 per cent of Americans and Canadians oppose NAFTA.

Chapter 11 allows corporations to sue for "lost profits" when governments introduce policies aimed at protecting the environment and other public interests.

Another section of NAFTA that's drawn opposition from social activists and workers in Canada, Mexico and the U.S. is Chapter 6, the proportionality clause.

Under this section, one country is obligated to export renewable and non-renewal resources to another country, even in times of scarcity in the country of origin. It's a clause that poses a huge threat to Canada, which supplies almost 70 per cent of U.S. oil imports.



A tri-national network of energy workers and civil society organizations from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. has also seized on Obama's commitment to deal with NAFTA.

At its most recent meeting in March, the three-year-old network joined the mounting call for a renegotiated trade agreement, as part of its overall agenda to develop a common vision for energy security in the Americas.

The Canadian delegation included representatives from the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the United Steelworkers Union, the Council of Canadians, and others.

Recognizing an important opportunity to confront climate change, delegates emphasized the need to develop a greener energy workforce while ensuring fairness for workers.

>>notebook>>



Having failed to protect public health care on the ground, government is now forced to do it in the courts.

Privateers back Liberals into uncomfortable corner

For eight years, the BC Liberals' message to the privatization lobby has been anything but subtle. They've turned a blind eye to extra-billing and unlawful fees, dismantled non-profit seniors' facilities, and privatized services. If actions were words, they've said it loud and clear, "our public health care system is up for grabs."

And they've done it despite a chorus of public opposition.

So it's little wonder that now, private clinic operators have brazenly initiated a legal challenge to the province's *Medicare Protection Act*, backing the government into a corner where it is forced to proclaim itself a public health care champion.

Having failed to protect British Columbians' right to universally accessible health care on the ground, they're now being forced to do it in B.C.'s Supreme Court – a venue with much higher consequences and costs.

One need go no further than their Statement of Defense to find a government in full damage-control mode. Court documents also reveal a damning exposé of just how blatantly private clinics have disregarded B.C.'s medicare laws – all on this government's watch.

Among other things, government's counterclaim reveals that the

Cambie surgical clinic and others received payments for services such as "surgery", "overnight", "anaesthetic fee", and "prepayment for surgery", all of which are either fully covered by MSP or in excess of the amount a physician is allowed to charge.

Not only were patients illegally billed for services they pay for through their taxes, they were also required to sign legally binding "Acknowledgement Forms", which prevent them from filing complaints with any government agency or revealing any information to government about treatment circumstances and costs.

Even more outrageous is the requirement that patients "indemnify" the clinics from any damages that might arise should these disclosures take place.

That government feels such pressure to defend the principles of universally accessible health care is partly a testament to the strength of public support for medicare. But that's no reason to breathe easy. Given the history that brought us here, the jury's still out on whether their words in the courts will translate into meaningful protections for B.C. residents on the ground.

OLIVE DEMPSEY • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Labour movement calls for immediate reforms to repair ailing EI system

As job losses continue to escalate here in B.C. and across the country, laid-off workers are forced to rely on an employment insurance (EI) program that provides little shelter from an ever-rising economic storm.

While virtually every Canadian worker sees EI premiums deducted from their paycheques, not every worker dealing with a job loss is eligible for benefits. According to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), only four in 10 unemployed workers, and even fewer women, qualified for benefits in 2007.

Those left out – young people, recent immigrants, part-time, temporary and seasonal workers – do not have enough hours of work to qualify. Benefits have also been seriously reduced. In 1996, the maximum weekly benefit was \$604. Today's maximum is only \$435, and the average benefit is just \$335 per week.

On average, unemployed workers who do qualify are eligible for only 32 weeks of benefits, with some only qualifying for a maximum of 14 weeks.

"The hard-working people of this country are getting hammered by job losses," says CLC president Ken Georgetti. "Simply put, if the government doesn't fix the problems with EI now, this recession will get a lot worse, more people will suffer, and the recovery will take longer."

Georgetti says employment insurance helps stimulate the Canadian

economy. "It helps people deal with tough times like these. It ensures that while the mill or the factory is shut-down, money is in people's pockets so the grocery store, shops and other services in the community aren't driven out of business too."

That's why labour is pushing the federal government to reverse decades of cutbacks to employment insurance entitlements, and do more with the \$55 billion EI surplus.

Although the federal government recently increased the period during which benefits can be collected by five weeks, the CLC says that measure alone is not enough to fix a broken system. Instead, labour is calling on government to adopt a far more comprehensive approach, including the following specific reforms:

- provide regular benefits on the basis of 360 hours of work, no matter where workers live and work in Canada;
 - raise benefits to 60 per cent of earnings calculated on a worker's best 12 weeks;
 - increase the period for which benefits can be collected to a maximum of 50 weeks from the current 41-week maximum;
 - raise minimum wages and tax credits for low-income workers;
 - expand support and funding for work-sharing arrangements under EI to reduce layoffs and build links to training programs, and
 - invest part of the EI surplus in training and labour adjustment programs.
- The need to quickly reform EI is underscored by rapidly rising unemployment and predictions that the situation is likely to get much worse.

At the same time, labour is pressing governments to stem the economic crisis by protecting and creating jobs.

According to B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair, job numbers released in mid-March show that B.C. is losing jobs faster than any other province in the country.

"In the last 12 months, B.C.'s unemployment rate has jumped more than 60 per cent and continues to climb," says Sinclair, noting that close to 70,000 full-time jobs were lost in the

province over the past year.

And the situation is not much better across the country. In March, Statistics Canada reported that employment fell for the fourth consecutive month. During that time, an estimated 83,000 public- and private-sector jobs vanished, pushing the national unemployment rate up to 7.7 per cent – its highest in six years.

Since October 2007, Canada has lost an estimated 295,000 jobs.

ESTHER SHANNON

"Simply put, if the government doesn't fix the problems with EI now, this recession will get a lot worse, more people will suffer, and the recovery will take longer."



PSAC PHOTO

Lost pay equity rights spark UN complaint

Representatives from women's groups and labour unions gathered at the United Nations in New York on March 6 to announce their intention to file a complaint against the Harper government with the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

The complaint condemns the Canadian government for rushing controversial pay equity legislation through Parliament, which will make it extremely difficult for women in the federal public sector to demand equal pay for work of equal value. The new law forces individual women to make pay equity claims without any

support, and would impose a \$50,000 fine on any union for encouraging or assisting their own members to file a pay equity complaint.

The "notice of communication" to the UN – which was signed by more than 40 organizations, including the Public Service Alliance of Canada – also condemns the 2009 federal budget for failing to fix the employment insurance system.

As it stands, only one-third of unemployed women in Canada who pay into the system can access EI benefits.

For more information, visit <psac-afpc.com>.

>>voices>>



How managing upward pressures and obtaining downward efficiencies will be achieved is a mystery.

B.C. budget same old pre-election sleight of hand

The BC Liberals' 2009/10 budget is the same old pre-election, sleight of hand we've seen in the past, but on a scale and breadth like never before. Artificially dampened expenditures and boosted revenues show impossible-to-believe numbers.

Take health care, where the BC Liberals expect to find "further efficiencies" of \$125 million in the next fiscal year, and another \$250 million the year after when they promise to "balance" the budget. Just where those savings will be found, no one knows. B.C.'s health authorities have already identified "annual spending pressures" of 3.5 per cent in their provincial transfers. How those diametrically opposite objectives – managing upward pressures and obtaining downward efficiencies – will be achieved is a mystery.

Spending plans for Housing and Social Development and Children and Family Development are equally suspect. Even as more families are distressed by deteriorating economic conditions, the Ministry of Children and Family Development gets a budget lift of about one per cent. And with numerous public-sector collective agreements set to expire at the end of

2009/10, this budget includes no provision for salary or benefit increases.

Finally, it's impossible to determine in this budget how much B.C. taxpayers will spend in the coming fiscal year on the 2010 Olympics, or afterward. A few million? Hundreds of millions? Who knows?

Instead of the \$495 million shortfall forecasted for the coming fiscal period, a more accurate, budgetary deficit would be from \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion. And that would be prior to the Forecast Allowance they've arbitrarily removed, one of the touted "levels of prudence" found in every B.C. budget since the turn of the century.

So with an election fast-approaching, the Campbell government pushes up revenues, tamps down expenditures, and removes the Forecast Allowance from budgetary planning.

Voilà! The deficit is one-quarter to one-fifth its actual size. A fudge-it budget? Worse than that – it might better be described as Toxic Fudge.

WILL MCMARTIN • B.C. POLITICAL ANALYST

Union redesigns education courses

HEU's education department has redesigned its Intro to Shop Steward and Chief Shop Steward courses in response to a call from convention delegates to create a mentoring culture for shop stewards at their work sites.

"The emphasis is on mentoring and coaching new stewards," says HEU education director Juli Rees, "with a focus on recruitment, support and retention. Our goal is to get members involved and support them to stay involved."

The three-day Intro course has been enhanced for grievance handling, and includes a half-day workshop with chief shop stewards to devel-

op plans for coaching and mentoring at the local.

Activists taking the Intro to Shop Steward course must make an 18-month commitment as a shop steward. After one-year, they can apply for the intermediate Know and Enforce Your Rights course, followed by the advanced Chief Shop Steward workshop, which has also been revised.

The education department is also offering a few new courses this year, such as preventing violence, chemical workshops, and advocacy on long-term care workload.

The preventing violence course – being held this summer – is a one-day workshop to help members develop and implement a comprehensive, cohesive and effective

violence prevention strategy in all health care workplaces.

CSS bargaining conference

Dates for the HEU community social services bargaining conference have been set for June 3 and 4 in Victoria. The purpose of this two-day conference is to prepare for the next round of bargaining, discuss bargaining demands, identify top priorities, and elect a bargaining committee. Registration deadline is May 1. See the union's website for more information.

Women's pharmacy set to open doors

It's been more than three years since HEU joined the advisory group for Lu's: A

Pharmacy for Women, helping to make the Vancouver Women's Health Collective's dream into a reality.

As the *Guardian* goes to press, the co-located pharmacy and health resource centre in the heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is in the finishing phase. Two female pharmacists have now been hired and are eager to begin setting up the pharmacy, which plans to open its doors in May.

Getting the word out about Lu's: A Pharmacy for Women – on a limited budget and to a varied audience – has been a challenge. It's here that HEU has contributed its time and energy, helping redesign and produce new materials to promote the pharmacy to

women living, studying and working in the Downtown Eastside.

So, next time you're in downtown Vancouver, maybe to spend some meditative moments at the Dr. Sun Yat-sen garden or to attend an event at GM Place, take a walk along Hastings Street and check out Lu's: A Pharmacy for Women. You may not see it, but "the heart of health care" beats soundly at the centre of this innovative and exciting project, located at 29 West Hastings Street.

HEU launches seniors' care campaign

HEU launched its Stand UP for Seniors Care campaign early in the new year with a

COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES

PATTY GIBSON

HEU members working in community social services are calling for more resources to strengthen programs and supports.



VICTORIA WALK BUILDS PUBLIC AWARENESS

By all counts, the first annual Walk for Community Social Services was a huge success. About 250 clients, self-advocates, family members, workers and employers braved the Victoria rain on March 28 to show their support for a sector that is largely invisible to many members of the public.

The ongoing Community Social Services Matter campaign was first launched in 2008 as a joint effort by unions in the Community Social Services Bargaining Association, including the Hospital Employees' Union, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees-B.C., and the Health Sciences Association of B.C.

Its goal is to raise awareness about the important role these services play in B.C. communities.

Walk speakers included organizer Marilyn Rust, parent and service provider Karen Van Rhee, and HEU residential support worker Lora Church.

"The problems in community social services are often highlighted," Van Rhee told the crowd, "but we don't often hear about the valuable work that is going on, and how it is making such a huge difference in the lives of people and in the fabric of our society."

"It is skilled people, devoted people, people that project dignity and respect to people with disabilities, people that bring heart to their jobs that are making this possible."

Rust underscored the importance of a united voice across the sector to protect and improve ser-



Marilynn Rust



Lora Church



Karen Van Rhee

vices particularly at a time of fiscal uncertainty.

"It is time for those of us who use these services now, and those who may need them in the future, to say in a united voice that community social services are essential for a healthier, stronger and more stable society," said Rust.

Church reminded Walk participants that there are close to 4,000 children with special needs on waitlists for early intervention and school-based therapies, and that over 2,000 adults with developmental disabilities are also languishing on waitlists.

"I have seen first-hand how a lack of supports can negatively affect a family. No parent should have to wait until their family is in crisis before they receive services," she said.

The Walk was one of several awareness-building activities held during March as part of Community Social Services Awareness Month, which was supported by more than 30 municipalities.

Other activities included forums, informational displays, food drives, and events aimed at putting community social services in the public eye.

These services include everything from child care to employment and housing support for people with developmental disabilities, to specialized services for immigrant families, and support for women escaping abusive relationships.

They provide a wide range of assistance to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. And they help make sure people don't fall through the cracks when they have a special need or when they are facing a crisis in their lives.

"In these times of fiscal uncertainty, the need for community social services will only grow," said Rust. "Unfortunately, short-sighted fiscal restraint policies could put these services in jeopardy."

She urged participants to speak up for programs that are essential for a healthy society.

series of radio and TV ads and a public website – <www.StandUpforSeniorsCare.ca>.

The campaign is a response to the growing crisis in seniors' care – the shortage of long-term care beds, low-staffing levels, heavy workloads, rising costs for services, and the trend to replace public beds with for-profit ones.

Its goal is to pressure the B.C. government to invest in our province's most vulnerable citizens, by increasing funding and making the changes needed to improve seniors' care.

Seniors' advocates, health care workers and supporters are calling for more not-for-profit, long-term care beds; improved access to home sup-

port; higher staffing levels, and a commitment to put seniors' care ahead of corporate profits. They also want improved care standards with better enforcement, and the appointment of an independent, provincial advocate for seniors.

A campaign guide for members – which includes fact sheets, petition forms, and other resources to help raise awareness about seniors' care – is available. Order forms for campaign T-shirts, buttons and stickers are downloadable from the HEU website, under the seniors' care campaign section.

Everyone is also urged to support the BC Health Coalition's Broken Promises campaign at <<http://www.bchealthcoalition.ca/>>.



Health care, forestry hot topics at 100 Mile House issue forum

HEU members Barb Matfin and Debera Willis, pictured above with Cariboo South MLA Charlie Wyse, helped make health care a hot topic

at a mid-March issues forum in 100 Mile House.

"Our Stand UP for Seniors Care T-shirts were a big hit at the forum," says Willis. "Most people were very supportive of the campaign. This is a small community, so every-

one knows someone who is waiting for care."

According to Willis, the devastation of B.C.'s forestry industry was also a key topic for forum participants.

"Ours is a predominately forest-driven economy. Now, thanks to government inaction, our region has thousands of unemployed people.

"But it's not just forestry. Ranching and the cattle industry, which is what the Cariboo is known for, have also suffered. A lot of ranchers have simply closed up shop, and moved into the towns to retire," she says, adding that, "everyone is getting really tired of the rhetoric."

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>>factfile

SUPPLY CHAIN

HEU members working in health care's supply chain are responsible for purchasing and distributing everything from MRI machines, to drugs, to food inventory.

Part of their responsibilities involve researching, tendering bids to find the most cost-efficient product, and negotiating vendor contracts.

Currently, there are about 1,100 workers, employed by B.C.'s six health authorities, who work in the supply chain.

Together, B.C.'s health authorities purchase supplies, materials and services valued at \$1.5 billion.

Health authorities spend over \$25 million on warehousing and transportation costs.

Compensation for experienced commodity buyers is estimated to be 15 to 25 per cent below what other public-sector employers are paying (i.e. school boards and crown corporations).

Between 33 and 40 per cent of workers currently employed in health care's supply chain are expected to retire over the next five years.

ON THE JOB

BRENDA WHITEHALL

HEU member **Cathy Brooks** works in one of the most critical, but invisible, areas of health care delivery.



BUYERS SAVE DOLLARS

One of the most invisible areas in health care is supply chain services – which includes purchasing, warehousing and distribution – and employs about 1,100 HEU members. Capital buyer Cathy Brooks is one of those workers providing a critical service in the delivery of health care on Vancouver Island.

"I don't think the public has any perception that this job exists," says Brooks, who works at Gorge Road Hospital. "They come into the hospital and assume everything's just there, and that items are available and ready for use."

Brooks' colleague Jana Ludwig, a former buyer, describes their behind-the-scenes' role: "Everything you see in a hospital from a pen to an MRI machine is purchased by buyers. With every phone call, every purchase we make, every piece of equipment we buy, our job is to get the best value for the taxpayer."

Working in purchasing for seven years, Brooks was drawn to the business aspect of the job. "I didn't choose it, it chose me... We're the only department that can generate direct savings for VIHA by the contracts we negotiate and purchase orders we make."

Whether ordering capital items – predominantly diagnostic and surgical equipment like MRI machines, OR supplies, implants (i.e. hip, knee) – or purchasing items like office supplies, Brooks researches every product for its safety, quality and cost-efficiency.

"There's a lot of critical thinking and prioritizing in my job," says Brooks, who buys capital items for the entire Island. "If I purchase equipment, I have to project a one to five-year analysis of what that will cost VIHA, decide if some items should be pur-

chased or leased depending on costs, and present the best-case scenario to budget-holders and end-users."

Juggling multiple budgets, Brooks says she must liaise with numerous departments and facilities to evaluate the products, analyze tender responses, and often consult directly with physicians, before purchasing anything.

Multi-tasking is definitely a skill Brooks brings to work. "I usually have about 15 contracts on the go at once. I have to decide if I'm going to attend five meetings that day, or spend time doing background research, or contacting vendors."

Brooks frequently uses the ECRI Institute's research website on health care medical devices, instruments and technology to effectively perform her job.

"When I go out to tender, I must work closely with the end-users to determine what the need is, to complete specifications. I also enlist the biomedical department to check CSA [Canadian Standards Association] technical and clinical requirements."

Becoming a buyer requires education. Training is available at the Purchasing Management Association of Canada, which offers the Principles-based accreditation or Certificate in Purchasing programs, or the more extensive Certified Professional Purchaser designation with supply chain management.

Although a buyer's job is multi-faceted and often stressful, Brooks finds it rewarding. "Buyers have actually become a lot more prominent in the last two years... We're working more closely with other departments – such as nursing, operating room managers, and surgeons. I would say getting the correct item – a safe and reliable item based upon the end-users' requirements – at the best price, is gratifying."

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Violence in the workplace

Did you know that health care workers face more on-the-job violence than hockey players?

"About 12 per cent of B.C. health care and social assistance claims between 2003 and 2007 were related to violence," says a recent report from the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in B.C. (OHSAH).

But that doesn't tell the whole story. Why? Because many violent incidents in hospitals, seniors' homes, and community agencies go unreported.

HEU is working with its members and others to change the perception that violent incidents, stemming

from patients, residents or family members, are "just part of the job".

The union's occupational health and safety representative Ana Rahmat is also on OHSAH's Provincial Violence Prevention Steering Committee (PVPSC), which is currently developing and promoting best practices for violence prevention programs, policies and training initiatives.

"It's key to make sure workers do not accept threats, assaults and bullying as part of the job," says Rahmat. "And it's important for health care workers to report violent incidents when they happen."

She says it's the employer's responsibility to put policies and procedures in

place to protect workers and ensure that they have on-the-ground training to deal with violence when it occurs. "But members need to establish an effective committee to push the employer to do the right thing."

In early February, the PVPSC held a Violence Prevention Stakeholder Workshop at HEU's Provincial Office, attended by more than 100 union and employer representatives.

The workshop focused on piloting violence prevention materials that are available on OHSAH's website at <www.ohsah.bc.ca>.

And the PVPSC's recent survey into the frequency and severity of violence faced by health care workers, received more than

1,500 responses. Results of that survey should be available in May 2009.

Equity conference slated for June

The union's biennial equity conference is slated for June 16 and 17 at the Richmond Inn. This two-day conference is an opportunity for HEU's equity-seeking groups to network, learn more about each other's issues, and elect members to the standing committees.

HEU's equity caucuses are: People with disabilities, Ethnic Diversity, First Nations, Women's, and Pink Triangle. Be sure to watch your local union bulletin boards and the HEU website for registration forms.

HEU's first political action conference

It may have been HEU's first-ever political action conference, but as everyone knows, B.C.'s largest and oldest health care union is no stranger to political action.

The two-day event, held in late January, brought together 100 member-activists, politicians and supporters from the broader community. Participants engaged in a variety of practical and action-oriented workshops.

Highlights included developing action networks by making the most of web-based tools, and practising political lobbying with real MLAs in attendance.

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

APRIL 28

International Day of Mourning

MAY 1

International Labour Day (May Day)

MAY 12

B.C. Provincial Election

MAY 17

International Day Against Homophobia

MAY 18

Victoria Day (HEU offices closed)

MAY 27-29

P.E. meetings

JUNE 3-4

HEU Community Social Services Conference (Victoria)

JUNE 7-10

CUPE BC Youth Conference (Naramata)

JUNE 16-17

HEU Equity Conference

JUNE 21

National Aboriginal Day

JUNE 24-26

P.E. meetings

JULY 1

Canada Day (HEU offices closed)

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NUMBER 40007486

Exhibit chronicles struggle for equality

The International Association of Machinists has long held as one of its fundamental principles – and it is a good trade union principle – that a woman should receive the same pay as a man when she renders similar service. In other words, no discrimination shall be made against women in the way of wages when she does the same work as a man. Her sex shall be no barrier to her progress. (IAM Journal, 1904)

This amazing declaration, made more than 100 years ago by a large and, at the time, male-only trade union, heralded the acceptance of "Miss" Nellie T. Burke as the first female machinist and member of the International Association of Machinists (IAM). It is one of the small, yet significant, glimpses into Canada's labour history that the art exhibit "A Century of Women and Work" brings to light.

A collaborative production of the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre, undertaken for International Women's Day 2007, the exhibit was brought to Vancouver by the Hospital Employees' Union, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, and Communications, Energy and Paperworkers local 467, as part of 2009's annual celebration of International Women's Day in March.

"A Century of Women and Work" spans the years between 1900 and 2000. It features 11 Canadian female artists who take us through the decades, exposing some of our history's lowest moments, and marking the advancement of women's equality in Canada.

The plight of Japanese women who worked in canneries, on berry farms and as seamstresses – and their internment along with their families in the camps of B.C.'s Interior during World War II – is poignantly illustrated. So is the racialized exploitation of immigrant women as domestic caregivers in the 1980s.

And B.C.'s own Tania Willard, a member of the Secwepemc Shuswap Nation, has created a moving woodcut relief print entitled "Be a good girl" to honour the memory of Aboriginal girls who were forced to leave their families and communities

to live in Canada's residential schools.

The historical fight for the right to vote in the 1920s is a vivid, magical fusion of women's past and present vision of the right to live with dignity, all over the world.

The exhibit was in Vancouver as part of the month-long festival *Sistahood Celebration 2009*, an initiative of the non-profit Working Arts Society. For those who missed it, there's a companion booklet available that captures many more events and actions undertaken by the generations of working women, who have helped create a better future for all those who have followed.

That's where the 1904 IAM quote comes from. And where other memories are resurrected, like this one about Canada's infamous "persons" case.

When Canada's first woman judge was appointed in 1916, her authority was immediately challenged. The grounds? An 1876 English court ruling that stated, "women are persons in matters of pains and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privileges."

Thirteen years later, the "persons" case was successfully appealed to the Judicial Committee of England's Privy Council, who wisely ruled that the exclusion of women from public office was "a relic of days more barbarous than ours."

To order a copy of the exhibit's companion booklet, visit the Ontario Federation of Labour website at <www.ofl.ca>. Search "a century of women and work booklet" for online order details.

And for more information about the Working Arts Society, and the *Sistahood Celebration*, go to <www.sistahoodcelebration.com>.

MARGI BLAMEY



**1900-2000:
A CENTURY OF WOMEN
AND WORK**

Retirements

Grace Wilson, a cook at Simpson Manor, retired in January after two decades of service. Grace, who plans to travel and do volunteer work, also held positions as local secretary-treasurer and shop steward.

Marj Gellard, from the MSA local, retired in December after 30 years as an HEU member. She began her career working in housekeeping and laundry at Mission Memorial Hospital, eventually becoming a laundry supervisor. Marj became a staffing clerk in 1992, and later transferred to the Centralized Staffing Services at MSA Hospital as a program clerk.

"She made many friends over the years working at both MMH and MSA," recalls co-worker Kate Marleau. "We wish Marj all the best in her retirement years."

Maintenance worker **Lou Fournier** recently retired from Stuart Lake Hospital in Fort St. James. An HEU member since 1987, Lou was also a shop steward for many years. He plans to hunt and fish during his retirement.

Cariboo Memorial Hospital wishes food services worker **Becky Buckland**, and clerical workers **Patricia Coster** and **Sharon Gilraine** happy retirements.

HEU organizer and activist **Dita Pennykid** retired from

the union's Provincial Office in April. A long-time union member, Dita joined HEU in 1989.

While working as a care aide at Canada Way Care Centre, Dita served on her local executive in a number of positions, including chief shop steward, conductor, secretary-treasurer and chairperson.

"I've always been in the organizing department," recalls Pennykid. "My happiness as an organizer

is when I see the workers exercise their rights to choose their union representation... I was an elementary school teacher for 20 years, and know that education is important to empower people. I see that with our members every day."

"We are inspired to continue our organizing efforts because of the solidarity, respect and commitment Dita has always demonstrated," says HEU's coordinator



PENNYKID

of organizing and private-sector bargaining Susan Fisher. "The success of so many HEU organizing campaigns is directly attributed to Dita's leadership and hard work."

Running for office

Three HEU members are NDP candidates in the May 12 provincial election.

Debbie Lawrance, a staffing coordinator at the Vancouver Cancer Centre, is running in the riding of Surrey-Panorama.

Pat Shaw, a nursing unit assistant at Dawson Creek and District Hospital – who ran in 2005 – is campaigning again in Peace River South.

And **Sue Wallis**, one of our retired members, is taking on the Liberals in Richmond-Steveston.

We wish them every success and reserve bragging rights when our sisters are sworn in as three new NDP Members of the Legislative Assembly.



MOLLY MCNUITY PHOTO

Members of HEU's Terrace local join a province-wide "Stand for Housing" rally to call attention to the growing concerns about homelessness and affordable housing in resource-based communities like theirs.

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Ethnic Diversity

One union, many colours! Working across our differences! To participate, please call and leave us your name!

PRESS 2

First Nations

First Nations members would like to hear from you! Please call if you would like to help educate our union sisters and brothers on issues that affect First Nations People.

PRESS 3

Lesbians and Gays

For support: afraid of being identified, feeling isolated, want to know your rights? Call for information on same-sex benefits, fighting homophobia and discrimination. www.pridepages.org

PRESS 4

People with disAbilities

If you are on WCB, LTD, or if invisibly or visibly disabled in the workplace, let us know how the union can better meet your needs.

Talk to us Toll-Free!

You can call any HEU office toll-free to deal with a problem or get information. It's fast, easy and free.

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