CURC
Congress of Union Retirees of Canada

Union Retiree

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Pensions betrayed at Kananaskis

Our pensions become top election issue as Tories quash needed reform

The Pharma challenge
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"Privately" gouged at the Post Office
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2010 in review: CURC plays a crucial role in the fight for pensions

by Pat Kerwin
CURC President

At the beginning of the 20th century, to be old was synonymous with being poor. Thanks to government programs and union negotiations, Canada had one of the lowest rates of senior poverty in the world at the end of the 20th century. Today that achievement is in danger of being lost. Campaign 2000 reported that the number of seniors living below the low income cut-off figure of Statistics Canada increased 25% between 2007 and 2008.

Pensions that were once thought secure with employers like Nortel are being cut back in bankruptcy hearings. Unions are facing demands from foreign firms like Vale Inco to eliminate defined-benefit programs. That is why the campaign to improve the CPP/QPP and the GIS is so important. I am very proud of the meetings that our area councils and provincial federations have held with their elected representatives to explain the issues and to seek support for these changes. We have undertaken this extensive campaign not so much for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren.

Our efforts had a real impact as finance ministers moved from asking why they should do it to discussing exactly to which level they would move. The intervention of Prime Minister Harper on the eve of the meeting of finance ministers in Kananaskis was an absolute betrayal of seniors. If he continues to block reform for working people, we must make this the number-one issue in the election likely to happen this year.

Thanks in large measure to the efforts of retirees in this campaign, more unions are recognizing the value in having an effective national organization both within their own union and with others through CURC.

The CLC convention will be held May 9–13 in Vancouver. On Tuesday night of the convention, CURC will hold, for the first time ever, a forum for the delegates on issues of concern to seniors. CURC will be holding its own national convention October 12–14 at the CAW Centre in Port Elgin. This year we will focus on Aging in Place, which covers the continuum of care for seniors as they age.

The first President of CURC, Edith Johnston, celebrated her 90th birthday last year. Alas, our second President, Larry Wagg, died last year. A tribute to Larry was included in our enewsletter. **If you did not receive this tribute, the reason is that we do not have your email address. If you have one please let us know on your membership renewal or on our web site: http://unionretiree.ca.** You can download the enewsletter there as well.

Check on the web site to find information on the area council where you live. If there is not one and you want to help organize one, please contact us. We need local activity across the country if we are going to succeed with our campaigns.

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Pension plans and bankruptcy

While most of our efforts have focused on improving the Canada and Quebec Pension plans, important work continues to be done on the effect of bankruptcy on pension plans.

Thanks to very persistent work by the Nortel retirees, Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan wrote Don Sproule just before Christmas that his government would not force retirees to put their funds into safer but less profitable investments. The Ontario government will table legislation that will give pensioners the ability to opt out of the current wind-up approach and would allow pensioners who have a greater risk tolerance to elect to pursue investment strategies that may ultimately lead to higher benefits.

A more comprehensive solution to the problem of underfunded pension plans in bankrupt firms was proposed federally in Bill C-501: "An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and other Acts (pension protection)" tabled by John Rafferty, NDP MP for Thunder Bay – Rainy River. This bill would have moved unfunded pension liabilities from being an unsecured creditor to a secured creditor on the same level as banks. The bill passed second reading and went to Industry, Science and Technology Committee for study.

The Harper government and the banks did not like this bill. While Rafferty preferred the original bill, he was willing, for the sake of getting it approved, to amend the bill by having unfunded pension liabilities be considered as "an unsecured — preferred creditor" — that is, behind the banks but ahead of unsecured creditors. The net effect would be that retirees would be farther ahead than they are today but not as far ahead as they would be under the original bill.

This change would require a procedural motion in the House of Commons to allow the Committee to make this change, as it affects a different part of the current law that Bill C-501 had proposed to amend. It is very doubtful that the Conservative and Liberal parties will give their approval to the procedural motion.

Even if the procedural motion were to pass, it is doubtful that the bill would make it through both the House and the Senate before the next election. Thus this issue will require continued lobbying after the next federal election.

FOCUS ON PENSION ISSUE AT CALGARY FORUM

The Calgary Area Council of CURC held a forum on the pension campaign on December 16, just prior to the meeting of the Finance Ministers in Kananaskis. The meeting was chaired by Susan Keeley, President of the Calgary Area Council.

Speakers included: Colin Piquette of the AFL, CLC Representative Tom Kehoe and CURC President Pat Kerwin. Participants wrote letters to Alberta Finance Minister Ted Morton, Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and the Calgary Herald.

Seated (L to R) Rod Bezo, Secretary-Treasurer of Calgary Area Council and Susan Keeley, President of the Area Council; standing (L to R) Colin Piquette of AFL, Tom Kehoe of CLC and Pat Kerwin of CURC.

TORY BETRAYAL AT

The growing consensus to

By Ken Georgetti
Toronto Star
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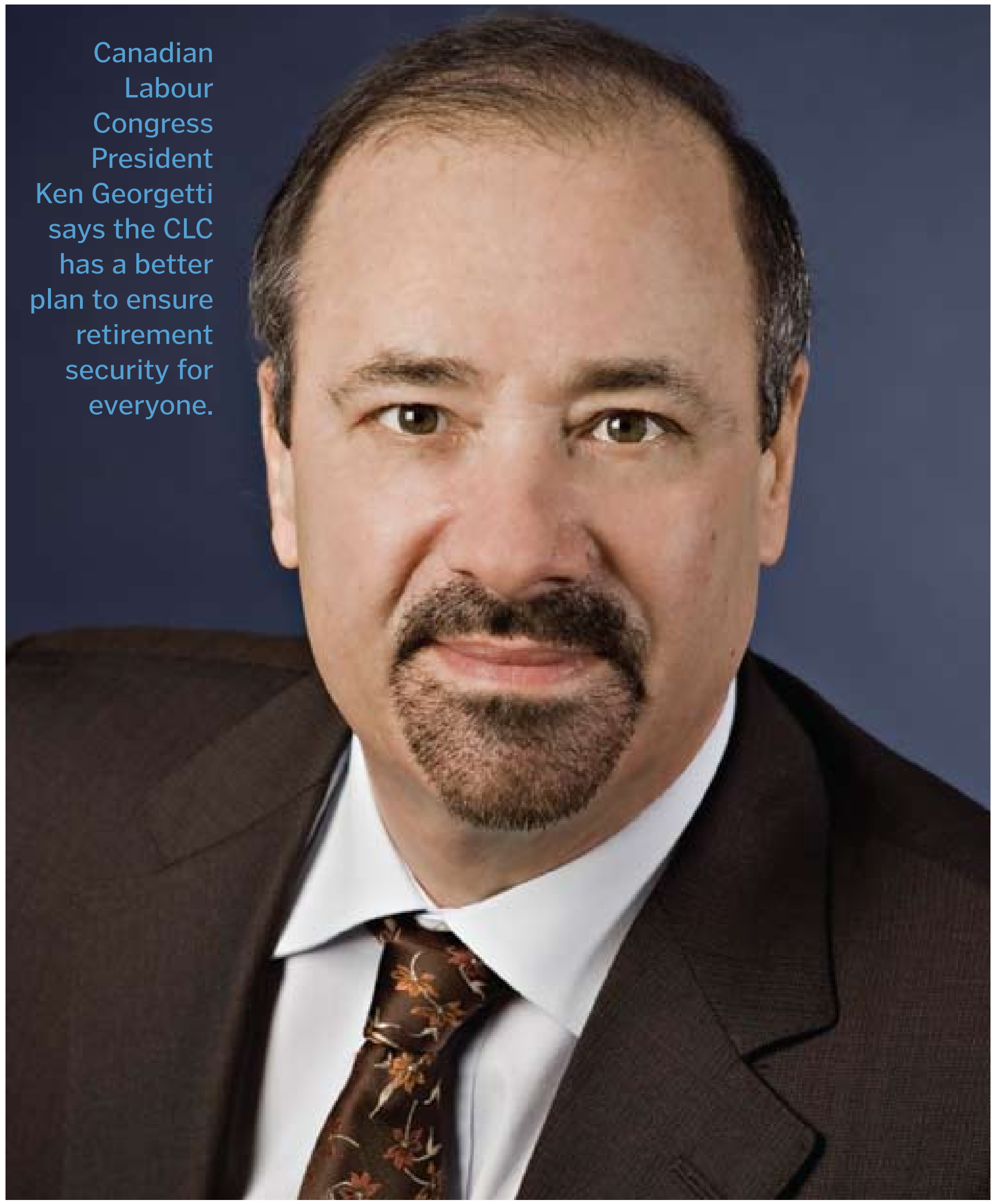


Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti says the CLC has a better plan to ensure retirement security for everyone.

Canadians are increasingly nervous about their retirement security — and with good reason.

Fully 60% of workers have no workplace pension, while one-third of Canadians between the ages of 24 and 64 have no personal retirement savings.

And 1.6 million Canadian seniors today live in poverty, with incomes below $16,000 a year.

The solution offered by the financial services industry to this crisis — Registered Retirement Savings Plans — simply doesn't work.

Only one in four taxpayers put any money into an RRSP in 2008, which helps explain why the unused contribution room for RRSPs totaled a massive half-trillion dollars as of that year.

Given 25 years of stagnant wages for middle income earners, and real wage decreases for lower income earners, it's not surprising how difficult it is for people to save on their own.

Then there are the three stock market meltdowns in 15 years (1997, 2002 and 2008) that have made average Canadians unwilling to risk their retirement security on Wall Street and Bay Street.

Despite the failure of RRSPs, mutual funds and the market to meet retirees' needs, the financial and insurance industries continue to push for even more government subsidization of their products, and indirectly, of the fat management fees — among the highest in the world — that they charge for their inadequate retirement investment products.

The Canadian Labour Congress has a much better idea. Along with seniors', students' and citizens' groups, for the past year the CLC has driven a campaign calling for a gradual doubling of Canada and

KANANASKIS MEETING

enhance the Canada Pension Plan

Quebec Pension Plan benefits as the best way to provide retirement security for all.

A modest increase in contributions will produce thousands of dollars a year in extra benefits for workers when they retire. If we phase in a small premium increase over seven years, it would result in a future doubling of maximum benefits.

That would raise the basic pension floor for all workers from the current level of $11,200 a year to a far more livable $22,400. This plan has been costed by a former chief actuary for the Canada Pension Plan, and it is achievable.

There is a growing consensus that improving the CPP is the best way to guarantee financial security for workers when they retire.

Most finance ministers agreed at their June 2010 meeting that the best way forward is to increase CPP benefits.

Mayors and city councillors meeting at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities annual meeting in May also called for improvements to the CPP.

The Canadian public is firmly on side, with 78% of respondents supporting increasing CPP benefits in an October 2010 Environics poll.

Who doesn't like the idea? The banks, financial institutions and insurance companies that have profited enormously by selling RRSPs and have a vested interest in discouraging reform.

But governments must listen to ordinary Canadians, who understand that there is no simpler, more universal or less expensive option than expanding the CPP.

Most finance ministers already agree but they must now move from commitment to action and not miss this opportunity.

It's time to ensure that all Canadians for generations to come can retire with dignity and security.

Ken Georgetti is president of the 3.2 million-member Canadian Labour Congress.

IT'S UP TO US TO MAKE PENSIONS AN ISSUE

The week before the ministers of finance met in Kananaskis, it appeared that with the exception of Alberta the ministers were supportive of our campaign to increase the CPP/QPP. The Ontario government had published a discussion paper suggesting an increase to 35% and an increase in the yearly maximum pensionable earnings to 150% of the average wage phased in over 40 years.

Alas, on the eve of the meeting, Flaherty and Harper withdrew the federal government support and suggested a voluntary plan for the self-employed and those without a pension. It would pool the risk, thus lowering administrative costs, but aside from this feature it was another version of the RRSP which is of benefit largely to high-income earners. Furthermore, it was to be run by private companies such as banks and insurance companies.

While this halted the move to increase the CPP/QPP at this time, it has made pension reform a top issue for the next federal election. The federal NDP and the Bloc Québécois are supportive of the CLC proposal. The federal Liberals explicitly reject our proposal in their position paper on pensions. They have opted for a voluntary plan attached to the CPP.

It is up to us to make sure that every senior voter recognizes where the parties stand on pension reform.

A universal pharmacare plan that saves

by Michael McBane

Imagine a plan to provide all Canadians with prescription drug coverage. Imagine such a plan would cost Canadians billions less than we are currently spending on prescription drugs. Finally, imagine a federal government that actually believed in medicare and in expanding it to include prescription drugs. Well, two out of three is a good start.

This fall, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and l'Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques released a ground-breaking study showing that a national drug insurance plan could save Canadians up to $10.7 billion a year.

Prof. Marc-André Gagnon's study, *The Economic Case for Universal Pharmacare*, finds Canadians could save between 10% and 42% — up to $10.7 billion — of total drug expenditures.

And it shows current federal pharmaceutical policies are a total failure. Many Canadians do not have equitable access to medicines; Canada is the world's third most expensive country for brand name drugs; the cost of artificially high prices for new brand-name drugs far exceeds any benefits; and the whole system is unsustainable because we currently cannot control the growth of drug costs.

Current federal policies deliberately inflate drug prices in order to attract jobs in the pharmaceutical industry and R&D spending. The study shows that the cost of these policies far exceeds the benefits to Canadians from having a domestic pharmaceutical industry. After he left office, Brian Mulroney was awarded a gold medal by the brand-name drug industry in recognition of this multi-billion-dollar benefit to them.

The so-called "innovative" pharmaceutical industry in Canada claims that its investment in research and development justifies high prices for new drugs. But the fact is, a whopping 59% of the gross expenditures of patented drug companies on pharmaceutical R&D in Canada are tax subsidies and come indirectly from the public purse. The brand-name drug industry in Canada spends three times more money on marketing and promotion than it does on R&D. In Canada, the R&D-to-sales ratio is a pathetic 7.5%. France's R&D-to-sales ratio is twice that of Canada and their prices are at least 10% lower.

As the Gagnon Report says, Canada's health research and innovation strategy is irrational: it is organized around large public subsidies for private sector R&D, but net company R&D funding is marginal.

In light of these important findings, it is time to change our failed industrial polices. It is not credible for the Harper government to claim that prescription drugs are a provincial responsibility. The federal government has extensive and exclusive responsibilities for pharmaceuticals including: drug safety, drug approvals, drug advertising, drug pricing, and drug patents. Further, it administers six drug insurance plans (for First Nations and Inuit, RCMP, military, veterans, prisons, and public servants).

The federal government's industrial policy results in:

- artificially inflated prices for new drugs through the Patented Medicines Prices Review Board;
- regulations that further delay access to cheaper generic drugs;
- negotiations with the European Union for a further extension of patent monopolies for brand-name drugs;
- systematic violations of the prohibitions on direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs,

billions

resulting in false advertising and higher sales of higher-priced versions of existing medicines.

Finally, if all this isn't bad enough, Ottawa then offloads about 96% of the resulting excessively high drug bills onto provinces, territories, employers and the sick.

The Gagnon Report puts a price tag on how much waste, public subsidies, and profiteering in the pharmaceutical industry is costing Canadian taxpayers and consumers. The Report documents the failed federal industrial policies as well as the disastrous health policy consequences. At least eight million Canadians are suffering as a result of federal pharmaceutical policy because they are denied access to affordable prescription drugs.

The Report's conclusion is that Canadians cannot afford not to have universal Pharmacare because it will save money and cover everyone in the country, regardless of where they live or work.

You can't claim, as the Fraser Institute does, to be concerned about rising health care expenditures and then let the eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the health care system (the pharmaceutical industry) do whatever it wants.

It's time for the federal government to change an industrial policy that is an economic failure, and that causes so much pain and suffering.

For more information on the campaign for universal pharmacare, including Professor Gagnon's study, and how you can help, visit www.PharmacareNow.ca

Michael McBane is the national coordinator of the Canadian Health Coalition in Ottawa. (mike@healthcoalition.ca)

How privatization gouges customers at Canada Post

Yes, Virginia, there is postal free enterprise. For Canadians using some franchised postal outlets, it's appallingly free (and very expensive).

Thanks to a very interesting e-mail making the rounds, Canadians are finding out about this price gouging.

Most of us get the published Canada Post rates when we go to the Post Office for stamps.

But how about those who use franchisees? Here's one story worth repeating:

A customer went to Canada Post with a package with the knowledge that she could also buy postage for an identical-weight second package to be sent in a week's time.

The cost at the Post Office: $11.74

One week later she took the identical second package to a Shopper's Drug Mart franchisee for mailing, only to be told by the clerk that there was insufficient postage!

The cost at Shopper's: $11.74 and $6 in additional postage or $17.74 total.

After a few choice words with the clerk, the customer retrieved her package and prepared to raise hell at the Post Office. But much to her surprise, the Canada Post clerk simply weighed her package and put it in the mail bag.

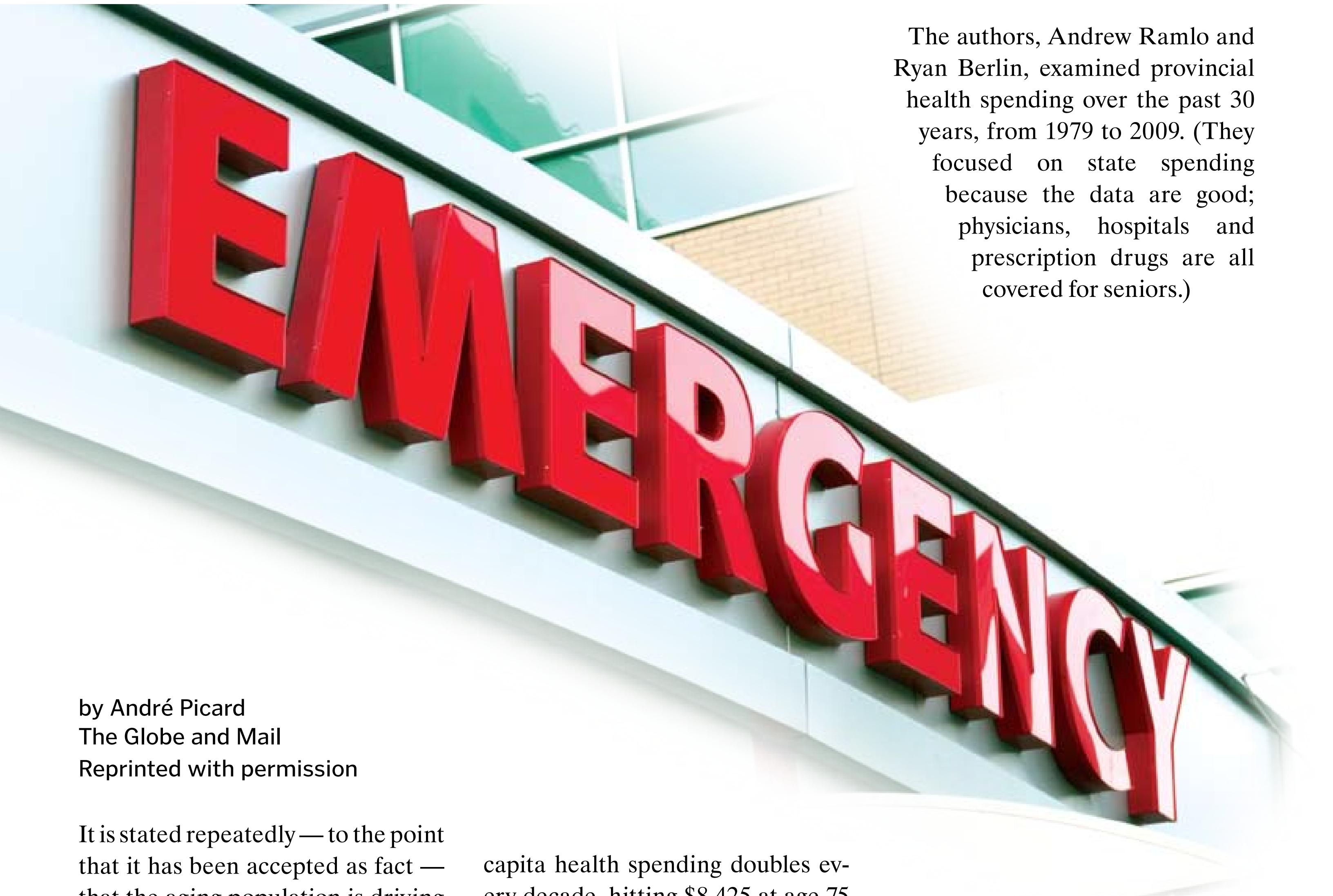
Postage amount right? "Yup, no problem."

Our customer, still dazed and confused, turned to Canada Post for an explanation. Here's what she was told, in part: "Only Canada Post Depots and Corporate Post Offices are obligated to follow the price of stamps and postal products that are legislated by Canada Post. Any commercial and private establishment may charge extra fees as a convenience to their customers."

And, of course, the concluding kicker: "We suggest visiting a Corporate Canada Post Office in order to avoid paying additional service charges that corner stores or other establishments may implement on their products."

And for the many who may be in a location only served by a franchisee? Hey, that's free enterprise, too, and, for sure, let the buyer beware.

Stop blaming seniors for



by André Picard
The Globe and Mail
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It is stated repeatedly — to the point that it has been accepted as fact — that the aging population is driving health care costs through the roof.

Aging baby boomers, we are told grimly, will bankrupt medicare.

Is it true?

What is true is that the proportion of Canadians who are seniors is increasing. Today, 14 percent of the population is over 65. That will rise to 23 percent over the next 15 years, according to Statistics Canada.

It is true too that per capita health spending increases steadily with age, from a low of $1,223 at age 5 to $3,772 at age 65. After that, per capita health spending doubles every decade, hitting $8,425 at age 75 then $16,821 at age 85.

Looking at those numbers we assume, intuitively, that we are doomed. But let's not forget that there are all kinds of cost drivers in our health system and an aging population is only one of them.

This point is made eloquently in a recent report from the Urban Futures Institute entitled *Sustainable: British Columbia's Health Care System and Our Aging Population.* While the report focuses on British Columbia, the messages are universal.

The authors, Andrew Ramlo and Ryan Berlin, examined provincial health spending over the past 30 years, from 1979 to 2009. (They focused on state spending because the data are good; physicians, hospitals and prescription drugs are all covered for seniors.)

During that 30-year period, public spending on health care rose to $118.6 billion from $13.6 billion across Canada. (In that same period, public spending in British Columbia jumped to $15.6 billion from $1.6 billion.)

Four factors accounted for those increases:

- Population growth — 7 percent;
- Aging of the population — 14 percent;

soaring health costs

- Inflation — 19 percent;
- Increased utilization — 59 percent.

The report also analyzed those factors in the decade 1999 to 2009, when spending increases were attributable to:

- Population growth — 13 percent;
- Aging of the population — 24 percent;
- Inflation — 22 percent;
- Increased utilization — 41 percent

The Urban Futures analysis tells us that the aging population is having an impact but, by far, what is driving health spending is utilization. There are new drugs, new technologies, new hospitals, more doctors and nurses (with higher incomes), new administrative structures and so on. Governments have been willing — save for a brief period in the early nineties — to increase health spending well above the rate of inflation with nary a concern.

Between 1979 and 2009, health spending increased at an average rate of 8 percent a year.

That is a much faster growth rate than inflation (3.4 percent), the over-65 population (2.9 percent) and population growth (1.7 percent). Health spending has also, for three decades, grown faster than overall government spending (5.2 percent) and gross domestic product (5.3 percent).

Now, some readers will say: Sure there is increased demand and costs, but seniors are the big users of care so it's their fault.

The Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, in its popular "Mythbusters" series, tackled the issue of aging seniors. It noted that over a generation, seniors have doubled their use of hospital and physician services and their drug use has skyrocketed. The increases are much higher than younger age groups.

Why? Is the older-equals-sicker equation correct? Are 21st-century seniors really that much sicker than 20th-century seniors? Or are we medicalizing aging to a perverse degree?

According to a fascinating article in the *Canadian Journal on Aging,* the cost of treating the sickest seniors — those in hospital — has remained relatively stable over a long period. On the other hand, the use of health services by healthy seniors (those who live independently in the community) has ballooned.

Maybe all this extra spending is preventive and keeping people out of more expensive hospital care, but there is little concrete evidence of that. But there is a lot of evidence that those with chronic illnesses — by far the biggest users of health services — are not being managed effectively or cost-efficiently.

(This takes us, in passing, to another myth: that we spend huge amounts on the dying, with heroic technological efforts to squeeze out a few more breaths. What the data show is that about six percent of seniors die every year, and they account for about 20 percent of medical costs, a figure that has remained steady for decades.)

Back to the Urban Futures report. It looked not only at trends 30 years back but offered projections 30 years forward.

The authors estimate that, over the next three decades, as the influx of 65-plus baby boomers comes and goes, health state spending will increase 84 percent — including 48 percent because of population growth and 36 percent because of the age composition of the population.

In that same time period, 2009 to 2039, GDP will grow an estimated 87 percent, meaning that, economically, we can easily handle the increased expense in health spending attributable to demographics.

However, if utilization trends continue, health spending will increase an additional 191 percent and sustainability will be more precarious.

To state it another way: For every $1 we spend today we will need $1.84 in 2039 to cover population growth and aging. But we will need $3.75 to keep pace if we continue with profligate shovelling of ever-more tax dollars into sickness care well above the rate of inflation.

Canada's medicare system is not threatened by a silver tsunami of aging baby boomers.

It is threatened by a tsunami of "more, more, more." It is threatened by an unwillingness to ask if more intense, more expensive care is appropriate or necessary, and a reluctance to reallocate dollars to strategies that work and to cut (or off-load) those that do not.

Aging is inevitable but thoughtless health inflation is not. So we should lay off the granny-bashing and start making some tough choices.

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Big Pharma wants longer drug monopolies

by Jim Keon

Brand-name drug companies and the European Union are pushing Canada for changes that would extend market monopolies for brand-name drugs and add hundreds of millions of dollars to Canada's prescription drug bill.

The brand-name pharmaceutical industry has convinced the European Union to table three proposals as part of the Canada–EU trade negotiations (CETA). These proposals are clearly in the interests of the European Union and brand-name drug companies headquartered in Europe, but they are certainly not in the best interest of Canadians and those who pay for prescription drugs.

One change would extend the patent period to compensate for delays in the approval process for new drugs. Another would lengthen the so-called "data protection" period by about two years, delaying generic versions of drugs whether they are protected by patents or not. The third change being pursued most aggressively by brand-name drug companies would extend the current two-year automatic delay of generic competition under regulations of the Patent Act by an additional one to two years.

Pharmaceuticals are the EU's top export to Canada, comprising 16 percent of their total exports to Canada with a value of more than $5-billion. The EU has not tabled these provisions to increase R&D investments by brand-name drug companies in Canada.

They hope to increase EU profits in pharmaceuticals exports at the

expense of Canada's health-care system and Canadian generic manufacturers.

If implemented, the changes would delay market entry of less expensive generic versions of prescription medicines in Canada. While the changes would mean more profits for European-based drug companies, it will only add to the problem of rising drug costs for Canadians.

For example, after years of litigation by Canadian generic drug companies, generic versions of the top-selling drug in Canada, Lipitor, are now available in Canada. The savings from just this one generic drug are more than $800 million annually.

History has proven that chasing brand-name drug companies' investments with our health-care dollars is a fool's errand.

The federal government has increased monopolies for brand-name drug companies no fewer than eight times since 1987. Canada's intellectual property regime exceeds our international trade obligations, yet these increasing monopolies have not resulted in the investments that Canadians were promised in 1987 when the Mulroney government extended patent protection through Bill C-91.

Earlier this year, the federal government's Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) reported that research and development spending in Canada by brand-name drug companies has dropped to its lowest level in 20 years.

The PMPRB reported that in 2009, brand-name drug companies spent only 7.5 percent of their Canadian revenues on research and development in Canada, marking the ninth consecutive year that brand-name drug companies have broken their promise to spend at least ten percent of their domestic sales on R&D.

The generic pharmaceutical industry is a strong supporter of trade. In fact, about 40 percent of the generic medicines produced in Canada are exported. However, adding hundreds of millions of dollars to our health-care costs for virtually no return is not a trade Canada should make.

Jim Keon is President of the Canadian Generic Pharmaceutical Association (CGPA). To learn more, visit www.canadiangenerics.ca

Retirees building strength

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

NLFUR helps scotch GIS cut

Ralph Morris, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Union Retirees, pointed to a number of continuing strikes in the province requiring political action by an informed public for resolution.

He then explained how a pending federal policy to cut off GIS payments to seniors who also get RIF income was quickly stopped by a single newspaper article that he wrote for NAPE retirees. The article was sent to a NAPE retiree in Toronto; this in turn led to questions in the House of Commons. The minister responsible, Diane Finley, said she knew nothing about it and then reversed the pending policy.

Morris concluded: "If we say enough in enough places we will be heard."

BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC FORUM builds coalitions

Diane Wood, secretary of the British Columbia Federation of Retired Union Members, outlined continuing administrative changes to help it better represent BC seniors. Equipment and facilities have been upgraded to reach members by newsletter, email, mail, telephone and in person.

Outreach and recruitment are increasingly necessary to keep and grow membership and she thanked unions who paid the first year membership for retirees. Also, simplified membership renewals with several options for payment reduced workload and a membership card has been introduced.

BC FORUM continues to campaign for working and retired families and individuals including a brief to a provincial legislative committee on budget priorities and briefs to federal and provincial governments on CPP as well as supporting the CLC CPP campaign.

FORUM participates in coalitions including the Coalition to Build a Better BC, the BC Health Coalition continuum of care committee, the Lower Mainland United Way labour committee, the 70-member Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO) as well as CURC.

Liaison with labour through the BC Federation of Labour and labour councils has resulted to date in affiliation and delegate status in more than half of labour councils.

Bill Silvester, BC FORUM second vice-president, stressed need for organizational strength to give FORUM "a much louder voice" on public issues such as pensioners harmed by the Nortel bankruptcy.

ONTARIO

Ontario retirees build bridges

Orville Thacker, president of the Ontario Federation of Union Retirees, reported a busy year with the ninth biannual convention in Sudbury in mid-April with 70 delegates as well as five OFUR executive meetings.

A retirees' delegation attended an OFL – CLC pensions conference in March. Retirees also joined 30,000 people on a march during G20 meetings in Toronto. Thacker reported the rally was overwhelmingly peaceful until disrupted by 100 vandals.

OFUR continues to work with the OFL with delegates attending OFL executive council meetings and OFL conventions.

OFUR also represented seniors with presentations to municipal governments. In elections in the Waterloo region, 22 candidates were endorsed and more than 50% elected.

Pictured are the OFUR Executive (L to R): Second Vice-President Betty Ann Bushell, Assistant Secretary Julien Dionne, Secretary Joyce Cruickshank, Treasurer Richard Kratz, President Orville Thacker, Member-at-Large Reg Duguay and First Vice-President John Redko.

all across Canada

NOVA SCOTIA

NSFUR looks to increase visibility

Larry Wark, president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Union Retirees, was re-elected at the annual meeting in May 2010 where CURC President Pat Kerwin spoke. The next annual meeting is set for May, 2011. An immediate project will start area councils in Sydney and Port Hawkesbury. He said key union people are now becoming retirees and NSFUR looks to increase visibility.

The NDP provincial government is moving ahead on long term care and finds the Manitoba model useful in terms of numbers served and services provided.

Pictured at right are the NSFUR Executive with Larry Wark in front and Regional Chairpersons Sandra Whitehead, Victor Tomiczek, David Huskins, Alice Neiley and CURC President Pat Kerwin in the rear.

NEW BRUNSWICK

NBFUR active in provincial politics

Cecile Cassista, president of the New Brunswick Federation of Union Retirees, said she was very active promoting seniors' issues in the provincial election. A change from a Liberal to a Progressive Conservative provincial government has emphasized the need to lobby on behalf of seniors.

NBFUR is rebuilding with an interim working group on seniors' issues with an annual meeting set for April.

Activists have campaigned successfully to stop seizure of seniors' assets when they require home care but there is a need for legislated guarantees to make the policy permanent, Cassista said.

This is part of a campaign to allow people to "age in place," which means being able to live in their homes in the community with affordable services, she concluded. Cecile is heading up the CURC policy development in this area which will be highlighted in the 2011 CURC Convention.

Amongst the activists are New Brunswick Federation of Labour President Michel Boudreau, Canadian Labour Congress Secretary Treasurer Hassan Yussuff, New Brunswick Federation of Union Retires President Cecile Cassista and Saint John Labour Council President Ron Oldfield.

QUÉBEC

QFUR joins pension effort

The Québec Federation of Union Retirees has worked closely with the QFL to build its organization. QFL President Michel Arsenault spoke at the meeting to approve the constitution of the QFUR.

Extensive organization has also been undertaken at the local level. There are now functioning councils in the Montréal and Laurentides-Lanaudière regions. Councils are in the process of being organized in the Québec et Chaudière-Appalaches region and the Mauricie et Centre-du-Québec region.

The QFUR has worked with the QFL and others on a campaign to improve the QPP as part of the national plan. The campaign is entitled « Une retraite à l'abri des sources ». They have also participated in demonstrations against the privatization of health and social services.

MANITOBA

Gov't responsive on CURC issues

Al Cerilli, president of the Manitoba Federation of Union Retirees, reports that his group has been very active on the issue of pensions. Cerilli said the Manitoba NDP provincial government is responsive to MFUR, particularly on pension and national drug plan issues. He looks forward to the government of Greg Selinger being returned for a fourth NDP term of office.

SASKATCHEWAN

SFUR looks back on successes in 2010

The SFUR executive, elected at the annual meeting last October.

President Betty Pickering reported on a busy year's activities by Saskatchewan Federation of Union Retirees. Individual membership rose by 87% through efforts led by second vice-president Ron Monk and continuing outreach work with unions, activists, labour councils, public forums and seniors' gatherings. These meetings often let SFUR promote the extended benefits package offered by CURC and Canadian Benefits.

SFUR lobbied extensively on pensions with elected representatives and participated in a pension forum in Regina sponsored by five union organizations. SFUR joined the picket line at Casino Regina to support striking RWDSU and PSAC workers and also supplied a lunch enjoyed by all.

SFUR networks through membership in the Saskatchewan Seniors' Mechanism (SSM), which includes 16 other organizations and reaches a potential audience of more than 100,000. The SSM held a gala called Celebrating Seniors in Regina October 3, which SFUR sponsored. A second annual awards banquet will be held this coming October 2 at TCU Place in Saskatoon.

SFUR and the SSM co-sponsored a primary health care conference in Southey in March that grew out of community education and networking. Dr. Michael Rachlis of Toronto was guest speaker and he will return for this year's SSM conference on long term care / continuum of care in Humboldt, May 17 – 18.

SFUR held its annual meeting on October 28 in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour annual meeting in Regina.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

PEI Federation enjoys electoral success in 2010

The PEIFUR had its official founding meeting on April 28, 2010. Here, the executive poses for the camera.

Everett Baker, president of the PEI Federation of Union Retirees, reported his group submitted a brief to the provincial cabinet on CPP and joined the demonstration at the Crowbush golf resort when labour and advocacy groups pressed a provincial ministerial conference to strengthen CPP.

Retirees participated in Island municipal elections and were successful in winning seven of 17 seats targeted. Retirees are concerned for services for the aged which are provided by nine private and nine public manors. Of the 1033 beds available, the waiting list is more than 100 and a provincial population of more than 10,000 Islanders are over age 80.

In the immediate future, the union will advocate for improved pharmacare and CPP.

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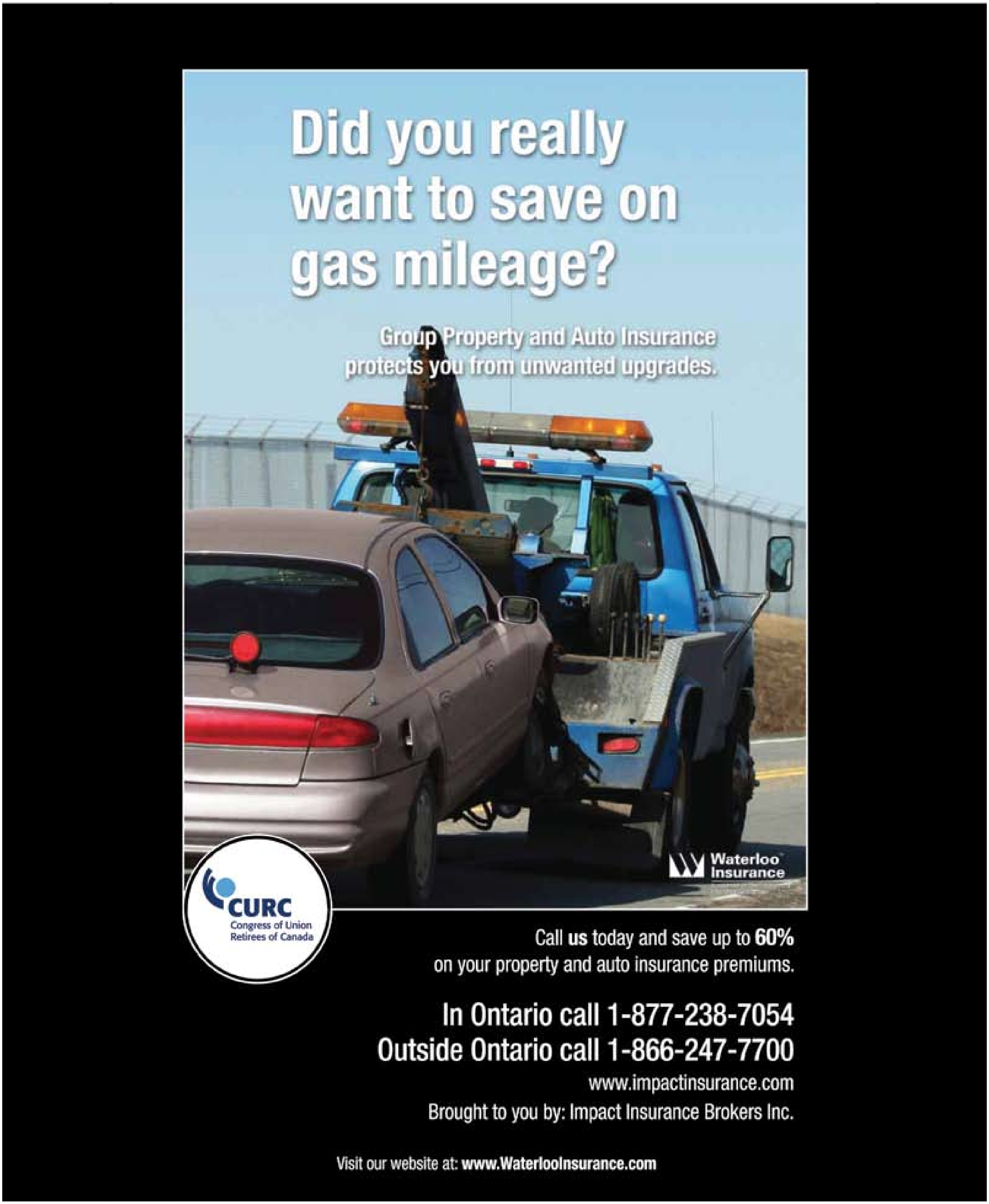

Bill Clark

Bill Clark, the founder and first president of the British Columbia Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM), died October 26. He was an inspiration to many in the labour movement with his leadership and innovative ideas.

Bill advocated seniors' issues long into his retirement after his presidency of the Telecommunication Workers from 1980–1987.

Bill recognized retirees should organize and negotiate better and less costly benefit plans which BC FORUM has accomplished. Bill's skills as a bargainer and leader resulted in an excellent pension plan and the creative use of pension monies in establishing Concert Properties, a company that would use only union labour as well as proving financially successful for union pension owners.

The Concert Properties Founders Endowment, established in his honour, provides bursaries to students in telecom and computer programs.

Bill is survived by his wife Gwen, his sons, Barrie, Bill Jr., Jamie and their families.

Bill Punnett

Bill Punnett understood the need for a union very early in life. His father was injured at work and denied a pension by the WCB. When he was 13 years old, Bill found his own employer paying desperate hobos much less for the same work he was doing. Bill vowed he would fight back against draconian employers when he started work full time.

In 1935, he was part of the successful campaign to introduce the Seamen's Union on the Great Lakes.

Bill worked as a skilled machinist at John Inglis Co. during the war years when it was considered unpatriotic to be a union activist. In 1945, at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in New Toronto, he was elected chief steward and treasurer of Local 232 of the United Rubber Workers. In 1946, he participated in the four-month strike which established the URW as bargaining agent for employees in the rubber industry.

As a staff rep for the Rubber Workers, Bill was active in the strike against Firestone that was successful in achieving a non-contributory pension plan which set a precedent for all unions in Canada.

Bill was a delegate to the Toronto and Lakeshore Labour Council (CCL), attended the merger convention of the TLC and CCL in 1956 and was elected a vice-president at the founding convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour in 1958. In 1971, recognizing his leadership within the Rubber Workers, he was elected Canadian Director.

A long time supporter of co-op housing because of the unfair housing practices of landlords, Bill was very proud when the William Punnett Housing Co-op was opened in New Toronto. Many of the residents had worked with Bill at Goodyear and were members of Local 232.

Bill was a political activist and promoter of union involvement in politics. He was a delegate to the founding convention of the New Democratic Party in 1961. In his own riding of Humber and then Etobicoke Lakeshore, where he and his family lived for 60 years, he held every office in the riding association. Once he retired, Bill became the sign chairperson. He died August 27, 2010. He was 91 years of age.

Peter Leibovitch

The labour movement lost one of its most ardent activists when Peter Leibovitch died of leukemia on September 18 at the age of 59. Peter was a passionate and selfless fighter for trade union rights and a devoted father to his five sons and a step-daughter.

Peter served three terms as president of USW Local 8782 at US Steel Lake Erie Works.

Peter fought not only for workers on the shop floor but on broader issues such as the rights of the Palestinian people and against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He managed many NDP campaigns including those of Sid Ryan and Tony DePaulo in federal elections.

Peter's most recent initiative was organizing precarious workers in the taxi industry in Hamilton and Toronto. He was a working class hero and leaves a tremendous legacy. His message to us undoubtedly would be, "Carry it on, carry it on, carry it on."

Full-length stories are available on our website: **http://unionretiree.ca**

Huguette Plamendon: A source of inspiration and encouragement

With the death of Sister Huguette Plamendon on September 29, 2010 at the age of 84, the labour movement lost a pioneer. Her career in the labour movement began in 1945 when she was hired to be a secretary in the Montreal office of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (a predecessor union of UFCW Canada). Shortly thereafter, she found herself embroiled in a massive strike that involved Canada's entire meatpacking industry.

She led pickets, and became a source of inspiration and encouragement for her sisters and brothers in the labour movement. She was 21 years old.

Because Sister Plamondon possessed a rare combination of intelligence, passion and eloquence, she rapidly rose through the labour movement's ranks. She made history every step of the way. Huguette was elected president of the Montréal labour council in 1955, and in doing so became the first Canadian woman to lead a major labour organization. A year later, Sister Plamondon became the first woman in Canada to achieve a national union executive position by becoming a vice president of the newly-formed Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

Huguette Plamendon was the first woman executive member of the Canadian Labour Congress.

In 1961, Huguette nominated Tommy Douglas at the NDP's founding convention. She served UFCW Canada as an international vice-president and an executive assistant to the national director for many years, and was the long-time president of UFCW Canada Local 744P in Québec.