

CUPE members step up to run in provincial election



Red Deer North NDP candidate Derek Seelinger (centre) with NDP MLA Rachel Notley (front, second from the right) and a group of supporters. Seelinger is running an energetic campaign and promises to surprise people on election night.

Three CUPE members and two individuals with strong CUPE connections have taken the plunge to run for political office in the upcoming Alberta Provincial Election.

Mike Scott from CUPE 30 will run in the riding of Strathcona Sherwood Park. CUPE 8 member Collette Singh is letting her name stand in Calgary McCall, and Derek Seelinger from CUPE 417 is running in Red Deer North. Former CUPE 3550 President Trudy Grebenstein is also running in Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and former CUPE 182 member Regina Vergara is seeking election in Calgary Hays.

All five candidates are running for the Alberta NDP.

Scott and Singh are no strangers to politics; both ran in the recent federal election. But for Derek Seelinger, it's a new adventure.

"I felt it was important for CUPE members to walk the walk," said Seelinger. "We're pretty good at complaining about how government's don't listen – but it takes more than complaints to change things."

Scott is a member of the CUPE Alberta political action committee and is committed to getting more

NDP MLAs elected in the upcoming election.

"Right now, working people have two NDP MLAs sticking up for us in a legislature of 83," said Scott. "Brian Mason and Rachel Notley are the only politicians standing up for better long term care, for lower electricity prices, and for better education funding."

"That's not good enough. Things have to change – and I'm determined to do what I can to change it."

As the President of CUPE Local 8, Collette Singh has seen firsthand the

problems in Alberta's long term care system. She's quick to point out that as the government for the last forty years, the Conservatives have a lot to answer for.

"Before the last election, the Conservatives promised to create 800 new long term care spaces," said Singh. "They've created none. They've done little to nothing to improve staffing ratios, turnover, and the high cost of care."

And while the NDP has historically done poorly in previous elections, all three CUPE candidates are optimistic that things are changing.

"Polls have shown the NDP at almost double the share of the vote it received in the last election," said Seelinger. "Here in Red Deer – the response to our campaign has been terrific. People are excited that they have an alternative to support."

Scott pointed out that even a small increase in the number of NDP MLAs elected will bring benefits to regular Alberta families.

"With only two MLAs, the NDP has been able to shame the government into all kinds of moves that benefit regular people. The NDP spent months pushing for better funding for education before the Conservatives reversed their own budget cuts."

"If they can do that with two MLAs, imagine what we can accomplish with ten?" ❁

Why you should vote.

In 2008, former NDP leader Ray Martin lost his seat in the Alberta Legislature by 337 votes.

In his previous term in office, Martin had developed a reputation as the leading advocate for affordable housing and rent restrictions at a time when the oil boom was making Edmonton an impossible city for families to live in.

The person who defeated him? A former Conservative MLA from another riding who was so lacklustre, he couldn't win his own party's nomination in the riding he had served. He's gone on to be almost invisible in the Alberta Legislature.

Close elections happen though, right? What can anyone do?

In the contest that saw Martin lose by 337 votes, over 20,000 people in the riding didn't bother to go to the polls – a feeble 34% turnout.

If only 1.6% of the people who didn't vote made it to the polls and voted NDP – the Legislature wouldn't have lost a lifelong advocate for working people.

Martin's result was not a fluke. In spite of Alberta's reputation of always electing Conservatives to massive majorities, the truth is close election results and low turnouts are actually quite common in our province.

In the same election year that Ray Martin went down to defeat, fellow NDP MLA David Eggen lost the riding of Edmonton Calder by an even thinner margin of 201 votes. In this case, almost 19,000 people declined to vote. The riding turnout was only 37%.

Eggen was one of the Legislature's strongest supporters of the environment. He was defeated by a Conservative MLA who's only claim to fame in four years was when he made comments that young girls should learn to smile and be nice to boys in order to get ahead in life.

What can anyone do? Vote. ❁



Former NDP MLA David Eggen lost his riding of Edmonton Calder by 201 votes in 2008. Almost 19,000 voters failed to cast a ballot.

Ten reasons for CUPE members to vote



NDP Leader Brian Mason has a long history of sticking up for middle class families

As organizations, CUPE and CUPE Alberta have passed convention resolutions to support the New Democratic Party.

In this year's provincial election, there are excellent reasons for working people to abandon the Conservative government and switch to a labour friendly government. Here are 10:

10. The Conservatives have consistently underfunded education. Even with the recent reversal of budget cuts, our schools are still over crowded and special needs kids still don't get the support they need. The Alberta NDP has pledged to lift the freeze on special needs funding, and provide stable funding to enact the class size recommendations of the 2003 Learning Commission.

9. The continued privatization of health care services has increased expenses and wait times in the health care system. Premier Redford has made it clear private delivery of services will continue and perhaps increase. The

Alberta NDP has pledged to reverse privatization and bring more services back in house.

8. Alberta has the most anti-worker Labour Code and Labour Standards in Canada. It is harder to join a union in Alberta than almost any other province in Canada. Brian Mason and the NDP have pledged to make it easier for any worker who wants to join a union to do so. Among non-unionized workers, Alberta has the lowest minimum wage in Canada, even though our economy is one of the strongest.

7. Alberta has the highest rates for auto insurance in Western Canada. Albertans pay more for insurance than any other western province, even though we are insured for less than any other drivers. The difference is that the other provinces have public auto insurance, which reduces costs for drivers. The Redford government won't even consider public insurance, the NDP is promising it.

6. The Conservative push for energy deregulation has been a disaster for consumers. Electricity and gas bills have skyrocketed. The NDP will scrap the Conservative deregulation scheme, which makes the energy companies rich, but leaves the rest of us struggling to pay our bills.

5. The NDP supports an environmental cleanup program for the oil sands, and an energy retrofit program that would create tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans. The Conservative government has no such plan.

4. The Conservatives continue to support the export of raw bitumen resources to Texas for refining. Instead of exporting the raw resources to the south (only to buy back the finished product) NDP Leader Brian Mason has continually called for an end to the export of bitumen and more government efforts to refine it in Alberta.

3. For too long, the Conservatives have been giving away our energy resources to big energy companies for next to nothing. Albertans own the oil and gas that exist beneath our feet, but the Conservatives sell it to the oil companies for a fraction of what most other energy producers charge. Albertans are getting such a bad deal on energy royalties, the province is running a deficit and has little in the Heritage Trust Fund after decades of energy production – and still our schools are crowded and hospital wait lines grow.

The NDP is the only party calling for a fair share of royalties being used for the services Albertans need.

2. Alberta has the worst, most expensive child care system in the country. Provinces like Quebec and Manitoba have quality, public child care systems which cost parents between \$5-\$15 per day, a fraction of what Albertans are charged. The Conservative government's solution is more private day care – even though that system has resulted in shortages and very expensive fees. Brian Mason's NDP understands that Alberta families need quality care at a price they can afford – and that means a public system.

1. Before the last election, the Conservatives promised that if elected they would build 800 new long term care spaces.

They have built zero.

Instead, they have looked to the private sector to create 'assisted living' spaces. Assisted living is a much lower level of care for a much higher price to the patient and their family. So inadequate is the service that most doctors won't release seniors from hospitals unless there is a proper long term care space for them to go to. This means the hospital beds are used up (at great expense to the taxpayer) and wait times increase across the system.

Brian Mason and the Alberta NDP have been relentless advocates of building more long term care beds in the province. These beds provide the care seniors need, at a cost their families can afford, while reducing wait times in hospitals and emergency rooms. The Conservatives have ignored those calls and kept building beds no one wants or can afford. 🌸



Conservative government actions have led to skyrocketing bills for electricity, natural gas, car insurance and other necessities of life.

Highlights from 2011

- CUPE Local 829 and the Medicine Hat School Division signed a historic first contract for approximately 170 Teaching Assistants and Day Care Workers previously not covered by a union.
- Edmonton Public School Trustees heard presentations from CUPE in favour of a motion to prevent the advancement of 'big box' day cares on school properties. School trustees voted 7-2 in favour of a limiting rentals to not-for-profit childcare only. Several trustees noted that the presence and research from CUPE helped sway their decision to support the motion.
- CUPE Alberta sponsored and participated in the 'Alberta Water Futures Tour' to raise awareness about the problems associated with water markets.
- CUPE made a submission to Alberta's Minister of Employment regarding proposed changes to the Alberta Labour Code.
- CUPE 37 launch a cost share campaign to fight privatization of services in Calgary parks.
- CUPE 30 makes a presentation to Edmonton City Council opposing Mayor Mandel's plan to privatize snow removal. Council instead votes to bring more services in house.
- CUPE 474 makes budget presentation to Edmonton Public School Board, calling for environmentally friendly (and worker safe) custodial policies.
- Four CUPE members and one CUPE staff person ran as candidates for the NDP in the 2011 Federal Election campaign. One CUPE staff person worked for the NDP as the provincial campaign manager.
- CUPE Alberta is participating in 'Join Together Alberta' a coalition of unions and other groups promoting public services.
- CUPE Alberta is participating and co-chairing the 'Kids not cuts' campaign against school cut backs to support services.
- CUPE Alberta Aboriginal Council launch postcard campaign calling on the Federal Government to launch a public enquiry into the high number of murdered and missing aboriginal women.
- CUPE Alberta Educational Employees Committee launched a postcard campaign looking for better funding for education, and a stop to cut backs of support services. ✿

Social Justice Quiz, 2011

1. How many deaths are there world-wide each day due to poverty and malnutrition?
 2. In the US in 1965, CEOs in major companies made 24 times more than the average worker. In 1980, CEOs made 40 times more than the average worker. In 2007, CEOs earned how many times more than the average worker?
 3. Based on 2008 statistics, how many people in the world live on \$2 a day or less?
 4. Based on 2008 statistics, how many people in the world do not have electricity?
 5. How many cars does China have for every 1000 drivers? India? The US?
 6. How much grain is needed to fill a SUV tank with ethanol?
 7. What percentage of people in homeless shelters are children?
 8. Over the 28 year history of the Berlin Wall, 287 people perished trying to cross it. How many people have died in the last 4 years trying to cross the border between Arizona and Mexico?
 9. India is ranked second in the world in gun ownership with 4 guns per 100 people. China is third with 3 firearms per 100 people. Which country is first and how many guns do they own?
 10. What country leads the world in the incarceration of its citizens? (Based on 2008 stats)
- Answers**
1. About 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes, according to the United Nations. Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes – one child every five seconds.
 2. Today's average CEO from a Fortune 500 company makes 364 times an average worker's pay and over 70 times the pay of a four-star Army general.
 3. The World Bank reported in August 2008 that 2.6 billion people consume less than \$2 a day.
 4. World-wide, 1.6 billion people do not have electricity. 2.5 billion people use wood, charcoal or animal dung for cooking.
 5. China has 9 cars for every 1000 drivers. India has 11 cars for every 1000 drivers. The US has 1114 cars for every 1000 drivers.
 6. The grain needed to fill up a SUV tank with ethanol could feed a hungry person for a year.
 7. HUD reports nearly 1 in 4 people in homeless shelters are children 17 or younger.
 8. At least 1268 people have died along the border of Arizona and Mexico since 2004. The Arizona Daily Star keeps track of the reported deaths along the state border and reports 214 died in 2004, 241 in 2005, 216 in 2006, 237 in 2007, and 116 as of July 31, 2008. These numbers do not include the deaths along the California or Texas border. The Border Patrol reported that 400 people died in fiscal 2006-2007, 453 died in 2004-2005, and 494 died in 2004-2005.
 9. The US is first in gun ownership world-wide with 90 guns for every 100 citizens. Laura MacInnis, "US most armed country with 90 guns per 100 people."
 10. The US jails 751 inmates per 100,000 people, the highest rate in the world. Russia is second with 627 per 100,000. England's rate is 151, Germany is 88, and Japan is 63. The US has 2.3 million people behind bars, more than any country in the world.
- This quiz was created from Social Justice Quiz, 2008 which was published on the New Green Economy. ✿*



The grain needed to fill up a SUV tank with ethanol could feed a hungry person for a year.

New study dispels myths about public sector pay

CUPE.CA



A new study confirms what any CUPE member already knows – public sector wages are not overly high.

OTTAWA – Think public sector workers are paid more than the private sector? Think again.

According to a new study released by CUPE, there is no evidence the pay of public sector workers in Canada is consistently higher than comparable occupations in the private sector.

Battle of the Wages: Who gets paid more, public or private sector workers analyzes census data at the most detailed occupational level available. By comparing average pay in comparable occupations, the study gives the most accurate snap-shot of how public sector workers pay compares to the private sector.

“There is wide spread misconception that public sector workers are paid more than their private sector counterparts, and this is being used as fuel in unnecessary and unwarranted attacks on public sector jobs, wages, benefits and even the most basic rights of public sector workers,” said CUPE National President Paul Moist. “This report clearly dispels this myth once and for all.”

While the study shows overall average pay is similar, it also found smaller inequities between genders, age groups, regions, and top and lowest income earners in the public sector compared to the private sector.

The small overall “pay premium” of 0.5 percent for public sector workers, can be attributed entirely to a smaller pay gap for women in the public sector. On average, women employed in public sector jobs are paid 4.5 percent more than women in comparable occupations in the private sector while men in the public sector are paid an average of 5.3 per cent less.

“Stronger pay equity rules have reduced the pay gap for women in the public sector,” said Toby Sanger, the study’s author. “If public sector wages reflected the standards of the private sector, women in the public sector would be paid an average of \$1,980 less per year and there would be greater disparities for others as well. Public sector pay scales should reflect the broader values of Canadians.”

“The IMF, Conference Board of Canada and the OECD have all recently raised concern that growing inequality is damaging our economic growth. Public sector wage scales reduce income inequality, help stabilize the economy and should be a model for the private sector, with decent wages for the lowest paid and less excess at the top,” said Sanger.

The complete report - including detailed analysis, explanation of methodology and recommendations - is available at cupe.ca. ❁

CUPE Alberta Convention

The 2012 CUPE Alberta convention will be held **March 21-23** at the Capri Hotel in Red Deer. Check out www.alberta.cupe.ca for more details.



Catholic School employees join CUPE, sign new contract

Educational Assistants and clerical staff at the Fort McMurray Catholic School District have voted to join the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

Employees voted by a 67% margin to leave their staff association and become part of CUPE. About 230 employees are affected by the vote.

“I’m pleased these employees have decided they will have better protection and a stronger voice within Canada’s largest union,” said CUPE Alberta President Marle Roberts.

The employees joined custodial staff in the district as part of CUPE Local 2559. With over 7,400 members in the K-12 sector – CUPE represents more school board support staff than any other union.

“By joining CUPE, these employees join a network of K-12 workers from coast to

coast,” said Roberts. “They will have the benefit of experience, resources, and professional assistance that only CUPE can provide.”

It took only one month after voting to join CUPE before the employees were able to complete negotiations for a new collective agreement with their employer.

The new deal provides an arbitration process to settle grievances, dues deduction, and the confirmation of 4.53% wage increases previously agreed to. Employees voted 97% in favour of the deal.

“An important part of any contract is having a way to settle disputes – and this agreement provides that,” said Roberts. “We’ve taken an important first step in developing a new relationship between the school district and its support staff.” ❁



Marle Roberts says the employees will have better protection and a stronger voice with CUPE.

CUPE Week Long School

May 6-11, 2012
Olds College, Olds Alberta

Details are available at www.alberta.cupe.ca

The United Leader

The United Leader is produced by the CUPE Alberta Newsletter committee:

Deborah Stewart
Archie Walsh
Kathy Larson
Sheila Stewart
Dee Kibler

Editor: Lou Arab, Communications Representative
Graphic Design: Jocelyn Renaud, CUPE Communications

Back issues are available at www.alberta.cupe.ca

Do you have stories that need to be told? Photos that do the talking for you? Want to rant in a letter to the editor? Please send your content to Lou Arab (larab@cupe.ca)