

Voice



Website lets members calculate how much Conservatives are taking from our pensions

A new website is letting CUPE members and others with public sector pension plans know how much they will lose if the Redford government succeeds in slashing benefits to pensions.

The website, TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca, includes a pension calculator that lets members of the Local Authorities Pension Plan know how much Redford's raid will cost them on retirement, 10 years after retirement, and 20 years after retirement.

And if you don't like what you see, the website provides a handy link to easily send the Premier a message.

In the first week after the website's launch, almost 3,400 Albertans had used the site to calculate their losses.

The website is part of a campaign put together by the Labour Coalition on Pensions

The Redford government is gutting the pension you paid for.

The pension promise.
That's what we call the promise about modest retirement security that the government made to almost 300,000 retirees and frontline workers in Alberta's hospitals, schools, cities, and towns.

But now Premier Redford wants to break the pension promise she made to you.
Her plan is unjustified, reckless and unfair.

Take action at TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca

A new website allows Albertans to see just how much money Premier Alison Redford is taking from their pensions.

to lobby the Redford government to back down on reckless cuts to Alberta Public sector pension plans.

The Redford government has announced it intends to

introduce three changes to pension plans in the spring session of the legislature. The changes include:

1. An end to early retirement. Currently, members

of our pension plans can retire early if their age plus their years of service equal eighty-five. This provision will be eliminated. This change alone is worth 20% of the average pension benefit.

2. A reduction, and possible elimination, of the indexing of pension benefits. The Redford government wants to reduce indexing of pensions to 50% of inflation, but only when they feel it's affordable.

3. A cap on pension contributions. This change may seem like a good idea to members who want a little more money in their pay cheque, but it will starve the pension plans of revenue, and require even more cuts to pensions in the future.

Using the calculator, it's easy to see the impact on CUPE members and other public sector employees. A 44 year old employee earning \$48,000 per year can expect to lose early retirement and lose \$336

per month when he first leaves work. After 10 years, that employee's losses increase to \$397 (if the government allows indexing).

Contrary to government rhetoric, our pension plans are very modest. The average full pension under the Local Authorities Pension Plan is only \$15,000 per year. With the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security, that member can expect an income just above the poverty line. After Redford's changes - an entire generation of seniors will have less than they need to avoid poverty.

The Redford government claims the pension plans are in bad financial shape, but the plan's liability will be largely paid off by 2021 without changes to benefits. An independent actuarial report released in January by the Labour Coalition said there was no need to cut benefits. ❀

For more information, please visit: TruthAboutAlbertaPensions.ca

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HOSPITAL LAB PRIVATIZATION

It's said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. But that is exactly what the Redford government is doing.

They have tried to privatize hospital labs in the past, only to bring them back 'in house' after private contractors couldn't do the job as safely, or even as affordably, as public workers.

Now, Premier Redford is pushing ahead with a plan to give Edmonton hospital lab services to one of three private companies bidding for the contract.

All three companies under consideration have a long history of overcharging, driving up health care costs, impropriety and disputes with agencies that regulate private health care in other places. Why would we trust our health care to organizations with such terrible records of looking out for public interests?

RISKS TO PATIENT SAFETY

A letter signed by sixteen pathologists at the University of Alberta makes it clear that doctors see huge risks to patients and public safety under this scheme.

Given the failure of Alison Redford's recent attempt to privatize home care, and the recent loss of private health information of over 600,000 Albertans by a private health care provider, it is clear that privately run health care delivers poorer quality care to patients and to taxpayers.

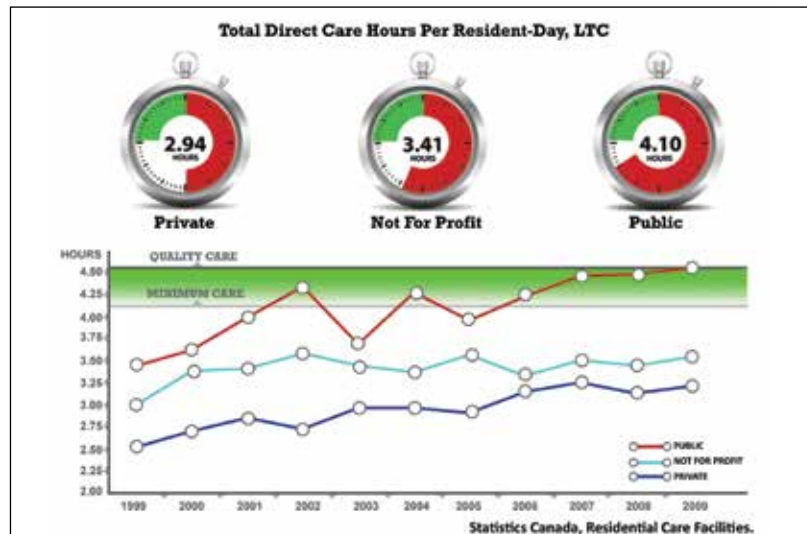
BROKEN PROMISES

In the last election campaign, Alison Redford promised to protect public health care. She told voters that voting for the Wildrose Party would lead to the privatization of health care, and promised public services would not be cut if her government was re-elected.

Privatizing lab services breaks all these promises.

IT HAS NEVER WORKED, IT DOES NOT WORK, IT IS A MISTAKE

CUPE / Canadian Union of Public Employees



A Parkland Institute research study found what CUPE members working in long term care have been saying for years – public facilities deliver better care for seniors.

Report shows public facilities deliver far better elder care than private

A report released in November by the Parkland Institute shows that residents in public seniors facilities receive an extra hour of direct care per day over resident's in private, for-profit homes.

For most of the last decade, the Alberta government has been pushing a policy of creating private care spaces instead of public or not for profit.

Parkland Research Director Shannon Stunden Bower said the report set out to study the shift to private care in recent years. "We found these shifts are associated with a decline in care availability, accessibility and quality, as well as more difficult working conditions for Albertans employed in the elder care field."

Among the report findings:

- a significant gap between

staffing levels in Alberta facilities and the staffing levels required to ensure dignity and comfort;

- private for-profit facilities fell short of the staffing benchmark associated with reasonable quality elder care by well over 90 minutes of care per resident, per day;

"The evidence reinforces the myriad anecdotal stories in the news of late about problems with elder care," says report co-author David Campanella. "It is also important to point out that all of these problems come during a period when private long-term care and assisted living facilities are generating rates of return to investors significantly higher than those generated by the US stock market."

The report recommends expanding public health care to include elder care, improving staffing levels, phasing out private for-profit elder care, and the creation of an elders' advocate to monitor care and report to the legislature. ❀

The report **From Bad to Worse** is available for download on the Parkland website at parklandinstitute.ca.

Alberta's minimum wage now lowest in Canada

It's official, we're 13th out of 13. Alberta's minimum wage of \$9.75 per hour (\$9.40 if you work in a job where you get tips) is lower than every other province and territory in Canada.

A minimum wage earner working 40 hours per week would have an annual income of just over \$20,000 – lower than the poverty line.

Officially, only about 2% of Albertans work for the minimum wage – but that figure has doubled since 2004 and is growing. Contrary to popular belief, minimum wage earners are not all teenagers. In 2011, 40% of Albertans earning minimum wage were over 35 – more than twice what the figure was in 1997.

And minimum wage earners are among the most vulnerable workers. Often minimum

wage earners are disabled or recent immigrants with poor language skills and a limited knowledge of their rights in the workplace. These are the workers with the most to gain from better labour laws.

Business groups often claim that an increase in the minimum wage will cost jobs. But an article by economist Armine Yalnizyan argues the opposite – giving people more purchasing power is better for business and the economy in the long run. ❀



Expand the Canada Pension Plan – or make 6/49 pay out more often

According to a recent poll commissioned by the Bank of Montreal, 35% of Canadian have no retirement strategy other than ‘planning to win the lottery.’

It’s not a surprise. Conservative politicians and business groups have almost eliminated pension plans in the private sector, and now they are doing everything they can to get rid of them in the public sector.

We’ve all heard about the government of Alberta’s plan to cut public sector pension plans. Similar cuts are being proposed in other provinces. Attacks on pensions and the subsequent fight back from workers are happening all over the country. One option to provide better retirement security is to expand the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). It’s an option that’s getting serious consideration from a lot of Canadians.

The CPP was established in 1966 and implemented as a supplement to the Old Age

Security (OAS). As far back as the 1970s, concerns were raised that the CPP and the OAS were insufficient in preventing poverty for seniors. The same concerns are echoed today.

The grim reality regarding retirement income is that more than 11 million Canadian workers are without workplace pension plans and will have to rely solely on the CPP and Old Age Security (OAS) when they retire.

Virtually all Canadians who work and are over the age of 18 contribute to the CPP (or the Quebec Pension Plan). The contribution rate is split between the worker and the employer. A person may collect CPP at 60 at a reduced rate or at 65 at the full rate. Currently, the average monthly CPP payment a person receives is less than \$600 and tops out at approximately \$1,000 per month.

The Bank of Montreal survey found 89 per cent of the respondents would have to rely on the CPP or the Quebec Pension Plan when they stopped working. Nearly a third – 31 per cent – said that they will

count “heavily” on the government pension. Sadly, 59 per cent responded that they would be forced to take part-time work to supplement their retirement income.

But there is another way; it is time to look at expanding the CPP. The Canadian Labour Congress is proposing a doubling of the CPP. This would be financed through a modest and gradual increase in contributions over seven years. This increase in contributions would ensure a better minimum pension for all Canadians and would help to ensure retirement with dignity for all working people in Canada.

So, who supports an increase to the CPP? According to the Canadian Labour Congress, economists, academics and 76 per cent of recently polled Canadians support expanding the CPP. Eight out of ten provinces also support the expansion with the exception of Alberta and Quebec. On the federal front, the Harper government does not support an expansion of the CPP. Instead, the current federal government would rather create a different savings



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plan, one where workers take on all the risk and employers don’t have to contribute.

It is time to take action with respect to the expansion of the CPP. CUPE has great information including a petition on their website – <http://cupe.ca/>

action/time-to-expand-cpp. Learn the facts, speak to friends and family, and sign the petition. And remember to talk about CPP expansion in all of your pension fights; more than 11 million Canadians are counting on you. ❀



Doctor’s orders: Stay home! Ontario physicians don’t want employers to insist on sick notes when patients should remain in bed.

Stop asking employees for sick notes: MDs

Ontario doctors are calling on employers to stop asking for sick notes when employees call in sick.

In a statement issued to the media in January, the Ontario Medical Association said making sick people visit doctor’s offices for notes spreads germs and makes some patients more vulnerable to prolonged illness.

“You don’t want to encourage people who have infectious diseases to go to their doctor’s office when it’s not necessary,” said

Scott Wooder, President of the Association. “They’re in a waiting room with other people, some of them have very serious illnesses like cancer. There are pregnant mothers and children. They’re putting those people at risk.”

“Staying home to rest will help you to manage your illness and prevent others from getting infected,” said Wooder. “Employers should encourage workers to stay home when sick – not require sick notes.”

Don't say "strike"



Despite frigid temperatures, public sector workers demonstrated every night for a week outside the Alberta Legislature against Bills 45 and 46.

Thanks to new legislation passed by the Redford government, loose talk about illegal strikes could lead to massive new fines on unions – and their members.

It's part of Bill 45, one of two anti-worker bills the Redford government introduced and passed in the dying moments of 2013. Bill 45 dramatically increases fines and penalties to unions who engage in strikes, slowdowns, or work to rule (strict adherence to the terms of the contract). Unions can be fined up to \$1 million per day for illegal activity, with individual members facing fines of a day's pay plus \$500.

New to labour law in Canada is the idea of a 'strike threat' which levies these fines even for discussing illegal strikes.

"The Redford government is acting like a bully," said CUPE Alberta President Marle Roberts. "To threaten huge

fines to individual workers who call a radio phone-in, or engage in some loose talk in the break room is unnecessary, over the top, and undemocratic."

Roberts says Bill 45 will pressure union members to work in situations where they don't feel safe.

"Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, but we all know it sometimes takes enormous courage to do that," said Roberts. "Now, bad supervisors can tell workers what they are considering is illegal and might lead to huge fines. And if an educated steward or union representative isn't available, that worker may be put in serious danger."

Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan said the bill was a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and predicted legal challenges. "It's clear that we will be going to court and it's clear that the Redford

government will lose," McGowan said.

The Federation of Labour also unveiled television advertisements that accuse the premier of abandoning the coalition that helped get her elected in 2012. The advertisements call out Premier Alison Redford for bullying opponents, and encourage Albertans to remember these bills during the next election.

"Alison Redford is not a progressive, she's a fraud. Despite her history as a human rights lawyer, she is also no defender of rights in a democracy," McGowan said. "Real democratic leaders understand that they have to respect others and work with others. Bullies use their power to impose their will. Alison Redford is a bully." ❀

The Federation's TV ad, "Bully," can be viewed at www.youtube.com/user/ABFedLabour

Athabasca University staff say school is creating barriers to education

EDMONTON—Tutors at the on-line Athabasca University are speaking out after the institution announced its Faculty of Science and Technology will be shifting to a call centre format for course instruction.

The Tutors, represented by CUPE 3911, say the change means students will no longer have a designated, individual tutor to instruct them throughout the course. Replacing it will be a model where students speak with different administrative staff

persons every time they have a question or concern.

Spokesperson Virginia Gillese said students will lose continuity of instructors as the university moves to a 'production line' style of education.

"This move compromises a student's potential to succeed," said Gillese. "Athabasca University is creating barriers to learning, not eliminating them, as is their mandate."

"This move endangers the integrity of the university, and diminishes the quality of education provided." ❀

Canadians – and Albertans – support unions

A majority of Canadians — 56 per cent — hold favourable views of unions, with a similar number of Albertans holding similar opinions, a new survey finds.

The Harris/Decima survey, carried out for the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), found 70 per cent of Canadians (and 68 per cent of Albertans) say unions are "still needed," compared to fewer than 30 per cent who say they are obsolete.

By a two-to-one margin, respondents said everyone who benefits from a union's services should be required to pay dues to that union. That flies in the face of some Conservative politicians' push towards "right to work" laws, which allow union members to opt out of paying dues.

Conservative and Wildrose candidates beware, 49 percent of Albertans agree with the statement "I am suspicious of politicians who want to limit the power of unions."

Voice

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CUPE Alberta Division has moved

CUPE Alberta Division President Marle Roberts has set up shop at the Alberta Regional Office in Edmonton.

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