

Vote for your boss

Civic elections a unique opportunity for CUPE members to flex our political muscle

By Lou Arab

October 18th is municipal Election Day across Alberta. That means every town and city councillor, school trustee, and county reeve is looking for a contract extension. And they need your vote to make it happen.

CUPE Alberta represents over 12,000 municipal employees and over 7,000 K-12 workers. Our members have a real stake in these elections. The election winners will be administering public tax dollars, deciding what public services to fund, what services to privatize or contract out, and how hard to push public workers at the bargaining table.

But first they have to get through the voters.

We get to elect our bosses. How cool is that?

Across the province, CUPE will be working to elect some of our members, and some other 'friends of public services' to elected public office. We can't tell you who to vote for – that choice is up to you. But we can pass on some information about some of the candidates fighting hard for the public services we care so much about.

Edmonton Civic

Dave Loken: Dave Loken is a CUPE 30 member currently representing Edmonton Civic Unions lobbying City Hall for better public services. Loken ran in 2007 coming close in the old Ward 2. This time he is running in the new Ward 3.

Amerjeet Sohi: For the last three years, this former bus driver has represented the Millwoods and southeast part of Edmonton on city council. Sohi has been a strong advocate for public services – he was one of the few councillors against selling off parts of



EPCOR. Sohi is seeking re-election in Ward 12. (www.sohi.ca)

Edmonton Public Schools

Tina Jardine: Tina is the former President of CUPE 3550, so she knows education issues first hand. As a candidate in Ward 1, Jardine is pushing for a board that presses the provincial government for better funding, that looks out for special needs students, and promotes community schools.

Sarah Hoffman: Endorsed by Rachel Notley, Linda Duncan, Ray Martin and a number of other prominent Edmontonians, Sarah Hoffman is starting her first political campaign

strongly. As a candidate for Ward G on the Edmonton Public School Board, Hoffman is taking on current trustees who have closed eighteen schools in the last ten years. (www.sarahhoffman.ca)

Calgary Civic

Bob Hawksworth: While almost all the other candidates for Mayor of Calgary are talking about cutting services, Bob Hawksworth is setting himself apart by promoting better services, a diverse arts scene and better protection of the environment. (www.bob4mayor.ca)

Brian Pincott: Ward 11 Alderman Brian Pincott made a name for himself during his first term on council as a passionate

defender of environmental values. (www.brianpincott.ca)

Red Deer Civic

Dianne Wyntjes: CUPE's Regional Director for the province of Alberta has thrown her hat in the ring for a position on Red Deer's City Council. You can read more about Dianne on page two.

Others

Former CUPE Alberta executive member **Rick Poole** is seeking a term on the Blackfalds School Division, and CUPE member **Anne Marie Watson** is running for the Red Deer Catholic Board. 🌸



Amerjeet Sohi



Tina Jardine



Sarah Hoffman

Interview – Dianne Wyntjes

Candidate for Red Deer City Council



CUPE Regional Director Dianne Wyntjes is running for City Council in her home town of Red Deer. Jocelyn Tellier caught up with Dianne and spoke with her about her platform, the importance of politics to unions, and why she chose to throw her hat into the ring.

Q: You are currently the Regional Director for CUPE Alberta Division. Why the leap into civic politics?

A: There is one particular phrase that has meaning for me - "Politics Matter". Working with CUPE over the last 30 years has given me insight and experience with public policy and politics. Wanting to give back to my community, I am taking that step and asking for support from the citizens of Red Deer to elect me to represent them. I want to bring my perspectives of the value and preservation of public services in Red Deer, the protection of our water resources, and to continue to build safe and healthy communities in Red Deer.

Q: What are the main themes you are focusing on? Why these areas?

A: Decisions made by our current and past Council members have brought our city to where it is today - a great city to live in. But it's important to address concerns about the efficient use of tax dollars, maintaining a healthy and safe community, reducing crime,

and upgrading our infrastructure for services such as safe drinking water and public water systems. We also need to be responsible with our environment and focus on transportation systems (including transit and bicycle and walking paths), providing an affordable city to live in with a thriving business community and good job opportunities. Finally, it's also important to work closely with the County of Red Deer as the constant expansion and growth of the city affects prime productive agricultural land. Working together to respect rural policy issues so that the city and county can work together is important to me.

Q: Tell me about Red Deer and what makes it a unique place for you as a labour/social activist?

A: Each community in Alberta is unique based upon the experience and history of the region. Born and raised in Alberta, many of us know that the term labour/social activist is not a term we see in the mainstream and media. Many union members recognize that the term "trade unionist" isn't popular, yet we carry on with our vision of fairness.

I was raised in rural Alberta and my roots come from the agriculture community. I recognize many social activists, one being Irene Parlyby, President of the United Farm Women of Alberta, an elected MLA. She was also one of the "Famous Five" - a

group of women who took their case all the way to the Supreme Court for women to be recognized as persons in 1927. Each and every day, many people make a difference in our Alberta communities in the work we do - through our Union, volunteering with other groups, in our church and in our community groups. We raise issues with our neighbours and families. Being a labour/social activist means that we care, we want to make a difference.

Q: Why is it important for labour to have specific representation in municipal/school board elections

A: Any strong organization should have a variety of individuals and different backgrounds and perspectives. If we look around our communities, we are all 'working people' and have the ideals and objectives of providing a good standard of living for our family and hopes for a healthy and comfortable retirement in a safe and vibrant community. CUPE members should be encouraged to participate in their local municipality or county decisions, or school board decisions - as a board member or as a concerned citizen. We need to participate - no matter if it's a phone call, a letter, a conversation, casting your ballot, or just paying attention to decisions made that affect your community, province and country is important. Being an elected member is just taking one step further in that participation.

Q: What kind of work have you done in Red Deer, how long have you lived there, and what kind of other community involvement have you had?

A: I have lived in Red Deer since 1975, and was raised in rural Alberta - half way between Spruce View and Eckville. I then returned to my agriculture roots and married my husband Allan (a dairy farmer). I attended Red Deer College and am a past member of the Red Deer College Alumni Executive, a past President and Recording Secretary on the Red Deer and District Labour Council, a current Board member on the Employment Insurance Board of Referees, and was recently appointed as a Board member to the Alberta Labour

Relations Board. When I have the time I enjoy participating in community events, like spring clean up in Red Deer or in simply enjoying our walking paths.

Q: Any hobbies or interests we "never knew"?

A: I enjoy reading books and magazines, fitness and fashion and travel. Baking is in there too...when I have the time, although the calories from the sweets can be challenging! I also enjoy tending to my flowers (and weeds) in my backyard which gives me immense satisfaction as I dig in the dirt.

Q: What kind of help can labour activists offer you and other candidates?

A: Without a supporting team a successful election likely won't happen. Any offer of help to a candidate you support is appreciated, so volunteer to work on a candidate's campaign. That can include door to door campaigning, phone bank assistance, talking to your work colleagues about supporting the candidate, reminding your colleagues, family and friends to cast their ballot on election day; or having a sign on your lawn or window. Finally, it costs big bucks to run an effective campaign. Any financial contribution (big or small) to a candidate's campaign is appreciated.

Q: Any favourite thought or quote as you head into this election period?

A: Never underestimate your contributions in politics - every vote counts; your ideas count; and your conversations with your elected officials matter.

One more thought - don't forget to vote on October 18th!

Q: What do you plan to do the day after the election?

A: If I win: Smile and look forward to the new challenges and opportunities ahead.

If I'm not successful but have enjoyed a wonderful campaign experience: Smile and look forward to the new challenges and opportunities ahead. 🌸

Local 1445 Profile

by Jocelyn Tellier



CUPE 1445 represents 150 members at Red Deer College. The bargaining unit includes office assistants, program assistants, library assistants, computer desk monitors, research assistants, bookstore assistants and exam invigilators.

Their Local President, Catherine Lilly, works as a Student Services Assistant in the registrar's office.

Lilly says the current contract expires June 30, 2010. A couple issues bargained for in their last round of negotiations were language clarifications, a 4% wage increase and \$250.00 health spending account in lieu of Alberta Health Care premiums.

It's a busy local; their joint classification committee just completed a large-scale reclassification project. The local supports two scholarships for Red Deer College students: the CUPE Endowment Award and the CUPE/Florence Stephen Performing Arts.

The Local has been exploring innovative ways of ways of involving more members, including lunch time meetings, voting by email, and electronic updates on a regular basis.

"We are diversifying our communication styles to evolve with our members as they embrace the innovations in the world around us," said Lilly. 🌸

Alberta farm employees denied basic right to safe workplaces

By Marie Weingartshofer, CUPE 3911

Feedlot employee Kevan Chandler was killed at work on June 18, 2006. The practices and procedures that led to his death could easily be repeated because Mr. Chandler was not protected under the Alberta Occupational Health & Safety Act. Alberta is the only province in Canada to exclude agricultural workers from the basic human rights afforded by OHS laws.

An investigation into Mr. Chandler's death was led by Justice Peter Barley. In his report, Justice Barley rightly stated that there was no logical explanation why paid farm employees are not covered under Health and Safety laws.

The Conservative government claims that because farms are family businesses, they should not be covered under traditional labour laws. But the Conservatives seldom explain how it is

that an industry dominated by multi-national agribusinesses (with thousands of employees) should qualify as 'family run.'

Barley's report recommended paid farm employees, with the exemption of family members, should be covered under health and safety laws. In the sixteen months since the release of his report, the recommendation has been ignored by the Stelmach government, while farm

workers continue to be injured and die in work-related accidents.

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) represent agricultural workers across Canada, and have been leading the campaign "End the Harvest of Death" to pressure the Alberta government to act. If you visit www.ufcw.ca you can add your voice to the call for change. ✿



Students pledge to 'Take Back the Tap'



Ms. Austin's Grade Five class in Gibbons, Alberta know the damage bottled water does to our environment.

When CUPE 4625 President Kathy Larson decided to circulate the small video "The Story of Bottled Water" to her coworkers at Gibbons School she hoped to convince at least one person to stop buying bottled water. While most who watched it thought the video was interesting, one group decided to take the message to heart - grade 5Au.

The video so incensed Ms. Austin's Grade 5 class that they decided to ban disposable water bottles from their classroom. They also pledged to try and convince everyone they knew including friends, family, and members of their sports teams to 'ban the bottle' and 'take back the tap'.

"My students literally couldn't wait for the video to end so they could start planning how to save the world from bottled water," says Jacqueline Austin with a big smile. Austin has played the Story of Bottled Water about a dozen times for her students - mostly upon their requests.

Since the students began their campaign last March, the kids of 5Au have learned that it's a tough sell to break people of their bottled water habit. They've learned that convenience and false claims outweigh common sense. They've learned that complacency is a difficult barrier to idealism. And they've learned that enthusiasm, unfortunately, sometimes isn't enough to convince someone

to change, especially when that someone is your parent or important adult in your life.

Though most of the students proudly displayed reusable water bottles on their desks, a few still had bottled water because, as they said when asked why: "Our Mom likes it". Mathew says it's tough to convince his parents not to buy bottled water because they own a convenience store and selling bottled water is big business. He grins a little sheepishly, but makes no apologies. He's already learned that sometimes the need to make a living outweighs the desire to do the right thing.

Nonetheless, the sentiment is catching on. Recently, Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter announced that his government will work towards a ban on bottled water at all provincial facilities that have potable water. CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol has called upon Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach to do the same in our province.

"Considering the immense impact that bottled water has on the environment, as well as the price tag associated with it, it's time governments at all levels pledge, as Ms. Austin's Grade Fives have, to Take Back the Tap," said Mol. ✿

To watch the video go to: <http://storyofstuff.org/bottledwater>

CUPE members at Sturgeon School Division help raise \$30,000 for cancer research

By Kathy Larson



On Saturday, May 29th members of CUPE 4625 (Sturgeon School Division) took part in the Relay for Life fundraiser for cancer research, sponsored by the Canadian Cancer Foundation. This year, the Edmonton relay took place at Foote Field on the University of Alberta campus.

Approximately one third of CUPE 4625's 170 members braved the rain, wind and snow as Edmonton was hit by a surprise snowstorm the night of the relay. Although numbers dwindled on account of the weather conditions many stayed to walk through the night, huddling inside tents where they sang, laughed and tried desperately to keep warm.

This was the second year of Sturgeon's involvement. Support staff put themselves front and center in this challenge to raise funds and awareness for a disease that all too often affects the lives of those they love, work with and work for. Fifteen teams comprised of support staff, teachers and central office staff gathered pledges and then walked for 12 hours beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday night until 7 a.m. Sunday morning.

The Sturgeon effort raised over \$30 000 to fund the fight against cancer. 🌸

Medicine Hat Educational Assistants join CUPE

MEDICINE HAT - One hundred and sixty-five Educational Assistants working for the Medicine Hat Public School Board voted 78% in favour of becoming members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The new members join custodial and clerical staff at the board as the third unit of CUPE Local 829, which also represents education workers at the Catholic and Prairie Rose School Divisions.

CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol said the group joined CUPE because they are looking for better provisions for summer layoff and a pension plan.

"Almost every unionized Educational Assistant in the province is part of a pension plan, so that will be a top priority for bargaining," said Mol.

CUPE represents over 7,400 non teaching staff in Alberta and over 110,000 across Canada.

"By joining CUPE, this group gets access to a large network of labour relations experts, massive research resources in the field of education, assistance with bargaining, dispute resolution and public relations. CUPE has faced many issues in education already and we can use our experience to assist these new members," said Mol. 🌸



Replace Edmonton School Trustees – Mol Closing eighteen schools hurts city communities

EDMONTON – After Edmonton Public School Trustees voted to shut down five schools, CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol couldn't help wondering which Trustee ran on a platform to close schools.

In the last ten years, eighteen public schools have closed in Edmonton.

"I pay pretty close attention to politics at all levels and I can't for the life of me remember Chairman Don Flemming or any other Trustee promising to close schools. And yet time after time, that's what they do."

"These Trustees are destroying communities because they are afraid to

stand up to the provincial government and say 'closing schools is wrong'."

Mol said CUPE would remember this vote when elections happen later this year, and called on parents to elect a new board.

"Enough is enough, it's time for Edmontonians to get active, get involved, get ready for elections and remove these Trustees."

"It's time to elect Trustees that care about children, families and our communities," said Mol. "These Trustees have failed Edmontonians yet again, shame." 🌸

Judicial Review denies workers' hopes to stay with CUPE

EDMONTON -- A Judicial decision issued in May denies over 2,000 CUPE members the ability to be represented by the union of their choice.

The decision upholds a government health care restructuring plan that moves employees from union to union. The plan moves health care support workers in southern Alberta, (currently members of CUPE), into a province wide unit represented by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. At the same time, the province is forcing about 1,000 CUPE paramedics into a bargaining unit of technicians and lab workers represented by the Health Science Association of Alberta.

"This decision takes away the ability of our members to be represented by the union of their choice," said Dennis Mol, President of CUPE Alberta. "Some of these members actually voted against changing unions only a few years ago. Our members prefer CUPE and are disappointed that the Stelmach Government's actions take away their ability to stay in our union." 🌸

The United Leader

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