

Albertans support better pension plan – poll

By Lou Arab



Polling shows most Canadians, fearful their own pensions and savings will wash away, favour increasing the scope and benefits of the Canada Pension Plan.

EDMONTON – While the Stelmach government opposes expanding Canada Pension Plan (CPP) benefits for retirees, a substantial majority of Albertans feel differently, according to a public opinion survey carried out by CUPE.

Some 66 per cent of Albertans support an increase in CPP benefits, while only 19 per cent would be opposed.

CUPE President Paul Moist said the poll sends a strong signal that Albertans want their government to solve the

pension and retirement income crisis faced by Canadians.

“All of us should have the right to a decent, secure income in retirement,” says Moist. “And augmenting the CPP is viewed by many experts as the most

cost-effective, secure way to help Canadians save more for retirement.”

The poll shows support for the CPP increase is consistent by region, employment status, gender and household income. Two-thirds of respondents who support Stelmach’s Conservative Party back an increase, as do a similar number of supporters of the Wildrose Alliance.

Earlier last summer, federal and provincial finance ministers agreed to consider a modest, phased-in and fully-funded enhancement of CPP benefits. The Alberta government has been the most vocal opponent of such a move. Changing the CPP requires the support of two-thirds of the provincial legislative assemblies representing two-thirds of the population.

Other poll findings:

- Thirty percent of prairie residents polled admit they are not saving for retirement.
- Only one in four western Canadians is fully confident that they will be able to save enough to live comfortably in retirement, and three in 10 believe they won’t have enough to live comfortably, with lower income being the most pessimistic. ❀

CPP Fiction & Facts

THE BEST way to help today’s workers save enough for retirement is by increasing what everybody gets from the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.

A modest increase in contributions today will produce thousands of dollars a year in extra benefits for workers when they retire.

The Canadian Labour Congress is proposing a gradual doubling of future CPP benefits – a proposal that won support from a majority of finance ministers and municipal governments.

The CLC plan has come under attack from some special interest groups. Let’s set the record straight about the CLC’s plan for the CPP.

Fiction: Labour’s plan to gradually double future CPP benefits will double CPP contributions for workers and employers.

The Facts: The reality is that a gradual doubling of future CPP benefits can be paid for by a modest increase in contributions, spread out over seven years. This means increasing what everyone contributes to their CPP savings by about 0.43 per cent of pensionable earnings each year for seven years. For a worker earning \$47,200 or more per year, the initial

cost of gradually doubling future CPP benefits works out to about nine cents an hour or \$3.57 a week. That’s less than the cost of a newspaper subscription. For a worker earning \$30,000 per year, the initial cost would be about six cents an hour, or \$2.27 a week. That’s less than the cost of a medium double-double with a donut at Tim Horton’s. This is first rate retirement savings at a low cost.

Fiction: The CPP won’t be there for young workers when they are ready to retire.

The Facts: The reality is that the CPP is recognized as one of the most stable pension plans in the world, and it will be there for the next generation of workers when they retire. The CPP is actuarially sound for the next 75 years. Today’s young workers have nothing to worry about, nor do their kids.

Fiction: Expanding the CPP will hurt younger workers because they will have to pay more to provide improved benefits for older workers.

The Facts: The reality is that a gradual doubling of future CPP benefits would be fully paid. Future benefits for each worker will be based on the number of years that worker made expanded contributions. Right now, one-third of

Canadian workers aged 24 – 64 have no personal retirement savings at all. Today’s young workers will benefit the most as they will be able to save more for retirement and get more from the CPP when they retire.

Fiction: Expanding the CPP will hurt lower income workers who cannot afford to pay for increased premiums.

The Facts: The reality is that the CPP already exempts the first \$3,500 of income when it calculates everybody’s contributions – that’s a policy designed to make contributions easier for low income workers. It is lower income workers who stand to gain most from a gradual doubling of future CPP benefits.

The increased contributions need to pay for those improvements will be modest and phased in over seven years. The cost to workers who earn \$10,000 per year to expand the CPP is just two cents an hour each year over the next seven years. This will pay for a future doubling of CP benefits.

This is first-rate retirement savings at a low cost. Most low income workers have no workplace pension plans. If nothing changes they are destined for a life of poverty or near poverty in retirement. ❀

CUPE Alberta Convention

Date

March 31-April 2

Place

Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites
Grande Prairie, AB

Details

www.alberta.cupe.ca

40 years of service to her community



EDMONTON – CUPE 1031 member Leonorah Johnson was recently recognized by the Good Samaritan Society for 40 years of dedicated and committed service to the seniors at the Zetter Care Centre.

Johnson immigrated to Canada from Jamaica in 1969 and immediately started working as a Nursing Attendant at the Mount Pleasant Care Centre. She later moved to what is now the Dr. Gerald Zetter Care Centre in the Ritchie

neighborhood of Edmonton where she has worked since.

According to Johnson, she didn't intend to stay with Good Sam for long. It was her plan to become a policewoman, but after being warmly received by the staff and residents – she decided to give it a try.

"I thought I'd give it a month," she says of the early days. "Then I thought – give it a year." Won over by the sense of community and teamwork among the staff, Johnson never left.

Residents and staff at Zetter describe Johnson as someone they can always count on. She is known for her support and mentoring of new staff and assistance with their site orientation. She is also known for her laughter, sense of humour and ability to enjoy herself at work.

But Johnson is best known for her efforts to make the lives of residents better -

taking the time to get to know residents and emphasizing individual care and interests. Staff say Johnson has a knack for getting her residents to do things that other caregivers struggle with.

One particular resident was very gruff with other staff but never with Johnson. When she took time off, he knew exactly how many days Johnson had been away and upon her return would loudly demand to know where she had been. "You've been gone for 14 days! Where were you?" Always correctly indicating the number of days Johnson had been absent.

Johnson has been working in a unionized environment since 1974, and finds it hard to imagine any other way of working.

"I like the union here," she says. "In CUPE, we stand together, we work hard for our members, and always do what's best for them." ✨

Long term care workers join CUPE

EDMONTON – About 100 employees of Saint Thomas Health Care Centre are the latest members to join the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

The employees voted Friday by a 71% margin to form a union. The health care centre provides long term care and general health services.

CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol said the employees came to CUPE to resolve issues around scheduling, favoritism and an inconsistent application of discipline.

"By joining the largest union in Canada, the employees gain the tools and resources they need to resolve their workplace issues," said Mol. "CUPE will work hard to help these employees earn the respect they deserve."

The group of employees includes health care aides, housekeeping, maintenance, food services and administration. ✨



CUPE members elected to local office



Alberta Regional Director Dianne Wyntjes has announced her retirement from CUPE after being elected to the Red Deer City Council. Wyntjes has worked for CUPE for over 30 years

October 18th was a good date for CUPE members running for office in local elections. At least eight known CUPE members and staff were elected to various municipal council and school board positions.

CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol said he was pleased with the results.

"Any time working men and women succeed in being elected to public office, it's good news," said Mol. "I'm pleased our union was able to support successful candidates who want to build strong communities."

"And to those who ran but did not win – thank you for putting yourself forward, for representing your community, and for working to build a better province."

The following CUPE members and staff were successful in their election bids:

Therese Taschuk (CUPE 4575) Smoky Lake Town Council

Richard Poole (CUPE 838), Blackfalds Town Council

William Taylor (CUPE 1021), Blackfalds Town Council

Cheryl Johner (CUPE 3550) Edmonton Public School Board

Dave Loken (CUPE 30) Edmonton City Council

Bruce McLeod (staff) Acme Town Council

Dianne Wyntjes (staff) Red Deer City Council

Anne Marie Watson (CUPE 1445), Red Deer Catholic School Board ✨

New Trustees shaking up Edmonton Public Schools



Fulton Place School was one of nineteen schools closed by Edmonton Public over the last decade. The new Board of Trustees has imposed a two-year moratorium on school closures while they explore alternatives.

Colburn seems to be jumping at the chance to shake things up.

"The electorate delivered a message that they are looking for more. More leadership, more creativity," said Colburn. "The days of Trustees being 'anonymous and invisible' have become a relic of the past."

Colburn himself moved the motion calling for a special needs task force, saying the board needs a deeper understanding of the complex world of special education. He says special education has been unevenly applied at the board level and he wants Trustees to understand how it can be improved.

And on the subject of school closures, Colburn isn't backing down from his long held opposition to mothballing buildings. "The electorate is looking for Trustees to explore other options, to talk to other levels of government and exercise some creativity. They want us to make school closures a last resort."

"There is an incredible appetite for change on this board," said Colburn. "One month into office and we haven't begun to explore the depth of people's imaginations." ✨

EDMONTON -- There is a new gang running the show at Edmonton Public Schools.

They are young, progressive, and they really don't like closing schools.

October's municipal elections put an almost entirely new slate of faces on the Edmonton Public School Board. Six of the nine trustees were elected for the first time.

In their first month on the job, Trustees have blazed a new trail. They elected Dave Colburn as chairperson – a Trustee previously on the losing end of most Board votes. They have established a special needs task force. And, to the relief and cheers of many parents, Trustees imposed a two year moratorium on school closures after shutting down nineteen schools over the previous decade.

So what does all this activity mean for students, parents, and CUPE members working at the board?

CUPE 474 represents custodial workers at the board. President Doug Luellman is optimistic.

"It bodes well for education that Edmonton citizens have voted for elected officials that do not support the closure of schools," said Luellman. "Schools are the hub of our community. It was a shock and disappointment that a community school such as McCauley was shut down."

Still, Luellman is cautious. "The first eight months of the new board will be the most important. We'll be looking for public consultation with unions and all other internal groups plus the public at large."

For his part, Colburn is open to better relationships with CUPE.

"It's important for the board to have open discussions with staff," said Colburn. "In the past, our dialogue has been limited. 'Working conversations' with staff groups have not characterized our relationship. I'm hopeful we will

find ways to engage in more genuine conversations with our staff groups so Trustees can find out what education looks like on the front line."

Trudy Grebenstein is President of CUPE 3550. Her local represents Educational Assistants, Administrative Workers, and other Support Staff at the board. Like Luellman, she is cautiously optimistic about the new board.

Grebenstein doesn't hesitate when asked what staff issues she would like the board to grapple with.

"One key issue is the amount of layoffs we have every June, and the other issue is workload and student violence," said Grebenstein.

"As the government reduces the budgets, the workload increases for our members," said Grebenstein. "In a survey of parents done last year, the board was told parents want more support for teachers – that means more Educational Assistants on the job."

New health act doesn't address the real problems – Friends of Medicare

EDMONTON – A new health act passed by the fall sitting of the Alberta Legislature is a toothless piece of legislation that will do little to ease emergency room wait times or long term care shortages. That's the verdict from Friends of Medicare spokesperson David Eggen.

"The act is what's known as enabling legislation," said Eggen. "It includes a statement of principles that are quite vague and not particularly substantial. It mentions a charter of patient's rights, but doesn't include that charter."

Eggen was particularly critical of the fact the new act will do little to address the recent surge in wait times in emergency rooms.

"Considering this act was introduced in the middle of a genuine health care crisis, it shows the disconnect in the Conservative government," said Eggen. "Are they looking for a statement of principles or a place for Grandma and quick service at the ER?"

Eggen said the problem in emergency rooms won't be solved until the government deals with the lack of capacity. According to the Friends of Medicare, Alberta has slightly more than half the beds it did twenty years ago, while serving one million more people.

"I'm worried they will open up more beds, but not increase the staff – which means people might have a bed, but they're still waiting to be looked at."

The other major factor in the ER wait times is the lack of appropriate Long Term Care spaces. According to Eggen, doctors won't release older patients from hospitals if they don't have appropriate long term care to go to. The conservatives have stopped building new long term care spaces, preferring different models of private care.

"The Stelmach government is changing the very definition of nursing home care. This is the leading edge of their privatization agenda," said Eggen. "The more they can move away from the long



According to David Eggen of the Friends of Medicare, the blame for long wait times in Emergency Rooms can be pointed at the fact Alberta has about half the ER beds we had 20 years ago.

term care designation, which is highly regulated, the more they can shift to private contractors who don't want to be covered under nursing home laws."

For Eggen, the government's health care failures have pushed him back into politics. The former MLA for Edmonton Calder was recently nominated to run

again for the Alberta NDP. Eggen says it was the government's record on health care that brought him back.

"My eyes have been opened over the last two years," said Eggen. "The Conservatives have been both fumbling the health care file, and selling it off – I can't stand for that." ✨

CUPE 30 members find pre-historic relics while digging sewer

Aaron Krywiak was one of two Local 30 members to find an Albertosaurus tooth while digging a sewer line in west Edmonton.



EDMONTON – A couple of city employees found themselves at the centre of a media storm after finding 70 million year old dinosaur bones. The discovery happened in August while the employees were digging a sewer line underneath a fancy west Edmonton neighbourhood.

Aaron Krywiak and Ryley Paul, both employees of Edmonton Public Works Department and members of CUPE Local 30 were jack hammering a tunnel one hundred feet below street level when Krywiak spotted something shiny.

The object, which turned out to be the tooth of an Albertosaurus dinosaur, was turned over to the foreman, who called the police, as well as officials at the University of Alberta.

Archaeologists later found the bones of two other dinosaurs, one of which was in the process of being devoured by the Albertosaurus when both were killed. ✿

Fort Mac kids sent to union camp



CUPE 2545 (Fort McMurray Public Schools Support Staff) sponsored three children to attend Camp Goldeye last summer. Camp Goldeye is run by the Alberta Federation of Labour for children of Alberta union members.

Anam, Bilal and Zainab were among the fourteen children sent by Fort McMurray unions to the camp, where they participated in canoeing, repelling, and swimming activities, while making new friends and learning a little about unions. ✿

Enter the CUPE Alberta photo contest



The CUPE Alberta photo contest is back! CUPE Alberta is again calling on members to get out their cameras and start shooting.

In an effort to document the life of CUPE in our job sites and communities, we are inviting amateur photographers to send in pictures in the following categories:

1. **CUPE at work:** pictures of CUPE members working at their jobsite.
2. **CUPE in the community:** pictures of CUPE members in their community.
3. **The lighter side of CUPE:** any funny picture that involves CUPE or a CUPE member in some way.

Prizes:

First prize in each category: \$150
Grand Prize (best overall picture): \$500

Deadline:

March 1, 2011

Send your pictures to:

Lou Arab, Communications Representative
Email: larab@cupe.ca
Mail to #410, 10525 170 St, Edmonton, AB T5P 4W2 ✿

The United Leader

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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)