

Coping with Bill 44



Bill 44 will threaten Educational Assistants with Human Rights complaints for teaching students about religion or sexuality.

Employees of Alberta's K-12 schools have been given a one year reprieve before the ramifications of Bill 44 hit Alberta's schools.

But CUPE support workers (as well as teachers and parents) will likely find themselves using that time to read the fine print of the bill to figure out what it all means. In fact, the Ministry of Education hasn't even considered the Bill's ramifications for support staff.

CUPE 3550 President Trudy Grebenstein expects serious repercussions for the 7,400 CUPE members working in Alberta schools.

"While I definitely have my own concerns about Bill 44, we haven't heard anything from the employer as of yet," Grebenstein said. "Our in-class assistants take the teacher's lead in lessons, but I hope they don't expect our members to act as watchdogs."

The Bill, also known as the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act, 2009, became infamous for its provision requiring teachers to answer to the Alberta Human Rights Commission for broaching subjects such as religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation, without parental consent.

The most likely workers to be affected by Bill 44 may well be CUPE-represented in-class assistants such as Teacher and

Education Aides. While most of the legislative debate centred around lessons dealing with sexuality or religion, little has been said about Teaching Aides who assist in lessons with smaller groups of people, or even intervene in school yard bullying that might come from discrimination. The very presence of gay teachers or support staff (or staff wearing religious attire) might be enough to prompt complaints under the bill.

A spokesperson for Alberta Education admitted the Ministry doesn't yet know how Bill 44 will work for support staff.

"Bill 44 is primarily focused on teachers, and in deference to their profession, the teacher would determine what's going to happen in the classroom," spokesperson Kathy Telfer told CUPE. "But we haven't had that discussion about how other staff members would be affected, it's something we will look at moving forward."

Culture Minister Lindsay Blackett had previously told reporters that the bill would be proclaimed and implemented this fall, before recanting just before the beginning of the school year.

Telfer had said that Alberta Education had been given Informal assurance that proclamation will be delayed until next September, so that they had time to put together standard policy, and an informal dispute resolution mechanism – which

isn't provided for in the Act.

Alberta teachers say Bill 44 will have a negative impact on the education of children and may result in many unnecessary human rights complaints.

Teachers will now need to give advance notice to parents of how and when a controversial issue might be taught in the classroom, which is impossible to forecast in all situations, says ATA spokesperson Dennis Theobald.

"That could lead to the offender standing before the Alberta Human Rights Commission, facing a hefty fine or a job suspension," Theobald said. "Is that the case with support staff in casual conversations with students also?"

Teachers, school boards, parent councils, Alberta's NDP and CUPE 3550 President Grebenstein believe that the best solution is for the government to withdraw section 9 of the Bill and start over by consulting with parents and affected professionals. NDP leader Brian Mason is circulating a petition calling on the government to stand down.

"Our goal with this petition is to show the Premier that fear about this Bill is widespread," said Mason. "We must protect a child's right to objective education in public system, and a teacher's right to provide it without fear of retribution."

K-12 workers fear further cuts to education

EDMONTON – Trudy Grebenstein of CUPE Local 3550 isn't sitting back waiting for further provincial cost-cutting in the K-12 education stream.

The Edmonton Public School Board workers President has been sounding the alarm over education funding with a simple mathematical lesson: one plus one equals two. The 4.2% in increased funding for Alberta school boards isn't enough to cover inflation, she says.

"In late June, trustees around the province approved budgets that have been cut to the core," said Grebenstein. "In March, the province announced a 4.2% increase in K-12 education funding - but that increase doesn't cover the salary increases negotiated with teachers and expected by non-teaching staff."

Grebenstein noted that the province had guaranteed that teachers' increases would follow the Alberta Average Weekly Earnings index, as calculated by Statistics Canada. In April 2009 that was up 5.99 per cent over the previous year.

"Each year, public school boards receive funding for the school year's supplies, equipment, services and wages for the school year beginning in September," she said. "Surely this generous timeline provides a sufficient period for our government to set aside funding for these kinds of future promises!"

In late June it became apparent that school budgets would have to be revisited in the fall. Whether that means absorbing more cuts or allocating additional funding remains to be seen.

Grebenstein adds that the government must keep its past promises and should announce its intention to support the promised 5.99 percent increase for public education services well before the 2009-10 school year begins.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport and it is up to Albertans to remind their elected officials of that," she said. "Silence will not guard the future of public education funding in Alberta. What is very much at stake here is the excellence of public education for the most important future resource our province has - its children."

Nothing stinks about garbage in Calgary

By Kevin Galley, President CUPE 37



Public waste collection provides better service at a lower cost to taxpayers.

Some folks would like nothing better than to shoot the City of Calgary in the foot first, and ask questions later.

In fact, since the well-publicized City of Toronto work stoppage, many people are asking questions about something they'd just as soon forget - garbage.

We all produce garbage. Many of us forget about it moments after we leave it on our stoop, throw it into our condo dumpster, or leave it in hundreds of public containers spread throughout our city.

I am pleased to respond to the slew of national and local columns against city collection to set the record straight on this stinky subject.

One of the most cited articles about garbage collection has been a Benjamin Dachis piece for a national paper, where he attacks Calgary's system directly. Dachis is a C.D. Howe Institute policy analyst who also writes for the Reason Foundation in the United States. Reason is an American think-tank so out of touch, they believe the solution to the American

health care woes is more privatization. Most of the anti-public garbage collection arguments are coming from this source.

Dachis attempts to pin the blame for ballooning municipal budgets on the workers that keep Calgary running smoothly. Most city management teams say blame for strained city budgets must be laid on the doorsteps of provincial Governments that continue to download services while holding back infrastructure cash.

Critics refer to city-owned garbage collection services as a 'public sector monopoly.' But how many private garbage contracting companies have you seen around? A Google search quickly informs that two giants, Republic Services and Waste Management control nearly all of the private market, with only one company operating in any given city. Waste Services Incorporated is regularly subject to Canadian Competition Bureau investigations, which result in consent agreements that limit somewhat the activities of the company. These private collectors quickly become far worse private, and unaccountable, monopolies.

In Calgary, public employees actually compete directly against private companies for commercial and recycling services – and we consistently win these contracts, because City departments consistently offer the best services at the best price.

In Edmonton, the most profitable areas of garbage pick-up - commercial and recycling – are contracted out, leaving the profits to a private company while the city is stuck with the costly residential collection. Dachis fails to mention that other cities who have attempted to contract-out – such as Winnipeg and Port Moody, have since brought services back in-house because privatization proved to be more inefficient and expensive while service deteriorated. An added benefit: cities such as ours reap the cash flow benefits of commercial and recycling collection, which can pay for the more expensive residential services.

Waste Management internationally has been fined over \$15 million since 1985 due to improper storage and illegal dumping of waste. In Edmonton, the city launched an investigation after

discovering a stockpile of recyclable material at a nearby landfill. The contractor disclaimed responsibility, saying it sold the materials to another company for \$1, and it's just too bad that these recyclables were wasted. Sadly, all too often, the only type of innovation and cost reductions that has been practiced by private garbage and recycling contractors have been the illegal kind, proving once again that the only path to environmental accountability is through public services.

It's true that Calgary's Aldermen haven't broached the issue of contracting out garbage, even in the wake of the Toronto strike, and there's a darn good reason for that. It simply doesn't add up for the environment, for the City's budget, or for the hard working people in our community's waste management. Not to mention the fact that our Local's relationship with the City has never been better – there hasn't been a CUPE 37 work stoppage since 1978.

Columnists such as Dachis would have us believe that experience in the U.S. show that job losses during privatization only directly affect employment for about 5% of the workers – but those general "efficiencies" are created by another factor that he fails to mention. The privatization of garbage services forces hard working people to take wage cuts – meaning less money spent in our local communities, while taxpayers pay more for less, and the environment suffers.

Mr. Dachis has proven that he should have absolutely no credibility with anyone beyond the most fervent Republican politicians, and certainly not ours. The Toronto experience aside, the citizens of Calgary can rest assured that no work stoppage is in the cards, and they're receiving high quality public services for a fraction of their tax dollar. Most importantly, Calgary is doing the best thing for our communities, and our environment, by trusting the workers of CUPE 37.

Something stinks alright, but it isn't Calgary's garbage.

Is my pension safe?

By Neil Ketler, CUPE Alberta Treasurer

There is one question about pensions that I get asked over and over again: is my pension safe?

It's a reasonable question. The financial crisis of 2008 was hard on the Local Authorities Pension Plan, just as it was on your own RRSP savings. But rest assured – your pension is safe.

LAPP has over 400 contributing employers and nearly 150,000 contributing members. Pension plans that run into financial difficulty usually have only one employer making contributions; in LAPP's case, many hundreds of stable Alberta employers contribute. The likelihood of any of our contributing employers failing is very slim.

Secondly, LAPP has nearly \$15 billion dollars invested in a wide variety of assets around the world. LAPP has

more than just stocks and bonds – LAPP owns shopping centres, office towers, power plants, and a range of other revenue-generating businesses. When some investments are not doing well (like stocks in 2008) other investments are doing very well. The gains offset the losses and, generally, the pension plan makes money. That's the beauty of having a huge, fully diversified investment portfolio.

Even though the value of LAPP's investments declined in 2008, a good deal of that money has come back, as the stock markets return to normal. Further, a plan is in place to fully restore LAPP to financial stability over the coming years.

So yes, your pension is safe. Enjoy your working career and look forward to a healthy and safe retirement, supported in part by LAPP.



CUPE Alberta committees meet



CUPE members attending the 'All Committees' meetings in Red Deer

CUPE Alberta hosted its semi-annual All Committees meeting last June in Calgary. The committees meet twice a year to discuss resolutions passed at the annual convention. The committees also get together to brainstorm over legislative changes that impact CUPE Alberta's members and what they can do to deal with these changes.

"Much of the work of our committees is done outside of the two meetings a year", says CUPE Alberta's President Dennis Mol. "Having the committees get together twice annually gives them all a chance to network and find

similarities to their important work and come up with ideas that help all committees make life better for our members."

CUPE Alberta committees are Aboriginal Council, Anti Racism, Environmental Resources, Equal Opportunities, Global Justice, Occupational Health and Safety, Newsletter, Pensions and Political Action. If you have any questions about the work the committees are doing or any suggestions for the committees, feel free to contact the chair of each committee. Contact information is found on the CUPE Alberta website.

Former CUPE member ready to run

Lewis Cardinal relishes his new role as Edmonton Centre NDP Candidate



Former CUPE member Lewis Cardinal is running for the NDP in Edmonton Centre.

EDMONTON -- Lewis Cardinal has a resume that would put many of us to shame.

The former University of Alberta Native Student Services worker is the President of the Indigenous Media Institute of Canada, the Co-Chair of the Aboriginal Commission on Human Rights and Justice, the Chair of Aboriginal Voices Radio (AVR), and a recipient of the Alberta Centennial Medal for his work in the areas of human rights & diversity – but he hopes to be able to add another position very soon to his work history – as Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre.

Lewis quickly turned heads in Edmonton as a dark horse candidate for city council, coming just shy of winning a position in the hotly contested Ward 4 municipal race.

Win or lose, this former Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) and CUPE 30 member won't forget his roots as a working person.

"I first worked in a union job when I was 14 – as a dishwasher with the Hotel MacDonald, I lied about my age (16) so I could work," said Cardinal. "I then graduated to a labourer with Crown Paving, a unionized operation doing paving work for the City of Edmonton – they eventually made me a heavy equipment operator."

"But my northern ancestors used to run the trading routes down to Edmonton – we were teamsters, even back in the day," he chuckles.

Lewis is Wood Cree from northern Alberta, Canada, but has deep roots in Edmonton, coming here as a child.

"I came here when I was 9 years old, five of us lived in a 2-bedroom basement apartment right in the downtown core," recalls Lewis. "It was culture shock – we were right at the poverty line. And it got worse over the years. Lorne Cardinal, (Lewis' brother of Corner Gas fame) and I were homeless – living out of tents and cars. Eventually we were banned from the food banks

because we went there so often. I know very well the lack of choices people have when they're poor."

Things eventually began to look up for Lewis. He completed high school and entered post-secondary first at Grant MacEwan College, then the University of Colorado at Boulder and finally the University of Alberta, where he is currently a PhD Candidate.

His work at the University of Alberta began in 1997 where he served as an instructor and a coordinator with the Indigenous Centre Project within the University of Alberta Aboriginal Council, and then expanded to the Office of Native Student Services within the University Student Services centre in 1999.

All of these experiences conspire to create the dedicated advocate he is today – and the response thus far is encouraging, he says.

"The response has been very warm and very positive. People are saying some

interesting things about how they'll be changing their vote," said Cardinal. "They're saying that we don't see the Liberals being as liberal as they used to be, they are more like conservative – light and they're looking at the NDP as a positive alternative."

Lewis cites equality as one of his primary motivations in his entry into public life.

"Issues of fairness and accessibility are my driving forces," said Cardinal. "Knowing poverty all too well, knowing racism all too well... I know that we as a society can do a lot better."

He knows he has a tough hill to climb. But Lewis is running to win – and is here for the long-term.

"I think we're at a turning point in our history. We have to make the decision to live more fair and more sustainably in our cities," he said. "The next two elections will really determine which way Canada is going to go – and I know we'll do the right thing."

Notes from the front line: School Bus Driver realizes why she does it

by Debra Schapansky



School bus driver Debra Schapansky was delighted to find the following drawings outside her home.

There are days as a school bus driver when I wonder if my children have secret desires to see me gagged and tortured.

It seems like I am always saying the same things over and over. It goes something like this; "Johnny where's your bum?", "Suzie sit up please, I can't see your head", "Bobby I need you to sit down", "I see legs in the aisle", "Is that a back pack blocking the aisle", "I can't have you standing, please sit down".

I live in fear of the realization that an accident can happen. No one wakes up in the morning and says, "Gee an accident would be a nice way to start my day". As a

bus driver I am aware that the bus comes equipped with very high seats to keep the children compartmentalized and acts as a restraint in the event of an accident. This is the safest place for them, and therefore they must stay in this safe place, and stay seated in order to protect them in case the worst happens. There always seems to be some fool out there, who can't see the huge, massive yellow object, with reflector tape all around it, and flashing lights everywhere. This is a huge fear for me, so I take safety seriously.

I do however find the young children teach me the things one doesn't often

get the gift of learning. I am always amazed at the thoughts and feelings whirling around in their heads. They share these with me on occasion. They are often thought provoking, insightful, and sometimes amusing. Regardless of the horror stories one may conjure up about the harried job of a school bus driver, it is not at all like that. It is rewarding and a nice way to spend one's day. I LOVE MY JOB!!!

Our School Division Transportation office in conjunction with the schools set up an essay contest for the students. The children K-6 could write a story about their bus drivers and the division would give a prize to the writer of the winning essay and the bus driver. While I thought it would be a great reward for the job that often seems so underrated, I didn't really expect it would generate much interest. Who wants to write about their bus driver, and what could they possibly say that would win a prize? How wrong I was.

One day, at home, I heard children squealing across the street and realized Murphy (my Jack Russell Terrier) found his excitement for the evening. I ran out to the front and there was Murphy holding a group of children at bay. I did my usual and commanded him back to our yard, and with his head down, and tail drooping and the biggest, saddest eyes you could imagine, he slunk into the yard.

Just as Murphy passed the bushes that line the front of our sidewalk I heard a

little excited voice say, "Hey that's my bus driver." Out he and two girls came from their hiding place. They are 7, 8 and 10 years old. They rode on my bus 3 years ago for about 2 months. During their brief experience on my bus, they gave me a workout on keeping them safe.

At the end of the night my daughter Sara went out to collect her cat. She came back in, excited and minus the cat, she instructed me to come, come now. I was tired and getting ready for bed, and she saw the reluctance on my face. You have got to come see this she told me enthusiastically. You're going to love it, and she drags me by the hand out the front door.

It was my last day driving and I am always a wee bit sad on this day, because I will miss the little darlings and this broke the spell of sadness I had been feeling. These children who heard me over and over ask them to sit, turn around, settle down, etc., left me the greatest prize I have ever received. It was a gift actually and it touched my heart. It instantly lifted the sadness I was feeling. It is truly a gift of art and love that I will treasure forever. This is beautiful, sincere, and I am in absolute awe of the gift they left on my front walk.

Enjoy - and the next time you see a yellow school bus, remember we are not lowly bus drivers... we are the luckiest people alive.

Debra Schapansky is a member of CUPE 4946 – Peace River School Bus Drivers

CUPE applauds Alberta Government for delivering on Schools But President urges Government to reconsider P3 elementary-middle school projects

EDMONTON – The President of Alberta's Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) congratulated the provincial government for moving forward with new school construction; but urged the reconsideration of further P3 projects.

"New high schools in Calgary, Edmonton, Sherwood Park and Spruce Grove are essential for meeting the critical need for public infrastructure in Alberta," said Dennis Mol, CUPE Alberta President. "Our students need these spaces, and our workers need these jobs. Good on them for moving forward."

This portion of the Alberta Schools Alternative Procurement Phase 2 (ASAP II) is being completed by way of the traditional design-build bundle, which many studies have shown to be the most efficient and cost-effective method of infrastructure construction.

"Industry reports on Public-Private Partnerships (P3s), such as a recent paper by the Merit Contractors Association and the Alberta Construction Association, say P3s cost more and can lead to specialization issues in the construction industry," Mol said.

Mol added that he was disappointed that the ASAP II project also included 10 P3-built elementary and middle schools – and urged

the Government to reconsider this decision.

"Most Alberta families already know that over the long-term, buying the house is better than renting the house," Mol said. "If traditional methods of building are good enough for high schools, it should be good enough for all schools."

"The elementary and middle schools should be constructed for the best interests of Alberta taxpayers."

The construction discussion paper, "Future Directions for Public-Private Partnerships in Alberta's Construction Industry," warns that P3s could result in Government spending more money on the projects than necessary, as well as contributing to industry becoming too dependent on providing specialized services to the provincial Government.

Mol noted the frequent cases of P3 consortiums failing to find financing for projects, going back to the Macquarie Group's failure to find enough capital on the Port Mann bridge expansion project in BC, due to the global credit crunch.

"There are frequent examples of P3 failures and abandonment across Canada," Mol said. "Let's get these projects right the first time, so Albertans don't pay more than is needed. The public deserves that."



CUPE Alberta President Dennis Mol says new schools are welcome, but they should be owned and operated by taxpayers.

The United Leader

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

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Alberta / B.C. Trades and Maintenance Conference

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