Unifor members for transit

Unifor members throughout the Metro Vancouver region are undertaking a massive education and voter mobilization effort for improved transit and transportation.

A regional referendum is underway on a 0.5 per cent increase to the provincial sales tax to fund a massive expansion of transit infrastructure across BC’s Lower Mainland.

The vote is a project of the area’s mayors after Premier Christy Clark refused to fund improvements to the province’s largest urban centres.

Unifor transit workers in Locals 2200 and 111 are leading the charge, and Unifor has united with more than 100 other organizations in the region to support a Yes vote.

CN deal ratified

Unifor members have ratified six new agreements with CN Rail.

Voting took place at membership meetings over the last two weeks, in 50 locations across Canada. The agreement was reached February 23, avoiding a lock-out by CN.

“Year over year, CN is a tremendously profitable company,” said Unifor.
**Lost jobs shows school bus turmoil**

The loss of 430 school bus jobs in Ottawa recently is an illustration of the unneeded turmoil caused by the Ontario government’s Request for Proposals (RFP) process for handing out contracts, and points to the need for reforms to the system, Unifor says.

“Parents and drivers deserve better than to be left wondering from year to year who will shuttle children to and from school each day,” said Unifor National Representative Mike Armstrong.

First Student today told 127 members of Unifor local 4266, drivers and other employees, that it had lost its contract for 350 school bus routes in Ottawa due to the board’s Request for Proposals (RFP) process, a secretive system the province requires school boards to use for bus contracts.

“Unifor will do all it can to ensure drivers are re-hired by the new operators when they take over the routes next year, but there’s no job guarantee and there’s no guarantee that drivers will maintain their wages and work standards, already among the lowest in the province,” said Armstrong.

Unifor has been a leader in raising concerns about the RFP process. Its report, Steering Clear, Avoiding the RFP Trap, was released at the start of the school year. Unifor also spoke to a panel looking into RFPs.

To see the report go to unifor.org/schoolbuscampaign.

---

**Photo spotlight**

Submit your photos to communications@unifor.org

Photo by Jonh Maclennan

The case against a homeless Indigenous woman being taken to court for building a cabin on Crown land in Northern Ontario has been dropped, thanks in part to efforts of a Unifor activist.

Darlene Necan said the decision means she’ll finally have a home.

“I’ll be going home to where I grew up. I’ll be going home to never be kicked out for any reason.”

Steve Watson, a Unifor staff retiree, said he was inspired to help after hearing that Necan had previously built a cabin for an elder living in a chicken coop.

“The first action she took wasn’t for herself, it was for somebody else,” Watson told the CBC. “That resonates with me.”

Her lawyer said community support helped Necan’s cause.

“We can all draw a lesson from the fact that grassroots organizing and grassroots efforts to try and achieve small victories can succeed,” Michael Leitold said.

---

**In brief**

**Daycare deal**

Unifor Local 4600 members at Town Daycare in Glace Bay ratified a new collective agreement after four days on strike.

The new deal will expire December 31, 2015 and includes a pay increase of 1 per cent and a commitment that any additional government funding will be subject to wage negotiations.

“We can’t and shouldn’t expect trained professionals, charged with the early education and care of our children to be paid such low wages,” said Local 4600 President Susan Gill.

The daycare had offered zero per cent.

“The Nova Scotia government is reviewing childcare funding and Unifor will be making a detailed submission to the review process,” said Lana Payne, Atlantic Regional Director.

---

**Local 523, Welland**

Unifor Local 523, representing outside workers with the City of Welland, Ontario, have ratified a new three-year collective agreement.

The deal will apply retroactively from Jan. 1, 2015 to Dec. 31, 2017. The agreement will see wages increase by 1.9 per cent in 2015, 1.5 per cent in 2016 and 1.5 per cent in 2017.
“Better transit and transportation benefits workers in a real way by making it easier and faster for them to get to and from their jobs and to spend more time with their families instead of wasting precious time on long commutes and traffic gridlock,” said Gavin McGarrigle, coalition co-chair and Unifor’s B.C. Area Director.

Unifor’s bargaining committees made progress on the issues most important to members.

Overwhelming approval of Extendicare agreement

Members at the Extendicare group of nursing homes across Ontario ratified 10 new collective agreements with a firm 96 per cent approval. The new deal will see improvements in wages, benefits, working conditions, shift premiums and stronger union representation.

“I am proud of the agreement we were able to achieve and the progress we have made for our members,” said Katha Fortier, Ontario Regional Director.

“This negotiated settlement was made possible by the hard work and dedication of the Unifor bargaining committee members from across Ontario. To receive such a high ratification is an endorsement of what our bargaining committee was able to achieve on behalf of our members.”

In a sector where many unions rely on arbitration to settle every agreement, Unifor stands out in achieving consistent results through bargaining.

“Bargaining in the health care sector is some of the toughest negotiations our union faces,” said Deb Tveit, Assistant to the President.

“To reach a bargained settlement and have it ratified by such a high number is a job well done by all of those involved.”
Victory for Nova Scotia health care workers

The four unions representing health care workers have come to an agreement with the Nova Scotia government after months of arbitration hearings and dispute over bargaining rights.

“I am so very proud of the leadership role Unifor played in this ongoing ordeal. And I am so pleased to say that as a result of our work, Unifor members will remain proud Unifor members,” said Lana Payne, Unifor Atlantic Regional Director.

“Make no mistake, this is a huge victory for our members and for workers’ rights.”

The agreement will see the four unions in health care bargain together four province-wide collective agreements under a Council of Unions structure.

“I want to especially thank our wonderful members, activists and local leaders and the staff of our union who were part of this fightback, including our most excellent legal counsel, Barry Wadsworth,” said Payne.

“We stubbornly held to our principles and in the end justice was on our side.”

Members of all unions vote on the new collective bargaining structure in the coming weeks.

Mabe retirees rally to protect their pensions

Months before the planned closure of the Mabe appliance plant in Montreal, the owners held a barbeque for the workers about to lose their jobs, as thanks for their pledge to work hard up to the very last day of production.

Three days after the plant shut down, the company declared bankruptcy and cut workers’ pensions by 22 per cent, despite promising not to do that.

“They put themselves into bankruptcy,” said Alain Leduc, past president of Unifor Local 501, one of the locals representing workers at MC Commercial.

Leduc was speaking at a Toronto rally of retirees from Locals 501, 504, 513, 533 and 541 and supporters outside a high-end appliance store selling the appliances they once made. They want Mabe to live up to its earlier commitment to maintain pensions and benefits.

The pension cuts alone amount to about $500 a month on average for the retirees. Leduc told the story of one retiree who was diagnosed with cancer, only to find out his life insurance was cut. He now has no insurance to help his family when he’s gone.

“It is very hard,” Leduc said.

Close to 1,500 retirees are affected across Canada.

CRTC puts homegrown TV at risk

The CRTC’s approach to pick and pay cable will be needlessly disruptive to Canada’s broadcast and entertainment industries, putting at risk this country’s ability to tell its own stories, Unifor says.

“Too many jobs are at stake – the jobs of people who make their livings telling Canadian stories to Canadians. Our talented actors and content creators will be forced to move to the U.S. to find work,” Unifor Media Director Howard Law said.

The CRTC announced February 19 that consumers will soon be able to pick which cable TV channels they want, rather than the current bundling system, along with skinny basic cable packages of local and U.S. stations. The Harper government promised in its 2013 Throne Speech that no jobs would be lost.

“If anyone should be left fully exposed to pick and pay, it should be the U.S. stations,” Law said.

In its submissions to the CRTC, Unifor has said a hasty approach to pick and pay and skinny basic would cost more than 16,000 jobs by 2020.

“It is now up to the Harper government to say how it will live up to the promises in its Throne Speech,” Unifor Media Council Chair Randy Kitt said.

In an earlier decision, the CRTC cut the Canadian content that must be shown on daytime TV, which Kitt said will further cut jobs and hurt broadcasters’ ability to tell Canadian stories.