

■ ■ The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

LABOUR REPORTER

THE VOICE OF SASKATCHEWAN'S WORKING FAMILIES SINCE 1956



SPRING
2017

• THE FIGHT BACK •



OWN IT! RELAUNCHED TO FIGHT NEW PRIVATIZATION THREAT

OWN IT!, an initiative to protect Saskatchewan's Crown corporations and public services from being sold, is a province-wide campaign and organizing effort.

Workers, families, and individuals that rely on Crowns and public services from across the province have been interviewed to get their stories on why selling-off Crowns and public services is a bad idea for all of us.

"Here in Saskatchewan we cherish our Crowns and public services, and residents all over our province rely on them every day. We can't sit by while the provincial government privatizes them, putting them in the hands of corporations who will put profit first — and

service and safety second," said Larry Hubich, president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL).

Privatization is everyone's problem now, and Own It! encourages Saskatchewan residents to make their voice heard. People can send a letter to their local town/city council and MLA by visiting: www.ownyoursask.ca.

"Selling Crowns and public services will really hit families hard: prices will go up, services will suffer, and jobs will be lost — especially in small towns and rural Saskatchewan," said Hubich, "that's why we are involving local leaders in this effort."

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This newsletter is written by members of CUPE 4828 and designed by Michelle Houlden, GSU Local 5.



We hope town and city councils will defend their communities and call on the provincial government to stop its risky privatization schemes.

— LARRY HUBICH

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“We hope town and city councils will defend their communities and call on the provincial government to stop its risky privatization schemes,” he added.

The provincial government’s latest ploy to sell our Crowns is a piece of legislation it has introduced called Bill 40. If passed, Bill 40 would allow the provincial government to sell half of any Crown corporation without running on it during an election or holding a referendum.

This new phase of Own It! follows a successful petition drive in the Fall of 2015 that saw nearly 20,000 signatures being submitted to the Legislature calling on the provincial government to say YES to Crowns and public services. It remains the second-largest petition in Saskatchewan’s history.

Own It! is a community coalition of workers’ groups and supporters of strong Crowns and public services.

DON'T BLAME WORKERS FOR GOV'T MISMANAGEMENT

LEADERS FROM Saskatchewan’s Labour Movement have come together through a series of meetings to share information on what people are hearing from public employers.

One thing has become clear: the provincial government is setting the stage to blame Saskatchewan workers for the government’s own budget mismanagement, waste, and lack of leadership.

“Janitors, teachers, and healthcare providers did not cause the government’s billion dollar deficit, so it makes no sense whatsoever for the premier to be bullying these, and other, public servants,” said Larry Hubich, president of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.

“The government should be looking at its own costly privatization schemes and boondoggle projects – like the privatized bypass around Regina, the GTH land scandal, the Lean scam, smart meters, and giving away our liquor stores – to save the province some money,” he added.

In response to the provincial government’s attacks on working people, families, students, and communities, a rally is being organized to take place on March 8th at the Legislature in Regina.

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Larry Hubich calls on the provincial government to stop their attacks on workers.

liquor stores – to save the province some money,” he added.

In response to the provincial government’s attacks on working people, families, students, and communities, a rally is being organized to take place on March 8 at the Legislature in Regina.

“People around the province are, quite frankly, fed up with the government’s excuses and scapegoating,” said Hubich.

“The Rally for Saskatchewan is an opportunity for everyone to come together and fight for what we value here in Saskatchewan: public Crowns and strong public services, world-class public healthcare, schools and teachers that have the resources they need to teach our kids, a seniors’ care system that is properly staffed, and a positive direction that believes in the promise of this province.

“Why is the Premier attacking the people who voted for his government?”

People can share information about privatization and take action to protect our Crowns and public services by visiting: www.ownyoursask.ca.



EDITOR'S NOTE

THE FIGHT BACK

BY KENT PETERSON

REBUKED BY the Supreme Court of Canada for violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Threatening wage rollbacks and even the possibility of opening closed agreements. Introducing Bill 40 to change the definition of privatization. An embarrassing record of waste and mismanagement and shady land deals. Threatening 12 unpaid Wall-days a year for public sector workers. The squandering of a boom, and the blaming of everyone else when things went south.

It seems to me that this provincial government has long passed its 'best before' date.

It's up to us, the workers of Saskatchewan, to work collectively and individually to bring about the change Saskatchewan deserves.

This fight back issue of the Labour Reporter is but a sampling of a few ways that fight back can happen. It's my hope this issue will spark a creative idea, the energy to hit the streets, or the courage to rally your co-workers to push back against cuts, sell-offs, rollbacks, and quite frankly the abuse of power.

LONG TERM CARE REPORT SHOWS NEED FOR MORE FRONT LINE STAFF

ON FEBRUARY 10, the provincial government released the reports from the 2016 Regional Health Authorities CEO Long-Term Care Facility Tour. The CEOs of each regional health authority reported serious issues facing residents in long-term care, such as infrequent baths, sub-par food options, and desire for enhanced recreational opportunities. In response, the three health care provider unions, SGEU, CUPE and SEIU-West, are calling on the provincial government to properly invest in front line staff.

"We all know that we need more staff in long-term care," said Bonnie Erickson, SGEU's Health Sector Vice-President. "The question is, what is this government going to do to ensure that every senior in our province has access to the quality of care they deserve? Any additional cuts or layoffs in health care in this province will put even more stress on already over-taxed workers."

Front line care providers in Saskatchewan are facing uncertainty from proposed budget cuts, privatization, and the looming merging of all of the province's health regions. Now the growing provincial deficit calls into question whether the government will put needed re-

sources into the system.

"Understaffing and workload are critical issues in continuing care in Saskatchewan," said Gordon Campbell, President of CUPE Health Care Council. "With more staff time, workers can be more attentive and provide better care to their residents. All of our members care deeply about the residents, and provide a high level of care – we need the government to adequately fund seniors' care."

Since 2011, when the Government of Saskatchewan removed regulations requiring a minimum standard of care for seniors, concerns about understaffing and workload in continuing care in Saskatchewan have grown.

"Skilled professionals in our health care system have faced increased workloads and decreased staffing levels, all in the name of cost savings," said Barb Cape, president of SEIU-West.

"It is far past time for our government to reinstate mandatory minimum care standards in LTC to prevent more tragedies from happening. In addition, it is imperative that this government invests in health care. Our province deserves world class health care for seniors and all residents – not service cuts."

TOUR FINDS STRONG SUPPORT

AFTER KIM WILSON, the president of Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE) Local 397, attended a meeting with managers from Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) in January, she knew she needed to take her message to workers across the province.

“We were told that as a Saskatchewan Crown

Corporation, and as public servants, we must do our part to contain expenses,” said Wilson, who represents SGI workers, “some of the suggestions were a freeze in range movement, rolling back our 2017 increase of 1.95 per cent, changing the rate of over-time pay, and forcing workers to take up to 5 extra days off a year – without pay,” she added.

COPE 397 usually holds several meetings across Saskatchewan to engage with its members, but this year the union did something different: it opened the meetings up to other unions, all workers, and members of the general public.

“Every public sector union was facing the same challenges from employers: threats of lay-



All of the folks who come out are concerned about their jobs, the services they receive, the cost of privatization, and that if Crowns are sold they will pay much higher prices for utilities. It's clear that nobody is buying the provincial government's blame game. People understand that we need to keep our Crowns and services public.

KIM WILSON
PRESIDENT, COPE 397



FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

offs, cutbacks, and sell-offs. We all recognized the need to organize together with the Own It! campaign to protect our Crowns and public services,” said Wilson, “we held a series of organizing meetings with representatives from different unions and other groups, booked some dates, and then hit the road,” she added.

Anti-privatization town halls took place, or are scheduled to take place, in 13 communities around the province; they are: Weyburn, Estevan, Prince Albert, Tisdale, Yorkton, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, Swift Current, North Battleford, Meadow Lake, Lloydminster, and Kindersley.

According to Wilson the reception has been

tremendous.

“All of the folks who come out are concerned about their jobs, the services they receive, the cost of privatization, and that if Crowns are sold they will pay much higher prices for utilities,” said Wilson, “it’s clear that nobody is buying the provincial government’s blame game. People understand that we need to keep our Crowns and services public,” she added.

At each town hall attendees were also asked to send a letter to their local MLA and council through the Own It! campaign’s www.OwnYourSask.ca. Hundreds did just that, and as a result the government has no excuse to ignore the voice of Saskatchewan voters.

Hundreds of town hall attendees are voicing their concerns about privatization plans to their local MLA and council, sending a clear message to the provincial government.



ABOVE: Kim Wilson, president of COPE 397, speaks during the Tisdale town hall meeting.
OPPOSITE PAGE: MLA Nicole Rancourt addresses the Prince Albert town hall meeting.

SASK. PARTY GOV'T MUST REMOVE FAILED “SUPERVISORY EXCLUSIONS” FROM SEA

The SFL is urging the Sask. Party government to remove its failed ‘supervisory exclusions’ from the Saskatchewan Employment Act (SEA), before it wastes more taxpayers’ dollars.

On Jan. 17, the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (LRB) denied an employer’s attempt to remove ‘supervisory employees’ from a unit of CUPE at the Saskatoon Public Library. This case was the first real test of the Sask. Party government’s 2014 changes that allowed employers to carve ‘supervisory employees’ out of their bargaining unit.

“Saskatchewan’s workers, through the Ministers’ Advisory Committee, told the Sask. Party government that supervisory exclusions violated a worker’s right to belong to a union of their choosing,” said SFL president Larry Hubich. “The government made an ill-advised and arrogant decision to ram through these questionable sections of the legislation,” he added.

SEA prohibits employer influence in workers’ choice of a union, any employer coercion that may affect a worker’s choice to belong to a union, and any employer interference in the administration of a union. The LRB stated that permitting employers to exclude supervisors from existing bargaining units would deprive workers of their union representation and their rights under negotiated collective agreements.

“We warned the Sask. Party government about the supervisory exclusions in the legislation, but they didn’t listen,” said Hubich. “My hope is that the government will, finally, do the right thing by repealing the supervisory exclusion sections of the SEA, and then actually use its Minister’s Advisory Committee in good faith by listening to the concerns of workers.”

WORKERS SUBMIT IDEAS FOR FUNDING POLICY CHANGES

FOR A PERIOD ENDING March 1, 2017 the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) asked for input on how its funding policy could be changed. The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) submitted a report that, among other suggestions, recommended that the funding policy should be changed so that it works for workers.

"The Saskatchewan WCB should aim to be a leader among provinces and territories with regards to its percentage range that would determine if it is fully funded. It is recommended that the Saskatchewan WCB adjust its fully-funded percentage range from 105% to 120%, to 110% to 140%," read the SFL's report.

The SFL report further recommended:

"The Saskatchewan WCB should use its funding policy to prioritize injury prevention, training, and education. It is recommended that if the Saskatchewan WCB has funds in excess of its fully-funded percentage range, that those excess funds not be distributed to employers, but rather set aside into a special prevention, training, and education fund. It is further recommended that employers can then access the special fund on application to, and approval by, the WCB for prevention, training, and education initiatives a given employer is undertaking."

SFL Secretary-Treasurer and long-time health and safety advocate, Lori Johb, thinks the SFL report is a good step in the right direction to make the WCB funding policy more responsive to workers' needs.

"From 2000 to 2014, Saskatchewan had the second highest average work-related lost-time injury rate; in that same time-frame Saskatchewan had the highest average injury fatality rate of all the provinces – 504% higher than Manitoba's rate, and 69% higher than Alberta's rate. And since 2000, 577 workers have been killed on the job in Saskatchewan – as recognized by the WCB," said Johb, "Despite high injury and fatality rates, when the Saskatchewan WCB had excess earnings for its 2014 fiscal year it sent the surplus of \$141 million to employers – with no parameters around the need to use the money to drive down injuries and fatalities. Similarly, when the Saskatchewan WCB had excess earnings for its 2015 fiscal year, it sent its \$281.5 million surplus to employers. Again, with no conditions to use the money for prevention, training, and education," she added.

"With these two recommendations for its funding policy, the WCB can better address injury prevention, training, and education," concluded Johb.

Workers across Saskatchewan responded to this important issue, and submitted letters to the WCB outlining why the SFL's recommendations are good ideas.

"The response was incredible. Within the first four days of us asking workers to send letters to the WCB supporting the SFL recommendations, over 120 people did just that," said Johb, "and there's no telling how many more contacted the WCB independently to offer their own suggestions," she added.



Lori Johb, SFL Secretary-Treasurer and Health and Safety advocate



OPINION

WE ARE OUR BROTHER'S (AND SISTER'S) KEEPER

BY BARB CAPE,
PRESIDENT, SEIU-WEST

A LARGE NUMBER of SEIU-West members are employed as health care providers, myself included, and we were just as surprised as you when it came to the Government of Saskatchewan's announcement to eliminate 12 health regions into one "mega" health region.

As a taxpayer, there are so many reasons to be alarmed about this 'transformational change' initiative. First, how will this massive change address chronic short-staffing within the health system in our province? There is no evidence that reducing the number of health regions will lead to better patient care.

The government claims this mega health region will save money by reducing bureaucracy but if that's the true purpose, then why aren't the bureaucratic structures of E-Health, SAHO, and 3sHealth also under scrutiny right now?

With the recent memo to all public sector employers threatening wage rollbacks or layoffs, it is now perfectly clear that our government's aim is not to cut bureaucracy, but rather expects our frontline health and education providers to bear the brunt of our government's fiscal mismanagement.

Health care providers and education workers are already doing more with less, so what kind of impact will layoffs and a less competitive job market have? It won't be pretty – and patients, clients, residents, students and parents are sure to feel the effects in our schools, libraries, hospitals, nursing homes and community care. We know that taxes fund our government, so how is the loss of more good jobs in the province going to help? This will only mean that there are fewer taxpayers to contribute to our overall government revenues. We need to

ensure good health care and education jobs continue to support rural communities and fund our public coffers to maintain continued public services across the province. It is clear we are in need of better solutions.

If this government genuinely wants to improve patient care, we should be looking at reinstating safe staffing regulations that would provide stable levels of care. Rather than provide the funding needed to meet and enforce the standards, the government got rid of them in 2011. We must restore and expand such legislated minimum staffing levels – only this will ensure patient safety and the knowledge that they have the care they need in our health care facilities.

Another solution is to recognize and strengthen our Canada Health Act with an emphasis on compliance to publicly delivered health care. The people of Saskatchewan take great pride in our province's leading role in this remarkable policy achievement, and it is vital that we ensure any change to our health care system not include privatization. The fact is, it doesn't save money and leaves suffering communities behind. And what really irks me about privatizing is how members of the public have to pay twice – with privatization, we'd have to pay for both service costs and our ongoing taxes towards the health care system. Protecting and strengthening our publicly serviced health care should be a priority; for example, we could maximize access to publicly funded MRIs through expanded utilization of the Dr. Fred W. Wigmore Regional Hospital unit.

Our tax dollars are extremely important and our government needs to be both accountable and transparent; such resources ought to be spent wisely, not wasted. We know the government mismanaged our boom - taxes were cut

and at the same time our government became dependant on the increased prices of oil and potash – we saw bronze roofs, new stadiums, and expensive bypass projects take budgetary priority – and here we are in the downturn with no savings and a \$1 billion deficit. These blunders have already been made, but there are ways to ensure the people of Saskatchewan are not forced to bear the brunt of this mismanagement.

It's clear that our government favours austerity as a misguided response to the budget crisis, which tells us we must sacrifice our public services based on the misconception that there is not enough money – basically, austerity represents a position that 'we must tighten our belts'. Yet austerity measures harm our health care, education, and other public services.

For example, Cameco is being taken to court due to the charge that they've withheld as much as \$2.1 billion from our public resources. Here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Wall has said little in response or action towards the Cameco scandal – even though our province could receive a huge portion of the money Cameco owes – an amount that would significantly help our situation. Our Premier needs to recognize that this is one of the 'options on the table' while stressing that our province is facing tough financial decisions.

In Saskatchewan, we are our brother's (and sister's) keeper; that is what made our province strong in past decades and will keep us strong into the future. We all have a mutual responsibility and a mutual benefit to our fair share of taxes and public services. We must work together to ensure that 'transformational change' not be another race to the bottom, but an opportunity for everyone in this province to demand accountability, transparency and quality public services.



**BREAD AND ROSES ...
AND TWITTER:**

If you want your union's handle, or your handle, added to this list simply tweet as such to **@SKFedLabour**.

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| @ATULocal615 | @KLQbn | @SGEUMary |
| @BarbByersCLC | @LHubich | @Shobna Radons |
| @Bymoan | @LJohb | @SKFedLabour |
| @CanadianLabour | @MCWalker64 | @SUNnurses |
| @CanLabourMedia | @MSHladun | @Thebaud |
| @CLCSask | @OwnYourSask | @TracyZam |
| @COPE397 | @PrezCape | @TriaDonaldson |
| @CUPEsask | @PSACprairies | @UFCW1400Wom- |
| @DeniseLDick | @PurpleWorksSEIU | en |
| @DLafleurCLC | @RankAndFileca | @UFCW649 |
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| @JoieWarnock | @SameOldKent | @UFCWCanada1400 |
| @JudyHenley1 | @SaskSpark | @Unifor1S |
| @jx5yak | @SGEU | @UniforTheUnion |

QUOTABLE



The Rally for Saskatchewan is an opportunity for everyone to come together and fight for what we value here in Saskatchewan: public Crowns and strong public services, world-class public health care, schools and teachers that have the resources they need to teach our kids, a seniors' care system that is properly staffed, and a positive direction that believes in the promise of this province.

LARRY HUBICH | PRESIDENT, SFL

» See the story on page 2.



It is imperative that this government invests in health care. Our province deserves world class health care for seniors and all residents – not service cuts.

BARB CAPE | PRESIDENT, SEIU-WEST

» See the story on page 3.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 8	Rally for Saskatchewan	Regina
March 8	International Women's Day	
March 20	Shift Work Recognition Day	
March 21	International Day for Elimination of Racism	
March 22	World Water Day	
April 3-7	SFL/CLC Spring School	Moose Jaw
April 4-7	Unifor Prairie Regional Council	Edmonton

April 12	Day of Pink	
April 22	Earth Day	
April 28	International Day of Mourning	
April 28-29	SFL Young Workers' Conference	Regina
May 1	International Worker's Day (May Day)	
May 8-12	CLC Convention	Toronto
May 17	International Day Against Homophobia	

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