

Advocate

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Whose side are they on?



In one more of the many actions it has taken to improve health care, the NDP government has given official approval to the business plan for a new, state-of-the-art St. Paul's Hospital to serve British Columbians.

Improving services
for families

Taking stock of the Horgan government

WHOSE SIDE are they on? Who are they working for? Those are the key questions to consider when we, as voters, decide whether a political party or government is worthy of our support.

We have now seen the NDP government of BC, supported by the three Green MLAs, deliver a significant budget update in 2017 followed by two full provincial budgets.

It is an appropriate time for us to

take a look at what the government's actions to date have meant for British Columbians, for the public services we rely on, and for our province as a whole.

For 16 years we had a government that consistently underfunded or cut health care, education, child protection, labour standards and other vital services to people.

With regressive actions like doubling MSP payments, tripling tuition

fees, slapping tolls on public bridges and freezing the minimum wage for a decade, the BC Liberals made it harder for ordinary people to get ahead. At the same time, they handed the richest British Columbians billions in tax giveaways.

In this edition, our special report looks at whether the NDP is succeeding in setting a new direction where ordinary people come first.

• **Taking stock: pages 7-10**

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In this edition

A lot has been happening since we elected a new provincial government in 2017 – so much that it can be hard to keep up with all the changes.

The NDP's main focus has been to improve services to people, make life more affordable, and create good jobs.

It has also tackled climate change and strengthened our democracy by taking big money out of politics.

Our special report, starting on page 7, presents some of the highlights.

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WE FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS

We can and must achieve more

By Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM

EVERY ONE of us has something that frightens us. Public speaking. Travel to foreign lands. Standing up to the rich and powerful. Snakes.

It's pretty easy to give in to our fears, stay home and do nothing.

But often the times when the butterflies are aggressively fluttering in our tummies are precisely the times we must decide to fly.

If we allow fear of failure to rule our actions, failure is guaranteed. And then we have to live with the regret of knowing that we could have done *something* if we had only tried.

You and I are uniquely positioned to do quite a bit in the struggle to make life better for others.

We are members of BC FORUM. We are members of the labour movement. We are never alone.

During our working lives, we saw the power of solidarity in our workplaces. It is equally effective in politics and debates on public policy.

If each of us does a little bit – to the extent that we physically and financially are able to contribute – it adds up to a lot.

Write a letter. Join a campaign. Sign up a friend in BC FORUM. Contribute to a good cause or a political party. Let's all do what we can to grab the world and give it a good shake.

A key issue for BC FORUM is the need for a universal, single-payer national prescription drug plan.

Studies consistently show that national Pharmacare would improve health outcomes, reduce hospital admissions, and save Canadians billions of dollars each year.

A federal advisory council is scheduled to report this spring, which will help keep Pharmacare on the political agenda, but there is no certainty that it will recommend anything beyond a band-aid approach.

As you know, national Pharmacare has been talked about for many decades. Yet Canada remains the only country with public health care that doesn't cover needed medications.

Drug prices in Canada are the second highest in the world. Only the U.S., where giant pharmaceutical corporations pour millions into election campaigns, has higher prices.

Recent news reports show that American BigPharma is actively lobbying to keep prices high in our country. They have even gone so far as to finance "research" published by the Canadian pharmaceutical industry association.

Their goal is clear. Profits first. And it hurts real people.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh recently told the heart-breaking story of a young boy who has a chronic long-term illness.

Just 10 years old, he told Singh about "the medication and the injections and all the work he's got to go through just to stay alive."

But he's not worried about his illness. He's worried about how much the treatments cost his parents. Our much vaunted public health care system – because it fails to cover needed medicines outside hospitals – has left a 10 year old boy feeling like he's a burden to his family.

We need universal coverage for prescription drugs. It has already taken much too long to get there.

But we will. Sisters and brothers, we will never give up until we do.



Diane Wood

Remembering Art Kube

ON BEHALF of BC FORUM, I extend our heartfelt condolences and respect to Art Kube's wife Mary, his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Throughout his activism in the union movement, the NDP, and seniors' organizations, Art always had a clear vision of what needed to be done, and prodded us to do more.

He never hesitated to let us know – in no uncertain terms – when a resolution, an action or a government policy didn't go far enough.

We cherish our time with Art and the inspiration of his example. He is dearly missed.

Bringing people together

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

BORN IN Poland in 1935. Uprooted at the age of eight by the brutality of World War II. Making his way to Canada, on his own, when he was 19.

These are experiences that would mark a lot of people for the rest of their days. Yet Art Kube lived his life filled with optimism and boundless determination to build a more civil society.

“I have tried to make it my life’s work to improve the quality of life for people.”

Art had an uncanny ability to bring people together and encourage them to take action.

As David Rice, retired regional director of the CLC once told me, “You can’t say no to Art.”

Brother Kube was, of course, the driving force behind Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition formed to counter Premier Bill Bennett’s 1983 assault on unions, basic human rights and public services.

“It was the broadest social movement, not just the largest, but also the broadest that the province has ever known,” said Father Jim Roberts, one of the co-chairs of the Solidarity Coalition.

The Harrison Winter School, originally held in Parksville, started under Art’s direction when he was regional director of the CLC. He believed union members should not be asked to work all week and then give their weekends to labour education.

“It also involved a political party,” Art told me in a 2014 interview. “Every week of the Winter School, Dave Barrett was there.



“(General sessions) impressed upon workers the importance of recognizing that they’re just as good as anybody else. Many people realized for the first time that they’re part of a bigger movement,” he said.

Art was a tireless advocate for seniors.

When a group of union retirees was denied the right to appear before a House of Commons committee holding hearings on patent protection for pharmaceuticals, he told them they needed “a sexier name.”

“I went home... called up my friends and said, ‘You’re now on the executive of Seniors on Guard for Medicare.’ Then I made up a letterhead and sent a letter to the chair of the committee. A day later I got a phone call asking when we could appear,” said Art with a huge smile.

Art served as director, President

and Ombudsperson for the Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations (COSCO), supporting and expanding its advocacy, lobbying and education work and helping to organize educational conferences. He was a life member of BC FORUM and a member of the Order of Canada.

He attended Labour Day celebrations every year, and constantly reminded union leaders of their responsibility to support social activism.

The annual Christmas celebrations hosted by Art and his family were often standing room only. They brought together hundreds of people, and frequently inspired conversations of past and future campaigns for a better world.

Art, you were a good friend and a steadfast ally. We miss you. We will cherish and do our best to live up to the inspiration you have given us.

With good policy, we can cut CO₂

A STUDY PUBLISHED in the journal *Nature Climate Change* has found that the right government policies can lead to success in reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The researchers focused on emissions between 2005 and 2015 and found a decline in 18 countries, even though worldwide emissions increased.

“This study shows it’s not a mystery,” said Corinne Le Quéré, a Canadian professor of climate change science who works in the United Kingdom.

“We have the technology. You put the effort in place, you develop the policies, you fund them, and then you get emission decreases,” she said.

Seventeen of the countries that



Wind and solar are significant contributors to electricity generation in Europe.

reduced emissions of greenhouse gases are in Europe. The other is the United States. It remains to be seen what impact the election of Trump will have.

Canada did not make the list.

Climatologist Michael Mann, who created the famous hockey stick graph to illustrate rapidly rising temperatures, agrees there is hope if we move quickly to renewable energy.

“There is still an available path to stabilizing greenhouse warming below 2 degrees,” he says.

“But it requires a rapid decrease in carbon emissions – about 10 percent a year over the next decade – at a time when emissions have shown a small uptick.

“There is a clear path toward averting catastrophic climate change,” says Mann. “We just have to follow it.”

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A BIG VICTORY

Nanaimo elects a new MLA

IT'S NOT often that a single by-election can threaten the stability of the provincial government. But that was certainly the case when Nanaimo voters went to the polls on Wednesday, Jan. 30.

Leonard Krog, who held the seat since 2005, stepped down after he was elected mayor of Nanaimo. If the Liberals won they would have the same number of seats as the NDP and Greens. The Speaker would have to break tie votes.

Instead of a traditional by-election where voters could safely "send them a message" their decision could bring down the government.

No doubt there were moments of heavy breathing when the early returns from Elections BC showed the Liberal candidate well in the lead. Just two days earlier, Mainstreet Research had released a poll which found the Liberal candidate at 44.7 percent and the NDP's Sheila Malcolmson at 32.3 percent.

As the counting progressed, it became clear that this was going to be the one time out of 20 when the margin of error was more than 3.5 percent. Way more.

In the final count, released by Elections BC on Feb. 5, Malcolmson had 49.9 percent of the vote, compared to 39.9 percent for her main opponent.

Two hours after the polls closed on election night, Premier John Horgan took the stage in front of hundreds of volunteers and supporters.

"Congratulations to Sheila Malcolmson on her election as the new MLA for Nanaimo. I know she will work hard for the people of Nanaimo, and she will bring passion and integrity to the Legislature," he said.

"I very much look forward to working with Sheila as our government



Nanaimo MLA Sheila Malcolmson and Premier John Horgan

continues its work to make life better for people in B.C."

Malcolmson, who resigned from her seat as a member of parliament to run in the by-election, thanked voters and the hundreds who volunteered to work on the campaign.

"This is a victory for Nanaimo," she said. "We've got lots of work to do."

She highlighted the government's priorities of making life more affordable, improving services that people

count on, and generating jobs in a healthy, sustainable environment.

"We have the strongest economy in the country right now, but we have to make sure that (the benefits are) shared by everyone," she said.

Malcolmson was officially sworn in as MLA on Valentine's Day. She was drummed into the ceremony by Snuneymuxw First Nation chief Mike Wyse and councillor Paul Wyse-Seward.

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Taking stock

Is this government working for us?

GOVERNMENTS ARE supposed to work for us. The whole point of government is to enable us to work together to address big issues we can't fix on our own – including health care, education, transportation, housing speculation, climate change and a civil society.

Government is a co-operative enterprise. We all contribute through taxes. We participate in decisions by voting. And in return, we expect government to work for all of us.

For 16 years in our province that was not the case. The B.C. Liberals relentlessly took actions that further enriched the wealthy few at the expense of everyone else.

They handed out billions in tax giveaways to corporations and the richest of the rich. To pay for that, they underfunded services to people, even tearing down hospitals and shutting beds in many communities.

Year after year, they increased MSP premiums – a regressive tax on ordinary people – until it brought in more than taxes on corporate profits.

For the least fortunate in our society, they froze welfare, assistance to people with disabilities and the minimum wage for a decade. In a gift to unscrupulous employers, they undermined employment standards and shut down the human rights commission.

In these pages, we look at whether the NDP is doing any better. The final decision is, of course, entirely yours.



Finance minister Carole James introduced the NDP's second full budget on Feb. 19.

Working for people

BRITISH COLUMBIA has the strongest economy in Canada – the highest projected real growth in GDP, the lowest unemployment, and the biggest wage gains. Wages increased by 4.1 percent last year, the largest wage growth in B.C. in a decade.

For the first time in 40 years, the government completely eliminated its operating debt in 2018. This means B.C. is in one of the strongest fiscal positions in the country, and no longer borrowing money to finance day-to-day operations.

While the economy is thriving, Finance Minister Carole James is not satisfied.

“A truly prosperous economy needs to work for everyone,” says James. “It needs to create opportunities for people now, while meeting the challenges of tomorrow.”

As she introduced the provincial budget for 2019, James said the government is working to make life better by improving health care,

education and child care for families.

“Budget 2019 puts money back into the pockets of British Columbians and creates opportunities so that every person can reach their potential,” said James.

As examples of that, she highlighted the new child opportunity benefit, elimination of interest on student loans, the end of MSP premiums on Jan. 1, 2020, and the largest infrastructure investment in B.C. history.

“Budget 2019 moves forward with CleanBC, putting our province on the path to a low-carbon economy that creates opportunities while protecting our clean air, land and water,” she said.

“Budget 2019 works to ensure that everyone has the opportunities they need to succeed. The investments we’re making will help us build a strong, sustainable economy that works for people today, and for generations to come,” said James.

Tackling climate pollution

THE GOVERNMENT'S CleanBC plan is aimed at reducing climate pollution, while creating more jobs and economic opportunities for people, businesses and communities.

"The low-carbon economy we build together will bring opportunities and jobs throughout the province, so people can live and work with greater security in the communities they call home," says Premier John Horgan.

"By moving to clean, renewable energy – like our abundant supply of B.C. electricity – we can power our growing economy and make life better and more affordable for British Columbians."

The government's priorities are to:

- Reduce climate pollution by shifting homes, vehicles, industry and business off burning fossil fuels and toward greater use of clean B.C. electricity and other renewable energies.
- Boost energy-efficient solutions, like zero-emission vehicles and home heat pumps, by making them more affordable and available for British Columbians.
- Make B.C. a destination for new investment and industry looking to meet the growing global demand for low-carbon products, services and pollution-reducing technologies.

The CleanBC plan was developed to achieve the province's legislated climate targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by the year 2030, based on 2007 levels.

The plan describes and quantifies measures that will eliminate 18.9 megatonnes, about 75 percent of the 2030 target. Remaining reduction initiatives will be quantified over the next 18 to 24 months.

"With CleanBC, British Columbia



Environment Minister George Heyman

is rising to the challenge of climate change," Horgan said. "Every year, we're seeing the unprecedented

wildfires and floods that hurt so many people, communities and businesses. We need to begin changing how we live, work and commute to put B.C. on a cleaner, more sustainable path."

"CleanBC is a B.C.-specific approach to making our communities strong and vibrant for decades to come as we rise to the challenge of global climate change," said George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

"We can build a low-carbon economy that includes all sectors and all workers. Together, we can protect our children's future, while making life more affordable today."

As part of this strategy, government is developing a CleanBC labour readiness plan to address the labour and workplace opportunities that emerge through the implementation of CleanBC.

Incentives, rebates and credits for climate action

NEW FUNDING for CleanBC initiatives to meet our climate commitments and protect our air, land and water totals \$902 million over three years.

To make energy saving improvements more accessible and affordable for British Columbians, the government will support clean energy retrofits:

- \$2,000 to replace a fossil fuel (oil, propane or natural gas) heating system with an electric air-source heat pump.
- Up to \$1,000 to upgrade their windows and doors to be better insulated.
- Up to \$700 toward a higher efficiency natural gas furnace.

The plan includes tens of millions

of dollars to make zero-emission vehicles more affordable, saving motorists up to \$6,000 on their purchase and about \$1,500 a year in fuel costs.

CleanBC will also help fund new public fast-charging stations and hydrogen fueling stations, and training programs for automotive technicians and electricians in the clean energy vehicle sector.

The climate action tax credit has been increased by 14 percent, rising to a maximum of \$400 for low and middle-income families of four.

An investment of \$168 million over three years will help large industries reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and a further \$15 million this year will support remote communities as they switch to cleaner energy.



A private project under construction on the Sunshine Coast by an Alberta company is one of hundreds that have disrupted B.C.'s wild rivers and streams to deliver exorbitantly priced power at times when it isn't needed.

Strengthening our voice in democratic elections

THE HORGAN government has taken big money out of provincial politics. Premier John Horgan said the step was taken “to make sure government’s actions and decisions benefit everyone, not just those with deep pockets.”

“The days of limitless donations, a lack of transparency and foreign and corporate influence over our elections are history,” added Attorney General David Eby.

The government has strengthened people’s voices in elections by:

- Ending corporate and union donations.
- Limiting individual contributions to \$1,200 a year, the second-lowest limit in Canada.
- Banning foreign and out of

province donations.

- Capping contributions to third-party election advertisers.
- Requiring ongoing public reporting of all fundraisers attended by major party leaders, cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries, including those held in private residences.
- Reducing campaign spending limits for candidates and political parties by about 25 percent.
- Setting new fines and penalties for contraventions of election financing and advertising laws.

“These unprecedented changes will not only end the ‘wild west’ of campaign fundraising, they are an important step in modernizing our democracy,” Eby said.

Fixing the mess at BC Hydro

ENERGY MINISTER Michelle Mungall has announced an immediate, indefinite suspension of BC Hydro’s standing offer program for private power and will expand oversight of the utility by the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC).

An independent review found that the previous government forced BC Hydro to purchase power from independent producers at four times the market rate – even though most of that power came during the spring freshet when it wasn’t needed.

Perhaps coincidentally, the private producers had donated \$3 million to the B.C. Liberals.

The long term contracts to deliver power when it isn’t needed will cost Hydro customers at least \$16 billion over the next 20 years. The review estimated that 81 percent of these funds will go to corporations that are based outside B.C.

“The previous government made choices that put their own interests ahead of what’s best for the province and BC Hydro customers,” says Mungall.

“They ignored the professional advice, they ignored the auditor general, and they ignored the growing debt. Instead, (they) chose to make British Columbians pay the price for their choices, today and for decades to come,” she said.

“Step one in fixing this problem is to take the politics out of decisions around BC Hydro. The best way to keep BC Hydro on the right financial path while protecting the interests of customers is to enhance BCUC’s independent oversight of the crown corporation as we move forward,” said Mungall.

Improving public services and helping people to get ahead

MSP PREMIUMS – a regressive tax that cost us \$2.7 billion a year – will be eliminated on Jan. 1, 2020, one year earlier than the BC NDP promised during the election campaign. For couples who had been paying \$1,800 a year in 2017, the charge was cut in half last year. It's a huge step towards fairness in our tax system.

The NDP has also:

- Invested \$1 billion over three years in child care, freeing parents to contribute to our economy. Fees have been reduced by up to \$350 a month at more than 52,000 child care spaces. The affordable child care benefit, available to families earning up to \$111,000 saves them up to \$15,000 per child each year. Funding has been provided to support the creation of 22,000 new licensed child care spaces.
- Increased the minimum wage by \$1.30 an hour on June 1, 2018. Three more scheduled increases will raise it to at least \$15.20 by 2021.
- Taken action to curb real estate speculation, especially by foreign buyers, and allocated \$7 billion to build 114,000 affordable homes over 10 years. About 17,000 homes were built or started last year.
- Limited rent increases to the rate of inflation, strengthened protections for renters, and increased rental assistance to low-income working families by an average of \$800 a year.
- Removed tolls from all bridges, saving commuters up to \$1,500 a year, and pledged the new Pattullo bridge will be toll free.
- Eliminated interest from all B.C. student loans.

- As a first step in helping vulnerable people to build a better life, increased income and disability rates by a total of \$150 a month – the first meaningful increases in 10 years.
- Restored transit passes to people with disabilities.
- To create opportunities to break the cycle of poverty, and make it easier for people to participate in their community, committed government to reduce B.C.'s overall poverty rate by 25 percent and child poverty rate by 50 percent in the next five years.
- Moved ahead with hospital construction, renovation, and expansion throughout the province.
- Added more than 800 hours of

MRI operating time per week to help patients get results sooner.

- Announced many new team-based primary care centres, with more to come, to help people get the care they need when they need it.
- While continuing to push for a national Pharmacare program, improved Fair PharmaCare by making prescriptions more affordable for more than 240,000 families and expanding coverage to include more drugs.
- Increased funding to improve public education for our children and grandchildren. 5,500 new spaces are being created throughout B.C., helping to move students out of portables and into classrooms. In addition, more than 4,000 new teachers will be hired.

Boosting support for seniors

IN ADDITION to other measures taken to improve affordability and services for everyone, the NDP has taken steps that are of particular interest to retired workers and our families.

- Provided funding of more than half a billion dollars over three years to improve services to seniors, including home support and residential care.
- Restored free passenger travel, Monday to Friday, for seniors on BC Ferries.
- Eliminated PharmaCare deductibles for senior and other families with net incomes of \$30,000 or less, and reduced deductibles for families with net incomes up to \$45,000.
- Invested \$75 million over three years to support caregivers by expanding respite care and adult

day programs, reversing the cuts imposed by the previous government, and helping seniors to remain in their own homes.

- Increased benefits to seniors living independently by an average of \$930 per year under the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program.
- Taken action to ensure that direct care to seniors will – for the first time – reach the target of 3.36 hours per resident per day by 2021. Hundreds of thousands of care hours have already been added.
- Rescinded the B.C. Liberals' infamous Bills 29 and 94 which led to the firing of thousands of workers, caused mass privatization of health care services, and disrupted the continuity of care to seniors and patients.

FROM THE BC FED

A green thumbs up

BUDGET 2019 focuses on measures that will benefit thousands of working families, create opportunities for new and under-employed workers to access good, green jobs and strengthen employment standards, says the B.C. Federation of Labour.

“When you start to add up the increased infrastructure funding (\$20 billion), the jobs created through retrofits of public buildings (\$40 million) and private homes (\$41 million), there is funding in this budget for a lot of good, green jobs being created,” said Laird Cronk, President of the BC Fed.

“An initiative near and dear to my heart is the addition of \$6 million from CleanBC to support training programs for automotive technicians and electricians in the zero emission vehicle sector.”

Budget 2019 also strengthened protections for vulnerable workers with an increase in Employment Standards funding of \$14 million over three years to facilitate the removal of the self-help kit, double staff to conduct investigations and create a registry as introduced in the Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act.

“Workers fought long and hard for the rights entrenched in the Employment Standards Act. For more than 16 years, those rights faced daily attacks with the underfunding of the Employment Standards Branch,” said Cronk.

“Budget 2019 takes an important step forward in providing the Employment Standards Officers with the resources to proactively investigate violations and enforce workers’ rights.

“Safe and secure employment is life changing. We were proud to



Laird Cronk, President of the B.C. Federation of Labour and Chairperson of BC FORUM, about to enter the budget lockup in Victoria.

see commitments in Budget 2019 that help to meaningfully expand employment opportunities for some of the most vulnerable workers,” said Cronk.

The BC Fed notes that Budget 2019 also commits increased funding to WorkBC, makes post secondary education more affordable by eliminating interest on BC student loans and expands opportunities for adult learners.

Cleaning up the Liberal messes

THE B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union is praising Budget 2019 as a prudent plan to clean up the messes left by the previous government, invest in critical public services, and prove that British Columbians don’t need to choose between economic strength, environmental sustainability and the health, safety, and prosperity of their families and communities.

“There is a lot for our members and all British Columbians to be happy about in this budget,” said BCGEU president, Stephanie Smith.

“Our members have been pushing for years for more investment in public services, it’s great to see that the government has taken that message to heart,” she said.

Building for a vibrant future

THE BC Building Trades applauded Budget 2019’s commitment of \$20.1 billion in public infrastructure investment – the highest level ever for a three-year fiscal plan.

The capital spending will be used to build hospitals, schools, post-secondary facilities, transit and roads.

“In addition to British Columbians benefiting from these public services, they will benefit from the jobs, local investment, income tax revenue and training opportunities that these projects will provide,” said Tom Sigurdson, executive director of the BC Building Trades.

The BC Building Trades was also cautiously optimistic about a \$3 million investment in the Industry Training Authority over three years to increase hands-on support for apprentices, employers and Indigenous communities to “engage with and navigate through the trades training system.”

Is your home ready to grow old with you?

By David Porteous

IN A recent study published in the Journals of Gerontology they found that seniors are less likely to change residences if they live in a one-floor house or at least have a kitchen, bedroom and bathroom on the same floor.

The analyzed results collected from more than 7,000 aged 65 and older over a four-year period are as follows. 8.2% moved within their communities, 3.9% moved to residential care facilities. Overall, the seniors who were most likely to move were those who lived alone, had a lower annual income and had visited the hospital during the previous year. After adjusting for demographics and health factors, poor indoor accessibility was found to be associated with moves within the community but not to



David Porteous

residential care facilities.

Retirement living found that nearly 75% of the 2,300 people aged 50 and older it surveyed plan on performing bathroom modifications, which they

said are key to aging in place. 33% polled plan on doing renovations such as adding wheelchair ramps or improving lighting. 40% said they are likely or very likely to employ technologies like electronic medical alert services, ride-share or food delivery services. In addition, there is a rising interest among seniors in how in-home technologies like voice-activated devices such as Alexa or Apple HomePod, or connected appliances, could help them stay in their homes.

To truly understand how aging in place can be supported, we need to shift focus from merely looking at individual health problems to also include the environments they live in.

David is an Elder Planning Counselor, and a charter member of the Canadian Initiative for Elder Planning Studies.

BC FORUM Health & Dental Plans

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Getting ready for the big one

“This isn’t the end of a campaign – it’s the beginning of one.”
– Jagmeet Singh

FRESH FROM his Feb. 25 convincing win in the Burnaby South by-election, federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh is firmly focused on the next federal election.

“We have just eight months to let people know that they can choose a government that stands up for people,” Singh told a lively election night victory party.

Hard working Canadians feel like they are falling further and further behind, and are even more worried about their kids’ future, he said.

“Conservatives and Liberals have rigged a system that works for the powerful, the wealthy and the well-connected, but not for everyday Canadians,” said Singh.

“We can make different choices and get better results. We can make life easier for people, not easier for corporations to take advantage of us,” he said.

Singh touched on several issues that are likely to feature in his party’s platform for the next election:

- Expanding our health care system to include medication coverage for every single person in our country.
- Construction of half a million non-profit, non-market, co-operative housing units to keep alive the dream of owning a home.
- Tearing down the barriers to education so young people can realize their dreams and have a bright future.
- Transforming to a green economy that creates opportunities for jobs and good salaries while reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses.



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh finished well ahead of his Conservative and Liberal opponents and will represent Burnaby South in the House of Commons.

- Working honestly towards reconciliation with the first peoples of this land.

“The people at the top and the wealthiest corporations have had it way too good for way too long,” said Singh.

“We can chart a new course for Canada. We can lift up the people

around us so we all rise together. We can build a brighter future now, before it’s too late.

“We can do this together. Let’s make it happen,” he said.

Singh, 40, was elected leader of the federal NDP in the fall of 2017, but has not had a seat in the House of Commons until now.

New report calls for a national Pharmacare program

A NEWLY RELEASED report from the Broadbent Institute says Canadians have waited much too long for national, single payer prescription drug coverage.

“National pharmacare has been a topic of discussion in Canada for over half a century, yet we remain unique among the world’s high-income countries with universal health coverage in that we still do not include outpatient prescription drugs in our national benefit package” says the report.

While consideration of a national pharmacare plan is on the federal government’s agenda, with an advisory council due to report its findings this spring, there are conflicting signals on what the Trudeau government intends to do.

“What remains clear is that there is broad agreement among experts that a single payer plan is needed to provide adequate coverage for all Canadians and to remedy the major gaps in coverage which now exist,” says the report.



Front: Stephanie Smith, President of the BCGEU, Diane Wood, and Sussanne Skidmore, newly elected Secretary Treasurer of the BC Fed. Back row: Paul Finch, Treasurer of the BCGEU, Doug Kinna and James Coccola, Executive Vice Presidents.

Bread and roses

and the Joy Langan Social Justice Award

DIANE WOOD, President of BC FORUM, has won the Joy Langan Social Justice Award, presented at each biennial convention of the BC Federation of Labour.

The award recognizes her leadership as a trade unionist, feminist and community activist.

“Sister Wood has spent her life working to improve the world we live in through labour and community activism, her dedication to social justice and feminism, and her support for other activists – particularly her willingness to step up for women leaders as a femtor, sister and friend,” said BCGEU leaders Stephanie Smith and Sussanne Skidmore, who jointly nominated her for the award.

A committee with representatives of labour, the community and Joy Langan’s family chooses the winner.

Diane’s union activism began in the 1970s as a steward in her Prince George worksite. She subsequently served eight terms as Secretary-Treasurer of the BCGEU, and held executive positions in the BC Fed, the Canadian Labour Congress, the National Union of Public and General Employees and Public Services International.

Since her retirement, she has continued her activism with the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada, the National Pensioners Federation, the Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of BC, the BC Fed executive council, and BC FORUM.

“Diane never hesitates to give up her hard earned retirement to give back to the community,” said her nominators.



Bill Silvester, BC FORUM Board member and John Hooker, BC FORUM Regional Representative and New Westminster & District Labour Council Delegate, were part of the team of volunteers who represented our organization during the five weeks of the CLC Winter School at Harrison Hot Springs.

Strengthening BC FORUM has never been more important

Please encourage your friends to join our team

THROUGH OUR UNIONS, before we retired, we've all seen the benefits of collective action. Our voices are strongest when we stand together in solidarity.

That's where BC FORUM comes in. We are the only provincial organization that represents union members who have retired or are nearing retirement. We are an integral part of the labour movement, with formal representation in leadership bodies, and maintain strong links with provincial and national seniors' groups.

Together, we can make a difference for ourselves and our families. Please encourage friends, colleagues and family members to join us using the form below, or on-line at www.bcforum.ca.

Renew your membership – and sign up a friend

PLEASE HAVE A LOOK at the mailing label on this edition of *The Advocate* to check whether your membership is now due for renewal. If your membership is about to expire, you can renew by mailing the coupon below to BC FORUM, #200 - 5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, B.C. V5R 4H1.

You can also renew your membership on-line at www.bcforum.ca.

We also ask for your help in reaching out to people who are nearing retirement or have already retired. Like all membership-based organizations, we are all stronger when as many people as possible work together.

- *Remember that BC FORUM actively welcomes members who are 50 and better, working or retired, so don't be shy about encouraging your friends and family members to join us, even if they are still in the workforce.*

Solidarity makes us strong.



BC FORUM has always provided free \$2,500 Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance coverage to members.

We are proud to now extend this coverage to members' spouses at the low cost of \$5 per year. All you have to do is check the appropriate box when you apply or renew your membership. BC FORUM's AD&D coverage is valid until you reach age 86, the maximum age we were able to negotiate.



Please check your expiry date on the mailing label. BCGEU, HSA, MoveUp, CEU, CUPE 386, UFCW 1518, Heat and Frost, UNIFOR 2301 and LIUNA 1611 pay first year dues for qualified members.



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* Required for Accidental Death & Dismemberment group insurance coverage to age 86.

Talk about dying? Let's not.

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

BROTHER ART Kube, the legendary and tireless advocate for workers and seniors once told me, "We don't talk enough about death."

He was absolutely right. Truth be told, we often don't talk about it at all, especially with those who are closest to us. In our society, it's just not a comfortable topic at the dinner table.

Advances in health care have greatly increased our life span, but death can still be as sudden and unexpected as it is inevitable. If we don't think it through, plan ahead, and talk about it while we can, we will likely end up adding to the emotional and financial burden on our families when we kick the bucket.

There's a lot to do when someone dies. Notifying friends and family.

Notifying pension providers, government agencies, banks, utilities and creditors. Choosing a funeral home. Getting a death certificate. Finding the will, if there is one. Probate court. Deciding what to do with the ashes. And more.

If you search the web for "What to do when someone dies" you'll find the provincial government has provided a checklist. It runs to 14 pages.

Death is not a trivial task for those we leave behind. It's both emotionally draining and expensive.

Many B.C. funeral homes are owned by foreign corporations. Prices are going up. Funerals now cost, on average, about \$7,000.

If the estate includes real estate and needs to go to probate, that will be another up-front cost of thousands of dollars.

A little research and effort on our part, perhaps with the advice of a trusted lawyer or estate planner, can go a long way to easing the burden.

It starts with a will, which should be reviewed and updated, if necessary, on a regular basis.

If the possibility of dementia is a concern, consider creating an enduring power of attorney.

If the family circumstances are appropriate, it may be possible to avoid probate fees by giving the heirs joint ownership of real estate and bank accounts.

And here's the best tip of all: spend 50 bucks to join the non-profit Memorial Society B.C. This one time fee will give you a discount of 15 to 30 percent from participating funeral homes, as well as access to advice.

The society was formed in 1956 to provide independent objective information. It has 240,000 members and is run by a volunteer board of directors who are not associated with any funeral home.

The most recent offering from the society, first made available for sale on Mar. 1, is the delightfully named "All Ready to Go Kit."

The kit includes a set of twelve tabs with a table of contents, an end of life checklist and a how-to kit. Together, these provide the framework and support for putting together a personal binder, with everything that's needed for our next journey in one place.

You can contact the society at 1-888-816-5902, mail@memorialsocietybc.org, or on the web at memorialsocietybc.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR TODAY!

The BC FORUM Annual General Meeting will be held Wednesday, June 19.

- 9:30 am – 1:00 pm.
- UFCW 1518 auditorium, 350 Columbia St. New Westminster
- Come early to visit the display booths, and chat with other members, guests and directors. Coffee will be ready at 9:00 am.
- Please mark your calendar today, and feel free to bring a guest.

New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM. You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone or e-mail: 1.800.896.5678 (toll free), 604.688.4565, bforum@bcfed.ca



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