



# COSCO News

Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C.

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[www.coscobc.ca](http://www.coscobc.ca)



September 2011

## COSCO lobbies for action to scrap Medical Services Plan premiums for all seniors

**MSP premiums – like all user fees and consumption taxes – have no relationship to ability to pay**

By Sylvia MacLeay  
President, COSCO BC

**M**EDICAL SERVICE PLANS (MSP) differ in details in each province of Canada, since they are provincially administered, but they have similarities as the federal government sets some parameters. In all of the provinces persons eligible for a disability pension or with an income low enough to qualify for the Government Income Supplement (GIS) do not pay MSP premiums.

At present, Canadian seniors do not pay MSP premiums in any province except B.C. Presumably the costs are met from federal health funds or from the province's general revenues.

This reflects the fact that MSP premiums – like all user fees and consumption taxes – have no relationship to an individual's ability to pay. They are inherently regressive, forcing people with limited means to pay a larger share of their income than the wealthy.

Seniors groups have asked many times that MSP fees be removed.

However, to date, no B.C. provincial government has taken action.

COSCO decided that with pensions not indexed enough to cover inflation, increases in the cost of living, and losses in savings due to the recent recession that removing MSP Premiums would help seniors.

Each September the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) holds an annual general meeting. This year it will be at the Convention Centre in Vancouver on September 26-30, 2011. As the BC retired teachers association had also independently decided to make elimination of the MSP a priority, that COSCO and the BCRTA have decided to work together to pursue this issue.

The UBCM convention will be considering several resolutions submitted by municipalities requesting that MSP premiums be removed for seniors. COSCO and the BCRTA obtained the names and addresses of the 160 Mayors or district leaders

in B.C. Each mayor received a personal letter from COSCO written on letterhead paper and signed with pen and ink asking that they vote to remove MSP premiums for seniors.

The mayors also received a different, but similar letter from the BCRTA. Although no reply was expected a number of replies were received. So far every letter states that their municipality will support the elimination of MSP premiums for seniors.

In addition to lobbying delegates on the MSP issue, COSCO will have a table at the UBCM convention with information about our popular Health and Accident Prevention programs, copies of the COSCO News, Information about plans for a 2012 COSCO Conference and other material.

Clearly, compared to other Canadian seniors, those who live in BC are not being treated fairly.

*If undeliverable, return to 1908 – 1330 Harwood St. Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1S8*

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## Thoughts on the HST

WITH THE HST DEFEATED, seniors can breathe only a short sigh of relief. British Columbians must now engage in a new debate. We need a tax system that is fair, respects the ability of individuals to pay, and recognizes our shared responsibilities to each other.

When Adrian Dix ran for the leadership of the B.C. NDP, his clear priority was equality. Everyone should have opportunities. And corporations should pay their fair share. In that spirit, he campaigned vigorously and effectively against the HST – which a massive tax giveaway to corporations that required people and families to pay hundreds of millions more each year.

In a civil society, we all have responsibilities, and that includes corporations. You'd never know it to listen to their paid spokespeople at the Fraser Institute. As soon as the HST was defeated, they called on the government to eliminate corporate income taxes. They have no shame. Corporations benefit directly from all the things that taxes pay for: educated workers, safe communities, transportation systems, public health care, the rule of law and much more.

Giving corporations a free ride is a deeply flawed economic strategy. It requires the rest of us to pay more, in the faint hope they will invest, produce and create jobs. But why would corporations invest when much current productive capacity is idle? Why would they produce more if customers are reeling under a higher tax burden and unable to buy their goods and services? Businesses need paying customers, not another tax giveaway.

Warren Buffett, one of the richest men in the world, recently urged the U.S. government to increase taxes on billionaires. He noted that he pays a far lower rate of taxes than anyone else in his office. The same situation prevails in Canada. The richest one percent of Canadians pay a lower rate of taxes than everyone else.

The B.C. Liberals have consistently reduced taxes for corporations and the wealthy, shifting their responsibilities to the rest of us. It's a trend that must be reversed if we are to have a civil society where benefits, opportunities, and responsibilities are shared equitably and fairly among all residents of our province.

Finally, a question. It took less than a year to impose the HST, a completely new tax. Why will it take 18 to 24 months to go back to a tax system that everyone is already familiar with? How do you spell rip-off?

# Renewal of the Canada Health Accord

By Alice Edge, Chair  
COSCO Health Committee

**D**URING THE MAY FEDERAL election, health care became and remained a topic of interest, due to the efforts of health advocates. The Canadian Health Accord is due to be renewed in 2014 and work to protect and expand the Canada Health Act has begun and must continue until the changes that are needed, particularly continuing care (home care, home support and residential care) and pharmacare are achieved. The fact that the Prime Minister agreed to continue the 6% escalator clause must be seen as a victory not matter how small.

The Health Accord was to be the remedy to shorten wait times, improve accessibility, better drug benefits, and electronic records. The transfer payments have never had “strings” attached and accountability by the provinces has never materialized. The federal government needs to play a major role in demanding accountability and putting patients first.

## Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement

**F**or many the discussion of this new trade agreement with the EU will not be news. Health advocates in Canada are very concerned that these talks are taking place at all and are especially alarmed at the potential outcomes if they succeed, without greater protection for trade, social policy and health care. The talks have never been open to the public and the federal government has never had a public debate about



COSCO raised issues of importance to seniors – including health care and income security – during the federal election. Here Sylvia MacLeay, President, prepares to record a COSCO radio ad on those issues.

them. Provincial and municipal governments are now being involved because government procurement and services are under discussion.

The Canadian Health Coalition, Council of Canadians and other national groups have written extensively about the negotiations. They warn against the potential costs that Canadians would bear if public regulation and policy is not protected.

Canada’s existing public policies in health care, health insurance, pharmaceuticals and social security need protection. Our country also

needs regulations within the CETA so that if there is expansion of our health care services and public insurance trade disputes that cost tax payers millions of dollars to settle or undermine public policy will not occur.

It is not too late for you to participate in activities that the following organizations have undertaken or to learn more about CETA. Follow these links to see how you can have your say:

[www.healthcoalition.ca](http://www.healthcoalition.ca)

[www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org)

[www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

# New driving test creates concerns for seniors – especially where transit is limited

By Sheila Pither  
COSCO Secretary-Treasurer &  
Health Literacy Coordinator

Recently there has been a great deal of discussion and controversy about a new driving test in British Columbia. Its name is DriveAble (the A is pronounced as in acorn).

I was given the opportunity to take part of the test when Lorraine Logan, Ted Pearson and I met with BC Automobile Association officials to talk about driver safety.

Here are some frequently asked questions that should clarify how and when the test is used.

### **Is the test replacing the procedure that has been in place for many years for people who reach their 80th birthday?**

No. That procedure is still being used. It often involves a test drive in one's own vehicle with an inspector who reports as to whether an individual is a safe and competent driver or not.

### **Then who is required to take the DriveAble test?**

Anybody of any age who is suspected of suffering from cognitive impairment that is likely to affect his or her ability to drive safely. Senior adults aren't the only drivers who take the test but they are certainly likely to be reported more frequently than younger people.

### **Who orders people to take the test?**

The Office of the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles (OSMV), after a report is received providing evidence that cognitive impairment might be a problem.

### **Who makes the reports to the OSMV?**

Most frequently the reports are received from medical practitioners, but anybody who has cause for concern, perhaps a family member or friend or neighbour, can report that he or she has grounds to believe that a person ought not to be driving because of cognitive difficulties. The OSMV reviews the reported evidence and decides whether or not to require a DriveAble test.

### **Then what happens?**

The individual receives a letter from the OSMV advising him or her that a test is required if the driver's licence is to be retained. Some people decide to relinquish their licence but more frequently people decide to take the test. There is no charge for the test if it is ordered by the OSMV but the cost is \$300 if an individual asks to take the test for personal reasons.

### **What is the nature of the test?**

There are six sections, each of which is designed to assess skills which safe drivers must possess. Responses are recorded on a computer screen and this has led to concerns

that people might fail because of unfamiliarity with computers.

Those who believe the test is a reliable tool are vehement in their belief that those concerns are unfounded, pointing out that all people have to do is touch the screen or press a button which should be no more difficult than if they were responding to a paper and pencil test.

Critics remain unconvinced and there is no denying that this is one of the major objections cited by those who oppose the use of the test. People are given time to practice each part of the test with instructions and help from the test administrator, who is often an occupational therapist. I wrote an article similar to this for the Vancouver Retired Teachers' Association newsletter and asked for feedback from those who had actually taken the test. One gentleman, who is extremely computer literate, said that anxiety and stress were the factors that caused him to fail the test. He went on to pass a road test with flying colours, but that is clearly not the case for everybody.

### **So a road test is involved in the testing procedure?**

Not in every case. A road test may be ordered for some individuals whose test scores fall within a certain range. This test is taken in a car with dual controls so that the assessor can take over if dangerous situations develop.



### **Where are the road tests conducted?**

This has been another area of concern because when the test was first introduced there were only a few testing centres and people were required to travel to areas that may have been unfamiliar. Many felt that this was a significant factor in failure rates. Many more test centres are being opened so this concern should be alleviated. However, the safety experts we talked to believe that skills are either there or they're not and the argument that milieu makes a difference is not accepted by DriveAble proponents.

### **What is the failure rate for the testing?**

It is very high. Current statistics indicate that only about 15% of

people pass the test. Obviously this sounds scary but proponents of the test remind critics that people being tested have been reported because they are suspected of having cognitive impairment that is rendering them unsafe to operate a motor vehicle. Therefore it is not deemed to be surprising that the test reveals lack of skill.

### **Are there appeal procedures? Are retests allowed?**

Yes, but the driver must pay the \$300 cost of the retest.

### **What is it like to take the test?**

I was very interested in having a chance to answer some of the questions for each part of the test. Remember though that I wasn't taking it under the stressful situation

of potentially losing my driver's licence if I didn't do well. Also I am computer literate so I cannot really judge how it would be if I happened not to know anything about computers. However, taking the test with four people watching me wasn't exactly an ideal testing situation either. Lorraine and Ted said they felt tense because they were wanting me to do well. The instructor was very professional and all in all I felt at ease. I think I passed.

### **What is COSCO's role in this?**

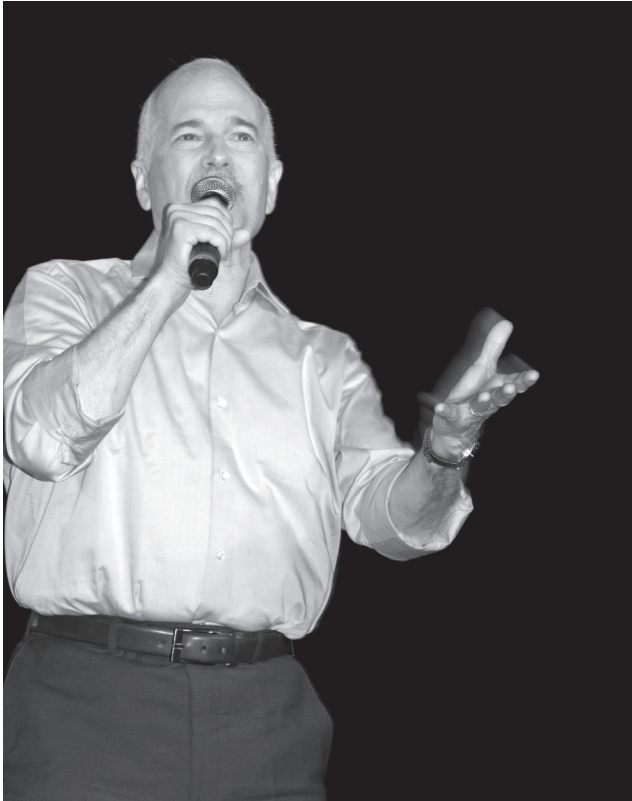
First we are attempting to understand the test and its implications. Nobody wants unsafe drivers on our roads. That is a given. However, the loss of the right to drive is a very serious adjustment for anybody, particularly in areas of the province where alternate ways of getting around are difficult or impossible to access. Make no mistake about it, the test isn't going to go away. We believe it is our obligation to provide feedback to BCAA and the OSMV about how the test is being viewed by the senior community. We are emphasizing the need for testing mechanisms to be accepted as fair for drivers of any age.

### **What is your experience with the test?**

I am asking that you get in touch with me to describe your testing experience, whether it was negative or positive. Alternatively, Lorraine Logan, COSCO's transportation expert, will be glad to hear from you. You will find our contact information listed in this newsletter .

Learn more at [www.driveable.com](http://www.driveable.com)

## We'll remember



## Jack Layton (1950-2011)

**R**emarkable doesn't begin to cover it. Faced with the final battle of his life – a battle against cancer that he had learned he couldn't win – Jack Layton was thinking about the rest of us, and the future of our country. Two days before he died on Monday, Aug. 22, surrounded by his family and close friends, he wrote a final letter to all Canadians, which we are re-printing in full below.

Seniors have lost an articulate advocate, a man who tirelessly fought for measures to improve our lives, including better pensions and health care.

Jack Layton will be sorely missed. He will not be forgotten. He will continue to inspire Canadians, in every province and territory, as they continue his work.

Jack Layton, here and opposite page, addressed an enthusiastic crowd during one of his last visits to British Columbia in April, 2011. The May election results were an historic breakthrough for the NDP, and a personal triumph for Layton, as the party became Canada's Official Opposition.

## Jack Layton's final letter to all Canadians

DearFriends,

Tens of thousands of Canadians have written to me in recent weeks to wish me well. I want to thank each and every one of you for your thoughtful, inspiring and often beautiful notes, cards and gifts. Your spirit and love have lit up my home, my spirit, and my determination.

Unfortunately my treatment has not worked out as I hoped. So I am giving this letter to my partner Olivia to share with you in the circumstance in which I cannot continue.

I recommend that Hull-Aylmer MP Nycole Turmel continue her work as our interim leader until a permanent successor is elected.

I recommend the party hold a leadership vote as early as possible

in the New Year, on approximately the same timelines as in 2003, so that our new leader has ample time to reconsolidate our team, renew our party and our program, and move forward towards the next election.

A few additional thoughts:

To other Canadians who are on journeys to defeat cancer and to live their lives, I say this: please don't be discouraged that my own journey hasn't gone as well as I had hoped. You must not lose your own hope. Treatments and therapies have never been better in the face of this disease. You have every reason to be optimistic, determined, and focused on the future. My only other advice is to cherish every moment with those you love at every stage of your journey, as I have done this summer.

To the members of my party: we've done remarkable things together in the past eight years. It has been a privilege to lead the New Democratic Party and I am most grateful for your confidence, your support, and the endless hours of volunteer commitment you have devoted to our cause. There will be those who will try to persuade you to give up our cause. But that cause is much bigger than any one leader. Answer them by recommitting with energy and determination to our work. Remember our proud history of social justice, universal health care, public pensions and making sure no one is left behind. Let's continue to move forward. Let's demonstrate in everything we do in the four years before us that we are ready to serve our

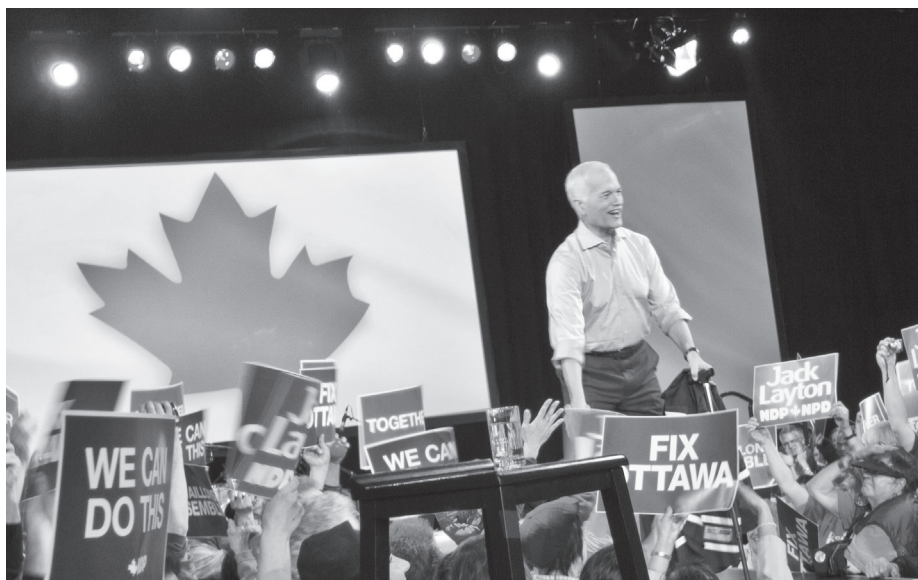
## We'll remember

beloved Canada as its next government.

To the members of our parliamentary caucus: I have been privileged to work with each and every one of you. Our caucus meetings were always the highlight of my week. It has been my role to ask a great deal from you. And now I am going to do so again. Canadians will be closely watching you in the months to come. Colleagues, I know you will make the tens of thousands of members of our party proud of you by demonstrating the same seamless teamwork and solidarity that has earned us the confidence of millions of Canadians in the recent election.

To my fellow Quebecers: On May 2nd, you made an historic decision. You decided that the way to replace Canada's Conservative federal government with something better was by working together in partnership with progressive-minded Canadians across the country. You made the right decision then; it is still the right decision today; and it will be the right decision right through to the next election, when we will succeed, together. You have elected a superb team of New Democrats to Parliament. They are going to be doing remarkable things in the years to come to make this country better for us all.

To young Canadians: All my life I have worked to make things better. Hope and optimism have defined my political career, and I continue to be hopeful and optimistic about Canada. Young people have been a great source of inspiration for me. I have met and talked with so many



of you about your dreams, your frustrations, and your ideas for change. More and more, you are engaging in politics because you want to change things for the better. Many of you have placed your trust in our party. As my time in political life draws to a close I want to share with you my belief in your power to change this country and this world. There are great challenges before you, from the overwhelming nature of climate change to the unfairness of an economy that excludes so many from our collective wealth, and the changes necessary to build a more inclusive and generous Canada. I believe in you. Your energy, your vision, your passion for justice are exactly what this country needs today. You need to be at the heart of our economy, our political life, and our plans for the present and the future.

And finally, to all Canadians: Canada is a great country, one of the hopes of the world. We can be a better one – a country of greater equality, justice, and opportunity. We can build a prosperous econ-

omy and a society that shares its benefits more fairly. We can look after our seniors. We can offer better futures for our children. We can do our part to save the world's environment. We can restore our good name in the world. We can do all of these things because we finally have a party system at the national level where there are real choices; where your vote matters; where working for change can actually bring about change. In the months and years to come, New Democrats will put a compelling new alternative to you. My colleagues in our party are an impressive, committed team. Give them a careful hearing; consider the alternatives; and consider that we can be a better, fairer, more equal country by working together. Don't let them tell you it can't be done.

My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.

All my very best,  
Jack Layton

## HOUSING NEWS

# Rent banks can help tenants; community fights to preserve its historic character

By Gail Harmer  
COSCO Housing Chair

**R**ENTING B.C. SENIORS of modest income sometimes find themselves temporarily at risk of not paying their rent or unable to pay out all of a required security deposit in one go.

There is an answer, a 'rent bank' but B.C. is a little slow getting on board like Ontario has. However, some of our communities have fledgling programs that are funded by a combination of civic tax dollars, private funders, faith group monies, and foundations. They assess the need, weigh the ability to repay and offer programmes of financial literacy. They work!

One exists in Prince George area through the Aboriginal Business Development Association. Another is offered through the Newton (Surrey) Advocacy Group and the third is operated in the Fraser Valley by the Central Mennonite Committee in Abbotsford.

I don't believe that they are advertised due to limited capacity and the great demand. They are all demonstration projects meant to show the obvious, ie. that loans offered to tenants in short term financial stress to prevent an eviction or to transition someone into a permanent home is an investment that prevents, for example, later extraordinary costs to our health care system due to homelessness.

The B.C. government, although aware of the programmes, hasn't moved to fund and implement these

for all B.C. renters. COSCO, respectfully, gives Minister Rich Coleman a 'nudge' to get moving on this!

## **Gentrification threatens poorest neighbourhood**

**C**OSCO is supporting the organized residents of Vancouver's poorest and most besieged neighbourhood (Downtown Eastside). The aim is to get political support for the contention that the condo development and boutique shops and restaurants now proliferating under the guise of "mixed" neighbourhood only guarantees the unlikelihood of replacing the lost housing for the poor of the neighbourhood. Land values in the blocks of and adjacent to these developments soar, making costs of replacing the hundreds of lost 'affordable' housing units less and less likely. Affordable is typically \$375 per month (welfare rate for shelter) or 30% of OAS/GIS.

Boutiques and restaurants serving the new social set are inaccessible and even hostile to the life styles of folks whose neighbourhood this has been for decades of Vancouver history. Along with these new residents/patrons, comes the social phenomena of security cops and barriers protecting the property of the interlopers, further alienating folks in their own community.

Seniors in that community are persons 45 and older due to the ravages of poverty, poor housing and poor support for persons living with mental illness and/or drug addiction.

They have one very important experience, however! They are secure in their sense of belonging, friendship, value and social support in this unique community.

If they continue to lose their neighbourhood based housing, they will lose the right to 'age in place', a concept that COSCO promotes for all seniors in B.C.

In spite of the challenges of basic survival, the community has always had a strong sense of identity, cohesiveness and social organization. The residents have their own membership driven organization called the Downtown Neighbourhood Council (DNC), the research and advocacy of the Carnegie Community Action Coalition (CCAP), as well as their own well read 'Carnegie Newsletter'.

A COSCO senior with an appropriate financial portfolio will stand in front of the news media on Sept. 8th, joining artists and community workers (targets of the developer as potential buyers) to explain why they are enjoining other investing seniors to *boycott condos* in the Downtown East Side.

COSCO understands that participation in the gentrification of the community is ethically problematic because it leads to displacement and exclusion of the low income residents.

Building social housing in the community to replace lost hotel units and preserving the supportive DTES community is life saving and more important than allowing developers to make millions!

# More risky changes to meat inspection

By Fred Coates,  
Provincial President, BC OAPO  
General Vice-president, COSCO

As if we have not already seen our food inspection deteriorate with the deadly listeriosis, and salmonella outbreaks over the last two years!

An agreement has been made between our federal and provincial governments that effective January 1, 2014 there will no longer be Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) meat inspection in many B.C. plants.

Following are excerpts from a press release from the meat inspectors union outlining the seriousness of such drastic measures. Included is a website which I would urge you all to visit to register your protest. B.C. consumers must not be denied proper inspection programs for their daily food requirements.

•

Ottawa plans to dump inspection of dozens of meat plants on the British Columbia government in a move that will expose B.C. consumers to a heightened risk of eating contaminated meat products, according to the Agriculture Union (Public Service Alliance of Canada) which represents federal food safety inspectors.

After providing meat safety inspection service for decades, the union has been advised by Canadian Food Inspection Agency that federal inspectors will no longer check B.C. establishments that produce meat exclusively for B.C. consumers for E. coli, listeria, salmonella and other contaminants that can have deadly consequences when eaten.

No later than January 2014, responsibility will fall to the province



of B.C. which has no meat inspectors and little of the support infrastructure needed to maintain even the current inadequate safety standards.

CFIA inspectors will continue to conduct food safety work in meat plants that are federally registered, a situation that will widen the existing gap in federal and provincial meat inspection standards.

“To save a few bucks, the federal government is creating a two-tiered food safety system in which some Canadians enjoy higher standards while others suffer higher risk,” said Agriculture Union President Bob Kingston.

At a news conference held in Vancouver to underscore the new risk consumers will face, Kingston launched an online petition at [www.foodsafetyfirst.ca](http://www.foodsafetyfirst.ca) calling on the government to change its plans.

“Consumers expect their meat products to be inspected for safety by the CFIA. Otherwise, there is no way for consumers to know if meat

has been properly inspected,” Kingston said.

For the government of British Columbia, the cost of inspecting the almost 60 meat production facilities that are provincially registered will triple because CFIA has provided this service below cost for some years.

“The bottom line is that by walking away from this responsibility, the federal government is needlessly exposing consumers to elevated risks from eating meat produced in provincially registered establishments,” said Bob Jackson, Regional Executive Vice-President of the PSAC, who joined Kingston at the news conference.

Provincial meat inspection standards are often much less stringent than those that are in place for federally registered facilities. This fact was painfully underscored by a recent high profile incident at the Pitt Meadows Meats Ltd in British Columbia. Soon after the facility owner publicly admitted hiding test results from the federal meat inspector which indicated dangerous E. coli 0157:H7 contamination at the facility, he opted out of federal inspection by registering as a provincial facility. This allowed his plant to meet the lower provincial standard and to keep operating without missing a beat.

Ottawa is also abandoning inspection of provincially registered meat plants in Saskatchewan and Manitoba which, like B.C., have no meat inspectors. It is a resurrection of the federal cost-cutting plan which had been shelved following the Maple Leaf food poisoning outbreak which left 22 people dead.

### A good read

Dear COSCO members,

I just finished reading the March, 2011 COSCO News and am delighted to be an ongoing member of COSCO. I support your agenda.

I enjoyed Alice Edge's reports – especially on poverty and pensions. We all know that health status is tied to economic status.

The Institute, whereby COSCO can now seek funding for workshops and other important promotional work and research, was a smart move so thank you to those brains who managed to get us charitable status.

A compelling case for changing the model of care provided to frail seniors is made by Dr. Margaret McGregor and Lisa Ronald in their research paper "IRPP Study" (January, 2011). They make a clear case that non-profit facilities provide a much superior care to frail elderly than the for-profit facilities. You may want to include an excerpt in the next News.

Finally, I loved your section on "Things that made us laugh or cry in the last little while" – so true.

Sincerely,  
Betty Carter

### All deserve a decent pension

Dear Sister MacLeay,

On behalf of the 54,000 members of the Canadian Union of Postal

Workers I want to thank the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of British Columbia for your support and solidarity during our recent fight with Canada Post and the Harper government.

In this round of bargaining, CUPW was determined to ensure that all members of the bargaining unit have a defined benefit pension plan. CUPW knows that defined benefit pension plans are an important component of a secure retirement.

CUPW will be relying on your support and solidarity as we enter into bargaining with Canada Post for the rural and suburban mail carriers.

Even though we have been ordered back to work, our fight is not over. CUPW's members' heads are held high and we will continue to work for respect, equality and a public post office. We will demand our rights in the workplace, and

continue to work with allies for fairness for postal workers and to regain our right to free collective bargaining. We will work with our allies for justice locally, nationally and internationally. We are proud of the struggle we have waged and are determined to continue.

In solidarity,  
Denis Lemelin, President  
Canadian Union of Postal Workers

### Just do it

COSCO News editor,

Re: "A compelling case for changing the model of care provided to frail seniors" (COSCO News, March, 2011).

I read the above notes compiled by Sylvia MacLeay. It is "bang on." Now to figure out how to do it.

All the best,  
Ralph Sultan, MLA  
West Vancouver – Capilano

## Opportunities and challenges of our increased longevity

Planning is underway for an important national conference to be held *Oct. 1 and 2, 2012* in Richmond.

Co-sponsored by COSCO and the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation, the conference will bring together leading experts and seniors to discuss the latest trends and plan a better future for older Canadians.

**Make a note of it today!**

# B.C. Liberal “fix” for escalating BC Hydro rates fails to address the real problems

By John Horgan

**E**LECTRICITY IS A VITAL part of our daily lives. Commodity-based operations like pulp mills, saw mills and mines depend on electricity. Service and retail sectors need power to drive sales and grow the economy. Families and individuals use electricity for heat, food, entertainment and education. Every corner of our lives is affected by energy.

For decades, BC Hydro has been an important driver of economic development and a publicly owned supplier of low cost, reliable electricity. That is, until the B.C. Liberals took over running the operation.

In 2003, the Liberals launched the first phase of their energy plan by separating the transmission system from generation and distribution to establish a second parallel corporation called the BC Transmission Corporation.

After millions were wasted, the Liberals were forced to admit to their failed experiment seven years later, when they brought BCTC back into the main company at even more expense to ratepayers.

Then the Liberals imposed a policy on BC Hydro that forced the utility to only buy new electricity supply from private providers here in B.C. This “independent power” purchase plan costs ratepayers as much as four times the market rate for electricity and will see at least \$45 billion in unfunded liabilities over the next 30 years.

They also introduced unnecessary requirements to be electricity

self-sufficient, boosting the need for such purchases. With the damage done, BC Hydro was forced to request rate hikes of more than 50 per cent over five years.

The Liberals called for a review of BC Hydro, prepared by a panel of deputy ministers and released in August.

The panel did a fairly thorough job of looking over the situation at BC Hydro from the perspective of accountants and administrators. And to their credit, they did touch on the policy decisions made by the Liberal government.

However, the report failed to emphasize the magnitude those policy decisions have on electricity rates for British Columbians.

The Liberal government’s reaction to the report? Just days before the premier would announce her new focus on job creation, Energy Minister Rich Coleman laid the blame on the number of employees at BC Hydro. He argued that up to 1,000 people should lose their jobs, an unfair hit on working families that totally ignores the real problems that led to the rate hikes.

The question that must now be answered by Premier Christy Clark and Energy Minister Rich Coleman is, “Where do we go from here?”

The public deserves to know what government’s plans are for the long term. Will Premier Clark and Minister Coleman revisit the Clean Energy Act the Liberal government brought in?

Will they do away with the wrong-headed and destructive self-

sufficiency goal?

Will they rein in the smart meter program?

Sadly, it appears we already have the answers to some questions. The Liberals won’t open up the long-term contracts they’ve signed to buy power we don’t need from private producers and will sell at a great loss on the open market. The Liberals won’t revisit the smart meter program and will hide the billion-dollar price tag until after the next election.

The Liberals must revisit the Clean Energy Act and allow for a comprehensive debate in the legislature on the changes. The legislature’s Crown Corporations Committee should be allowed to meet to explore these issues after sitting dormant for years. And the B.C. Utilities Commission must be restored to allow for an independent review of smart meters and other major capital projects.

The Liberals have shown through years of bad policy and wrong-headed thinking that they have lost their way and cannot be trusted to manage energy policy.

Every Liberal MLA, and five different ministers of energy supported the policies that led to the skyrocketing rates we are seeing now and into the future.

The time has come for a broad discussion about our energy needs for the long-term. Adrian Dix and the New Democrats are prepared to have that discussion.

*John Horgan is the B.C. New Democratic Party’s energy critic.*

# Facilitators needed as demand for health and safety workshops continues to grow

By Sheila Pither  
COSCO Secretary-Treasurer &  
Health Literacy Coordinator

**T**HE REQUESTS FOR the 18 COSCO health and safety workshops have continued to come in, with 330 workshops given and over 5,700 people attending since the program began.

The big news is that we are launching 15 more workshop topics in November.

Facilitators will be trained from November 14 – 18 and we will be including a small number of new presenters.

The commitment you would be asked to make is that you would be willing to present workshops in

your own community and contact local senior groups to encourage them to book presentations.

On occasion our facilitators are asked to go out of town if we don't have a local facilitator to give a workshop. All your travel expenses are reimbursed by COSCO.

The new workshops are being prepared by gerontology and medical students with assistance from specialists in many fields. People attending the facilitator training will learn to give all these workshops.

New facilitators will learn how to present the 18 topics already on our list by accompanying experienced facilitators.

I hope that you will seriously con-

sider joining our group.

Many of our facilitators have been involved right from the beginning of the program.

They are enthusiastic about the impact we are having on the health and safety of seniors all around the province.

We believe in seniors helping seniors. We know we can make a difference when we stress prevention.

If you are interested in joining the group please get in touch with me at pither470@shaw.ca or 604-684-9720.

*For a complete list of the workshops offered by COSCO's team of volunteer facilitators, please visit [www.coscobc.ca](http://www.coscobc.ca).*

## Membership Application

**Please mail to the address below**

- I wish to join COSCO as an Associate Member. I enclose my \$25 membership fee.
- I wish to make a donation to COSCO. Please find enclosed a cheque for \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please make cheques payable to COSCO.
- Mail your application to Ernie Bayer, Membership Secretary, 6079 - 184 A Street, Surrey, BC V3S 7P7 604 576-9734.
- Seniors groups and organizations wishing more information about joining COSCO should write or phone Ernie Bayer and request a membership package.