

UFCW 832 Access Live
February 12, 2019

- Jeff Traeger: Good evening, everyone. My name is Jeff Traeger and I'm the president of your union, UFCW Local 832. I want to welcome you all to the February 2019 Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting for members of Local 832, which is now called to order. With me in the studio tonight, along with our Communications Coordinator Chris Noto, is George Combiadakis, who's the UFCW Income Tax Consultant, Erin Selby, the Director of Education and Training, and Zach Fleisher from ATU Local 1505.
- Jeff Traeger: Now, Bea Bruske would normally be here with us tonight, but she's currently in Gimli, Manitoba negotiating for our members working at the Diageo Plant. We all hope that committee gets a deal this week, contract expired back on January the 31st. If you remember the last time, we had a two-and-a-half month strike there, so good luck to the bargaining committee working hard to get a deal for our members in Diageo.
- Jeff Traeger: Once again, tonight, we won't be reading any of the reports, which will give us more time for presentations from our guests and more time for you to ask questions that you may have. There are three reports that our bylaws require us to approve at this meeting. They are the minutes of the previous meeting held on November 13, 2018, the Secretary Treasurer's report on the current finances of the Local and the President's report.
- Jeff Traeger: All three of these documents have been posted for the last week on our website for you to review. They will stay posted there in the future, so that you can see all of the documents from any of our town hall meetings at any time. We will be conducting the three votes as we normally do throughout tonight's meeting to pass the approval of these reports. This will allow us to dedicate more of the hour to hear from our guests and to take your questions.
- Jeff Traeger: For all the members on the line that would like to ask a question, all you need to do is press your star key, followed by the number three, and you'll be placed in a queue. I would ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or ask questions about matters that affect all Local 832 members. If you have a specific question about a grievance or an issue that affects your workplace alone, I would ask that you contact your full-time union representative, whose name and contact information is available on the UFCW bulletin board in your workplace or online at ufcw832.com.
- Jeff Traeger: Tonight is our first quarterly town hall GMM of 2019. We have a full slate of presentations for you. As it is income tax time once again, we've asked George Combiadakis to join us to talk a little about the UFCW income tax service and to let you know how you can best prepare for a seamless tax appointment. Erin Selby is here from our Training Center to talk about the new courses being offered to UFCW members through our national online training program, known as WebCampus. I'm not sure, but I suspect Erin may also want to plug our Activist Conference being held at the Fairmont this spring.

Jeff Traeger: Zach Fleisher is here from the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1505 that represents Winnipeg city bus drivers and mechanics to talk to us about safety on our buses, lower rates for low income riders, and the funding announcement made by the Prime Minister in Winnipeg today. Finally, we have the first installment in a series we will be running on our town hall meetings this year, where we will be speaking to a UFCW member about life in their community and at their workplace. Tonight, our special guest is longtime UFCW member Pia Morales, who works at the Northern Regional Health Authority in Lynn Lake, Manitoba. I will begin the meeting by making a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which took place on November the 13th, 2018.

Erin Selby: Seconded.

Jeff Traeger: It has been moved and reluctantly seconded, so please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad or no by pressing the number two on your keypad. Once again, to get into the lineup to ask a question, simply press star, followed by number three, and we will get you in the lineup. Since we will be opening up the phone for questions soon, please get in the queue now if you have a question. Our first guest up is George Combiadakis. Welcome, George.

George Combiadakis: Hi, Jeff.

Jeff Traeger: How long have you been doing income tax service for UFCW members?

George Combiadakis: This year will be my 32nd year with the union.

Jeff Traeger: 32 years, holy smoke. Whoa.

George Combiadakis: I had a black mustache and hair back then.

Jeff Traeger: I know exactly how you feel. How many returns do you do for UFCW members in the average year?

George Combiadakis: Well, our Winnipeg office, we do about 6,500 returns. Then, Brandon, they do close to 1,500 tax returns, as well as well as Neepawa. We did about 300 returns in Neepawa last year. Then, we have a few small communities, Thompson, Portage, Gimli. I go out, see them all for a weekend. I have somebody set up in Russell, Flin Flon. We have locations all over. For those people that don't have a place to get their taxes done, they can always mail their tax returns to Winnipeg. We'll prepare them for them and mail them back.

Jeff Traeger: That's great. It sounds like there's an awful lot of people using it, but it's not just all UFCW members that you do returns for, is it?

George Combiadakis: Well, there's quite a few UFCW members, their family members. There's retired members. I think we have just as many retired members as we do working members at this time.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah, that's true. Okay, so if people want to set up an appointment, no matter what community they're in, what's the best way for them to do that?

George Combiadakis: For Winnipeg, they would phone our Winnipeg office. The number is 786-5037. We have a receptionist, a daytime receptionist and an evening receptionist. They could set up an appointment and come and see myself or my two assistants that I have working with me. For Brandon, they would call the Brandon office. For those in Neepawa and some of the local small communities, they would call the Winnipeg office. For those like in Russell or Thompson or Flin Flon, there's an easy number for them.

Jeff Traeger: One of the things that happens to us every year here in the Winnipeg office is we get people showing up for their tax appointment at the front reception. You're not at 1412 Portage at the UFCW office. Where are you located?

George Combiadakis: Located at 878 Portage. I had people coming there for the last 15 years and they still come to this office.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah. Well, they also phone our switchboard for appointments, as well. 878, that is actually in our Training Center building, right, on the main floor?

George Combiadakis: Yes, it is.

Jeff Traeger: On the east end of the building, right?

George Combiadakis: Correct.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, excellent. Okay. You've been doing this 32 years. I guess you've seen just about everything. What's the most common issue or problem that people have when they come in to get their taxes done?

George Combiadakis: Well, a lot of times it's either forgetting slips or not bringing something in. That's usually the biggest problem we have and then they get a reassessment down the roads and they get a bill in the mail and they don't know why they got this bill in the mail, so best to make sure that you have all your information slips when you come in. We also need information such as, like, T4s, T5s, employment slips, any kind of pension papers that you have, a CPP, all need security.

George Combiadakis: If you rent, we'd need all your rent information. If you own a property, it's a good idea to bring in your property tax bill. We like to check to make sure you're receiving \$700 school tax credits. There's a lot of people, say if they buy a new house or if they built a new house, they forget about that credit. Students that have tuition receipts, they could make sure they bring in their tuition receipts. A lot of times, they have to go on the university websites to pull them off.

George Combiadakis: For those that have small children, any daycare expenses, any medical expenses. With medical expenses, if you could total up all the receipts, because a lot of times people will walk in with, you know, 150 medical receipts and we don't have the time to go through them. We can go to your drugstore and get a printout of all your receipts and they'll provide you with that.

George Combiadakis: If you're preparing just your tax return, not your spouse's, we need your spouse's income. We do get quite a few newcomers to Canada, too. For them, it's a good idea to bring in their Social Insurance cards, because they do change from a 900 to a 600 insurance number. We need the date of entry that they come into Canada. We need the proof of marriage if they have a spouse living overseas and they want to claim their spouses as dependents, as well as their spouse's income.

Jeff Traeger: They just bring a copy of a marriage certificate or something like that?

George Combiadakis: Yeah. A lot of newcomers, they all have a copy, a printout copy with them. It's also a good idea to bring in your banking information. Right now, Revenue Canada has a big campaign to get everybody set up on direct deposit. If you could bring your banking information with you, we could set you up right at the office here.

Jeff Traeger: Just, like, a void check or a transfer?

George Combiadakis: Usually a void check or I just need the numbers, basically.

Jeff Traeger: Transit number or whatever [crosstalk 00:09:44]? Yeah.

George Combiadakis: The transit number and institute number, yeah.

Jeff Traeger: How much does the tax service cost? I know we publish it in the magazine each year, but I'm sure there is at least a few people on the line that aren't sure how much it costs. How is that going to compare with some of the other big players out there?

George Combiadakis: Well, it's really cheap, actually. For union members, they're paying \$20 to get their tax returns done and that's up to five information slips.

Jeff Traeger: What would that cost me if I walked into H&R Block?

George Combiadakis: H&R Block, you're looking at about a hundred bucks, hundred to hundred-and-fifty dollars.

Jeff Traeger: \$20 versus a hundred dollars, wow.

George Combiadakis: It's a big, big difference. For the family members, they could get it done for \$45 for up to five information slips, which is also very cheap. We've been doing the

service for a long time and we've streamlined the operation so much that we can provide that service for everybody.

Jeff Traeger: It sounds like, when you were adding them all up, they were close to 10,000 returns, maybe a little less, but in that range?

George Combiadakis: That would be for all of Manitoba, yeah.

Jeff Traeger: That's great. Okay, is there anything else you wanted to tell people while you've got UFCW on the line?

George Combiadakis: Well, just Revenue Canada's doing a lot of reviews. They've hired a thousand new auditors and they're really getting on everybody's cases. It's very important that you have all your papers. Make sure you keep all your papers. If you do get a review, make sure you get ahold of one of us to make sure that it's a legitimate review or a legitimate reassessment and we can help you out upfront, rather than wait until they send you a bill and have more problems down the roads.

Jeff Traeger: I get a feeling that last part was for me, since I'm one of those people getting reviewed.

George Combiadakis: You wouldn't believe how many calls we get.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, okay. All right.

George Combiadakis: There's lot of [crosstalk 00:11:38].

Jeff Traeger: Well, if they hired a thousand auditors, I'm sure they've got lots of reviews ongoing. All right, well thank you very much, George. Really appreciate you coming down and taking the time to talk to us. I do see, on our screen here, that the previous vote has been passed. We have two questions on the line, so we're going to take two questions. We're going to start with Deborah. Deborah, go ahead.

Deborah: Oh, hi. How are you?

Jeff Traeger: I'm doing well. How are you doing, Deborah?

Deborah: I'm doing fine, but I'm not doing fine when I read the newspapers and I see the way the government is coming at our healthcare brothers and sisters. We have people who work at the Grace and people who work at St. Boniface. It's just really disheartening to see this sort of push for everybody to jockey for position. I just wanted to know where you're sitting with this, Jeff?

Jeff Traeger: I'm right there with you. I feel exactly the same way. I also would include all of our members in the North and those members working at WRHA Laundry and

DSM. We've got about 2,200 members in healthcare and their lives have been upside-down ever since the government started the healthcare sector bargaining [inaudible 00:12:52]. Well, as well, we haven't had bargaining. Those contracts expired a couple years ago now. We haven't had any bargaining going on nor has anybody else in the sector.

Jeff Traeger: I just think it's atrocious. It seems to me as though the government has one concern and one concern only and that's saving money. I think they're putting patient care at risk and I certainly think they're putting healthcare workers at risk. Thank you for your comments, Deborah, and appreciate the call. We're going to move on to Maria now. Maria, go ahead.

Maria: Oh, hi there. Just wondering, what do I have to do to apply for, my son is working in university right now, so I don't know what to do to apply for his tuition?

Jeff Traeger: Oh, is this a income tax question?

Maria: No.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah, okay. We'll put ... No? Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

Maria: It's just about how to apply. My son right now is studying at university and I just want to know, what do I have to do to get a scholarship with him?

Jeff Traeger: This for a scholarship?

Maria: Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, a scholarship. I'm going to turn it over to the director of our education and training here. Erin, go ahead.

Erin Selby: Well, there's a few things you can do. We do offer several scholarships through UFCW. We give away about \$33,000 every year in scholarships. Some of them are just for people or their dependents who work for one of our ETTF employers, which means an employer that directly funds the Training Center. There's a few that are specifically for those folks. You can go online at our website to see if your employer is an ETTF employer. We also have a couple that are done through the National that are open to all of our members. Then, there are some that are still specifically for people who work through St. Boniface. If you were a member of 1869, there's a couple of scholarships still open to those folks. Can you tell us where you work?

Maria: I work for Bearskin Airlines.

Jeff Traeger: Bearskin Airlines, she said.

Erin Selby: Which I don't think is an ETTF, but we can check on the website. I would suggest that you go to ufcw832.com. When you go to the Training Center link or, actually, right on the front page, there's a little square that says "Scholarships," you can go in there and you can see the full list of ones that you or your son would be available, would be allowed to try out for. They're all from about now until end of spring is when the time is to start putting in your applications.

Maria: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your help.

Jeff Traeger: Okay. Thank you, Maria. All right, no problem. Since we were with Erin, we're going to stay with Erin now. Erin, you were going to talk to us about some of the advantages of WebCampus.

Erin Selby: Well, I was going to talk about some of the new things at WebCampus. I pulled up the page, just out of curiosity, of what's new, what's different, and realized that there are more than 160 courses offered on WebCampus right now. I don't think I could even start to go through all of them, but why don't I give you a little bit of an overview of some of the things you can do?

Erin Selby: Things are divided into six categories of courses. Some are under personal development. These are things that you might want to do just for your own growth, so maybe something on retirement and pension planning or maybe you just want to take better pictures. There's a digital photography one. There is a whole section under computers and technology that is some really basics if you've never understood how to use a computer or email or maybe some more advanced things. I know Bea told me that she took the Excel course on that and she found it really helpful. She's got lots of experience with working with a computer, but she still was able to build on that by taking one of those courses.

Erin Selby: There's a whole section on food and retail, where you can develop your skills in selling. You can look at some more safety and food handling. There's an entire section of health and safety as well. There is a section on labor studies. I know we have a lot of members who are interested in both the history of labor, of UFCW in particular, and just some other things that are going on in the world of labor right now, so you can check out that section.

Erin Selby: Then, there's one last section that's called skills development. This one is a little bit more work specific. Perhaps you're thinking that you'd like to move into a different department at your work. There's one on how to be a cosmetologist technician, how to be a pharmacist assistant. There are some that are a bit more general, like project management. These are all the ones that may help you in terms of getting a promotion or moving into a different job at work.

Jeff Traeger: Okay. Now, I've heard that some of these courses that you get on WebCampus are available for credit at university. Is that accurate?

Erin Selby: I find that really exciting. Let's say that you've kind of always wondered if you wanted to go to university or maybe one of your family members, because of course WebCampus is free for our members, but also their families. Maybe you thought, "Oh, I might like to try university, but I'm not sure if it's for me." Well, you can actually start out on WebCampus for free. You can take some courses that will be recognized for credit at the University of Manitoba.

Erin Selby: If you do want to keep going, at some point you would have to go to university in person, but you can do quite a few classes for free online. I always tell folks it's a good way to just dip your toe in and see if university is for you. If you do it and you think, "Well, this isn't really what I wanted to do," you haven't lost any money. If you do it and think, "Hey, I got a B-plus in this class, maybe I'm pretty good at this," it's a nice way to test it out.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, excellent. How do people get more information about WebCampus? You were talking about going on the site. How do you get there?

Erin Selby: Going to the site, the best thing you can do is go to our website, if you go to ufcw832.com. It's easier if you click on, there's a little tab at the top that says, "Training Center," and when you're on the Training Center page, there's a big square kind of bluish box that says "WebCampus." When you click on there, it'll give you all kinds of options. It's really easy to register. If you have any trouble at all, there's a great help line, so you can call in to the help line. They'll talk you through it. If you are a little bit new to using computer software and you need some support, they're there to do it. Otherwise, it's all right there.

Erin Selby: The classes have different start times, so you look at what you're interested in, see the dates of when it's going to be offered, sign yourself up. The nice thing is you have a pretty long period of when you have to complete that course. You can work on your own time. You know, if you have time after work or you just have early mornings before the kids are up, however it fits in your life, that's what WebCampus is for.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah, it sounds awesome. Wish they had that when I was going through university. Now, you mentioned about history and history of labor. For those of you that don't know out there, this May will be the 100th anniversary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. There's something else happening in May as well. Erin, what's going on in your world in May?

Erin Selby: Well, we're celebrating as well. We are having our Biannual Activist Conference. It is happening from May 6th to 9th this year at the Fairmont Hotel. Our theme is fitting into that whole recognition of how far we've come in labor. We're calling it, "Hundred Years Forward, Building on Our Past." We are going to take a little look at both the history of labor in Manitoba. We're going to talk about UFCW's history, but we're also going to talk about some contemporary things, where we want to go, some of the challenges we're facing, but I have to tell you, Jeff, we're also going to have a lot of fun. It's going to be a really good mix.

Jeff Traeger: Well, are there any details you can share [crosstalk 00:20:39]?

Erin Selby: Well, I don't want to give it all away, but one of our keynote guests who was going to be kicking things off is Les Stroud. You might know him as "Survivorman." For those of you who are not familiar with what Les does, he has a TV show where they just drop him in the middle of a forest, a desert with nothing and he has to survive for the next three days. He sort of MacGyvers everything. He eats bugs if that's all that available. He's cooking things over the fire.

Jeff Traeger: Well, we'll feed him lunch at the Fairmont. He won't have to eat any bugs there.

Erin Selby: He won't be roughing it at the Fairmont, that's for sure. He's a pretty interesting guy. He's going to talk to us about, you know, surviving and taking our trip and moving forward. He's going to be a lot of fun. We've also got some other interesting guests. We've got the folks from Second City, if you remember them, the comedy improv group. They're going to be joining us as well.

Erin Selby: Another thing that we're doing a bit differently is, for anybody who's been to our Activist Conference, we usually have the afternoon, we have different courses available. This year, we're going to break people off into their sectors, so that if you're in retail, you're going to be with all the other folks in retail and you'll be talking about issues that are specific to your business. If you're in meat production, then you're going to be sitting with other folks who are in the same industry and talking about things that affect you. I think that people will find it really relevant to the issues that they're facing at work.

Jeff Traeger: Well, all right. How do activists get registered?

Erin Selby: The same way you go for WebCampus. You can head on to the website at ufcw832.com. If you head over to the Training Center page, you just have to click on "Training Center" and there's a tab that tells you how to click on for the Activist Conference. It is for folks who are shop stewards or health and safety members, but we do hold a few spots for our rank and file members. We do first come, first serve on that. Even if you're not an activist yet and you think you'd like to join us, go ahead and fill out an application. Maybe you'll be lucky enough to be joining us. After that, I have no doubt you'll want to be more involved.

Jeff Traeger: That sounds like our encouragement program. Very good. Okay, thank you very much, Erin. Appreciate that. Noticing that, for the first time in many, many town halls, we have nobody waiting in line for a question, so that must mean you've forgotten how to do it. You need to press the star key, followed by the number three key on your pad. It will get you in line to ask a question.

Jeff Traeger: If you do that right now, you're going to be first in line, because we don't have anybody in the queue. Before I move on to our next guest, I need to make a motion to approve the Secretary Treasurer's report, which is, again, on our

website for you to review. That report is for the 11-month period ending November 30, 2018.

Erin Selby: I second that.

Jeff Traeger: Very well seconded that time. It has been moved and seconded, so please press the number one on your keypad to vote yes and the number two on your keypad to vote no. If you have a question about Secretary Treasurer's report or anything else at all, just press the star, three, and we'll gladly take your question. Now we're going to ... Oh, we do have an inbound caller here. It looks like Darlene is on the line. Darlene, go ahead.

Darlene: Hi, Jeff. Good evening, everyone. I'm just curious, with the recent Safeway store closures, what sort of impact might that have on our membership numbers? I mean, given that more store closures are on the horizon, I'm wondering if it'll have a financial impact on the union and might that create an increase in dues going forward?

Jeff Traeger: Okay, that's a very good question, Darlene. I can tell you that Safeway has only closed two stores for the conversions. They were the store at Kildonan Crossing and the one at Jefferson and McPhillips. Those stores are currently under construction to be renovated and reopened as a FreshCo store. At FreshCo, because the collective agreement is very different than the collective agreement for Safeway, there's a different due structure that we use. It's exactly the same as it is for No Frills. There will be a slight reduction in dues income for the Local, but certainly nothing that would generate a dues increase.

Jeff Traeger: As you'll see coming and as you saw in the January magazine, we do not have a general dues increase again this year. The state of the finances are in very good form. As far as announcements of further Safeway store closures, haven't heard anything yet. I actually did have an opportunity to speak to Senior Vice President of Human Resources last week. If you remember the fellow named Dave [Feron 00:25:43], he has retired, so there's a new fellow who I was introduced to and I asked that question specifically.

Jeff Traeger: At this time, all they would say is that there are no further conversions on the horizon or closures in Manitoba. We did see in the media that they announced 10 stores in BC, most of those in Vancouver, a couple of them on the island. It seems as though Safeway has 64 locations, we have 23 here in Winnipeg, but 64 in BC. I think that there were quite a few people at Sobeys that were wanting to make sure that they did more conversions in areas where they had more density. Alberta and British Columbia have a lot more stores in them just based on population than we do in Manitoba.

Jeff Traeger: At this point, I can tell you that, you know, Bea in the accounting department has done an amazing job of keeping our dues as low as we possibly can. The last dues increase we had was as a result of an increase to the international per

capita that was voted on at convention. It was many, many years before that that we did not have a general dues increase. We're going to keep working here to make sure that you pay as little as possible, also making sure that you get the same great service from your union that you've gotten used to over the years.

Darlene: Great, thanks so much.

Jeff Traeger: All right. Thanks, Darlene. We're going to go to Mr. [Halushko] now.

Mr. Halushko: Yeah, hi, Jeff.

Jeff Traeger: Hello there. How are you?

Mr. Halushko: Not bad. I was just going to ask you to clear this up. In our contract, it says, "For the first 120 days, employee and union has no recourse to grievance arbitration," right? I was reading that last bulletin or a book you guys had out and there is a lot of ways a guy has to be told why they had been released or given some reason. I just find a lot of guys at our work have been given no reason. What's the right way to handle this, with letting go of probationary employee?

Jeff Traeger: Yeah. Well, you know, one of the things that, generally speaking, probationary employees have no recourse to grievance and arbitration provisions in a contract, unless it's a violation of their human rights. I think of a case that, when I was a union representative, there was a probationary employee that was working in Maple Leaf that got seriously injured on the line. They were injured because the company failed to provide them with the proper safety equipment. Their injury ended up being life-changing for that person.

Jeff Traeger: We did file a grievance, even though it was on probation. The company took the position that it was not grievable. We went to arbitration and we actually won that member's job back, which was really just to get him access to disability benefits, because he was severely disabled as a result of the accident. You should always, if you've got a question or if you think that, as a shop steward or as a rank and file member, if you think that a probationary termination occurred in your workplace without any valid reason at all, the test, really, that the board uses is suitability. The employer can say you're not suitable for employment, but they still have to actually show that you were not suitable if challenged, right?

Mr. Halushko: Yeah, but Jeff, it says here, and this is Garry Bergeron speaking here, "While unsuitability is still a low threshold, an employer must demonstrate that the employee was given a fair opportunity to try to meet the requirements of the job they were hired to do."

Jeff Traeger: That's right.

Mr. Halushko: "An employer must clearly communicate what standard it expects, inform the person of deficiencies it observes, and establish that the standards that have to be met are reasonable." It's not just a human rights thing. What if they don't like-

Jeff Traeger: No, yeah. No, I agree with you, it's not just a human rights thing. They actually have to show that the employee is not suitable and they have a responsibility to make sure that the employee is aware of what the requirements of the job are and what they need to do in order to be considered suitable for the position. You're right, it's not just human rights. I'm not going to argue with Garry Bergeron, because he's my lawyer, so I'm not going to argue with him.

Jeff Traeger: I will say that probation is something that, if you honestly believe that there's something more to the probationary termination and that you were not given a fair opportunity or it was not communicated to you what you were required to do to meet the suitability test, then you should certainly contact your union and we will try to get that answer from the company. If they're not forthcoming, we can always file a grievance. We have one grievance-

Mr. Halushko: The new Canadians know about this stuff and they go through them like crazy. A lot of them, like you could see in their faces, they can't figure out what happened, like, you know, "I was working today and now I'm out the door."

Jeff Traeger: Yep. No, you're absolutely right. Just a message to everybody out there on the line, if you're involved in a probationary termination, don't just give up on it completely because the employer has the right to terminate you on probation. Always follow-up to make sure that you get the answer that you need. Thank you for that. We're now going to move on to our next interview. Our next guest is Zach Fleisher. Zach works in the communications department at ATU. Here in the labor movement, we are very lucky that we have great relationships with other unions and ATU is certainly one of those other unions that we have a great relationship with. Zach, you work at ATU, but you're actually a UFCW member, right?

Zach Fleisher: Yeah, actually, I'm a proud UFCW member there, Jeff. I was taking notes when Erin was talking about the Activist Conference, so I might have to sign up for that, too. That sounds like a pretty good deal. Yeah, I work with the Amalgamated Transit Union here in Winnipeg. A lot of folks don't often know about what the ATU is, but we represent about a thousand bus operators and about 250 to about 300 maintenance workers within the city of Winnipeg and about 25 bus operators in the city of Brandon. A lot of folks often forget about that as well.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, yeah. I did, too, yeah. All right, so you got to have a few things on your plate as communications guy for ATU right now. There's a lot going on with bus drivers. We see it in the media all the time. What's happening with safety for bus drivers? We all heard that absolutely tragic and horrible story about the

driver that was killed out at the University of Manitoba. Of course, that all came back up again with the trial happening just recently. What is ATU doing and what is the city doing to make sure that that doesn't happen again?

Zach Fleisher: Do you want to just recognize that on February 14th, two years ago, we lost our brother, Jubal Fraser, who was murdered on the job? Definitely, for those in the labor movement, we know that a safe work place is a right. It's not a privilege. It has to be there for everyone. The employer has to be there to protect them. What we've seen since the unfortunate murder of our member on the job is that the city has started to really start to look at, you know, assaults on bus drivers and the bus operators who are members.

Zach Fleisher: We see about 60 assaults reported a year. I say "reported," because a lot of them go unreported. Over time, members lost faith in the employer and it's up to the union to encourage members to let us know about things that are going on. Right now, the city kind of came forward with a task force. It took them a bit of time to study the issue. One of the recommendations that came forward was, as you mentioned, Jeff, was the shields. We did some internal analysis and we said, you know, because some drivers, it's not a slam dunk. You're not going to protect every driver on the job. Some folks don't like them, some folks love them. We crunched the numbers and out of 57 incidents in 2018, 41 could've been mitigated or prevented with a shield.

Jeff Traeger: That's a lot. That's pretty significant.

Zach Fleisher: Exactly.

Jeff Traeger: It is going forward now, right? I've heard that it passed through city council and that they're going to be using the surplus that they had from last year in transit to install these shields? The look you're giving me, I got this completely wrong. Why don't you tell us all about it?

Zach Fleisher: It's not completely wrong, I'm just looking through it. Winnipeg Transit is reporting a big surplus. You are correct there. What they're doing is they're forwarding the request onto the budget process, which will be coming out later in March. Initially, management came forward with a three to five-year timeline. They were edging on the five-year timeline to install these shields.

Zach Fleisher: For our members, they knew this wasn't acceptable. You know what? It has to move. You got to make it at least safe in the interim for members there. Through member organizations, through political action, through showing up at city hall, to calling your councilors and letting them know, "You know what? A, you guys have the money, B, even if you didn't have the money, this is important. You got to be protecting your employees," through political pressure, countless meetings at city hall, we really appreciated the support of UFCW there as well, that was really monumental.

Zach Fleisher: We've got the city down to a time limit of just a year. We went from five years to a 18-month they were considering and now it's about a year. They're putting the resources where it matters, which is protecting workers within the workplace. You know what? At the end of the day, the ATU is fighting for a better transit system. We're fighting for a safer transit system, not only for our operators, but also for the general public.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, that's awesome. Now, that's driver safety, which is important. We have a lot of members who use Winnipeg Transit Service here in Winnipeg and in Brandon as well. One of the concerns, obviously, is passenger safety as well. Is there anything on the horizon that we can look at to try to make passengers safer as well?

Zach Fleisher: You know, it's always something that we're looking at. One of the things that we always encourage passengers, if you see something on the bus, tell the driver. They can report it straight to control. If you've got someone who is threatening you on the bus, let the driver know. They can have the cops kind of summoned and to work with folks there.

Zach Fleisher: It is tough, right? You see a lot of folks in all sorts of backgrounds on public transit and, you know, folks don't always feel safe. We want to work with the public. We want to work with community organizations and certainly UFCW members. If you hear something, if you have an idea, call the ATU office. We're happy to take suggestions anytime.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah. I know George was saying before the meeting that in BC there was just a recent incident where, I guess it was a cadet or something like that that was assigned to work on the bus was assaulted. I find it personally interesting that, recently in the news, in the liquor stores and all the theft that's been going on, while now all of a sudden, Winnipeg Police Special Cadets are actually in the Liquor Commissions, but we have all of this violence is being reported on buses, but we don't have cadets there. In Toronto, they have, like, transit police. Is that what they're called? Is ATU supportive of that idea, of having kind of a transit authority that oversees passenger safety on buses?

Zach Fleisher: Yeah. Where we're at with that right now is, currently, you have a classification of transit supervisors who are outside of the ATU union. The issue is that they're kind of ambassadors for the transit system, but the issue is that they don't have the power to detain. If you have someone who's maybe causing a scene on the bus, maybe they're intoxicated, if a supervisor's called, they can only encourage them to leave the bus, which if folks are kind of visualizing this in their head, you know, might be a bit problematic. That's kind of tough to say to someone who's being threatening, you know, "Hey, man, maybe you should walk off the bus." They might not do that, right?

Zach Fleisher: The city is currently studying that, because there's all these new budgetary constraints. They're not sure they can provide enough cadets from the police

force or regular plain-clothed officers. They're seeing if they can empower and they're studying if they can empower the transit supervisors to perform some of those functions closer to a peace officer.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, okay. All right. Now, before you came here to UFCW tonight, you actually were at an announcement by the Prime Minister, which was taking place in the Transit Garage on Osborne Street. What was that all about?

Zach Fleisher: Well, first, I just wanted to give a shout-out to our transit maintenance workers. You know what? We've got the best transit maintenance department in Canada, for sure, perhaps North America. We do all sorts of rebuilds in-house and tons and tons of interesting work going on there. The issue is that we're working in a facility that has seen better days.

Zach Fleisher: You know, obviously we're really focused on the health and safety side for our members. Some of the 2.5 million that the Federal Government is now contributing is going to go towards better ventilation, faster closing of garage doors. The Mayor kind of made a good quip today, where he said, "You know what? In the middle of winter, the faster that garage door closes, the better." We're really pleased to see, you know, money going towards infrastructure so that the areas and facilities that our members work in are properly serviced.

Jeff Traeger: Last question I got for you is, quite a few UFCW members work part-time and they have a low income. The question is, is there any position that ATU has or any talk about going to a lower fare system for people with low income?

Zach Fleisher: Definitely. First, I just want to say, you know, the ATU is at the forefront of fighting for more affordable, accessible and frequent transit. We want your bus to be there more often. We don't want to see you waiting out there for 25 minutes in the cold and we don't want to see you breaking the bank either to take a ride. One of the things that we did was we reached out last year to some community organizations.

Zach Fleisher: We did some public opinion research polling to try and influence a discussion. We like to see the City of Winnipeg, along with collaboration for the Province of Manitoba, because they should be paying their fair share, too, to work towards a low income or affordable bus pass. If you look to cities like Calgary, for folks out there, they're paying about 15 bucks a month for a bus pass and that's obviously huge.

Zach Fleisher: The City of Winnipeg is looking at it. We weren't too pleased off the hub, because the initial price point was about 50, 55 bucks a month. For a lot of folks who might not be able to afford that price up front, maybe they're paying \$2.95 for fares along the way during the work week when their wages are catching up, that might not still be enough. The ATU is still going to keep pushing city council to really make it affordable. They have a chance to really give folks who are

struggling and might not be able to make ends meet the chance to have affordable public transportation.

Jeff Traeger: Perfect. All right. Well, thank you so much for coming and joining us, Zach. I really do appreciate it. Best of luck with all that. You've got a lot on your plate as communications guy for ATU.

Zach Fleisher: Thank you very much.

Jeff Traeger: Okay. We now have time for a couple more questions before we move on to our last guest. The first one up is [Veegas Deepkower 00:41:36]. Go ahead. Hello there?

Veegas D.: Hello?

Jeff Traeger: Hello there.

Veegas D.: Hi, I'm just looking for my-

Jeff Traeger: How are you?

Veegas D.: I'm good. How are you?

Jeff Traeger: I'm doing well, thank you. What can we help you with tonight?

Veegas D.: Yeah, I'm just looking for your office in Winnipeg. You even spoke, at the time I was on another call.

Jeff Traeger: The office in Winnipeg? You're wondering where we are in Winnipeg?

Veegas D.: Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Okay, the UFCW head office-

Veegas D.: [crosstalk 00:42:12]-

Jeff Traeger: No. Oh, this is for the income tax service? It's 878 Portage Avenue. It's near Portage and Arlington and you'll see a big building that says "UFCW Training Center." It's on the main floor with the separate entrance at 878. There are signs in the window.

Veegas D.: Okay.

Jeff Traeger: Okay.

Veegas D.: Like, you guys also provide anything for the credentials, which we have always done in India, and we are getting, assessing our degree over in Canada?

Jeff Traeger: Oh, I'm going to have to turn it back over to George to answer that question, because I'm not a tax consultant. Go ahead, George.

George Combiadakis: Can you repeat your question, please?

Veegas D.: Yeah, I'm just wondering about my credentials. If I was going to that, like you guys even pay for that also, like any help from your union for the evaluation of the degree I have done?

George Combiadakis: That could be part of your education expenses, like part of your education fees. That's [crosstalk 00:43:18].

Veegas D.: Yeah, education fees. Yeah.

George Combiadakis: Yeah. If you would bring the information in with you when you come in, you may be able to claim some of that as part of your education fees.

Veegas D.: Okay, so-

Jeff Traeger: Okay, so if you call the office at 786 ...

George Combiadakis: 786-

Jeff Traeger: ... 5037.

Veegas D.: 786-5037, okay.

Jeff Traeger: 5037, and make an appointment. Make sure you bring all that information with you, so that George can have a look at it when you get there. All right, we've got one more call, Richard. Richard, go ahead. Hello, Richard? Looks like you're calling from Brandon.

Richard: Celebrating a hundred years strike in Winnipeg, what was that strike about anyway at that time?

Jeff Traeger: Strike in Winnipeg?

Richard: Yeah, in 19 ...

Jeff Traeger: 1919.

Richard: ... 1919 or whatever?

Jeff Traeger: Well, it was about a whole lot of things, but really, the Winnipeg General Strike was about a group of workers that were tired of being mistreated on the job, tired of working long hours, tired of being underpaid and undervalued. They decided that they were going to walk off the job. Then, bit by bit, piece by piece,

most of the people that worked to keep the city of Winnipeg running walked out with them because they felt the same way. They walked out in solidarity with those workers. That was a hundred years ago as of May the 15th. The anniversary is a part of the celebration of labor and how much labor has accomplished in the last hundred years, knowing full well that we still have an awful lot more to do. That is what 1919 was all about.

Richard: Okay. Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Okay?

Richard: Anyway, I'm sorry, but I went and pushed star, three twice by mistake.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, no problem. No problem, Richard. Don't worry about it.

Richard: Thank you.

Jeff Traeger: Now you have a good night. All right, well we'll get on to our last guest now. Before I do that, I just need to make a motion to approve the President's report, which is the final document we have to approve at tonight's meeting.

Erin Selby: That is second by me.

Jeff Traeger: There you go. It has been moved and seconded, so please press the number one on your keypad to vote yes, number two on your keypad to vote no. If you have a question about the President's report or anything else at all, please press the star key, followed by the number three, and we will gladly take your question. Now we're going to take it out of the studio here in Winnipeg and we're going to take it all the way up to Lynn Lake, Manitoba. We're going to talk Pia Morales. Pia, are you there?

Pia Morales: Yes. Hello. Good evening, everybody.

Jeff Traeger: Good evening, Pia. How are you tonight?

Pia Morales: I'm really good. Thanks.

Jeff Traeger: Okay, good. Pia, we just would like maybe if you could just tell us a little bit about yourself and about how you came to live in Lynn Lake?

Pia Morales: All right. Okay, first, yeah, I came to Lynn Lake of July of 1996. I came in here as, like, a sister mission or something, it's like a missionary sisters.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, okay.

Pia Morales: Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Where did you come from, Pia?

Pia Morales: From the Philippines.

Jeff Traeger: Ah, okay. Then, did you work there for a while as a missionary before you started working in healthcare?

Pia Morales: Yes, because I came in here as a visitor visa, because first I never know what is Lynn Lake or something like that, not at all, anything when I traveled from the Philippines, landed in Vancouver, Vancouver to Winnipeg. Then, I arrived in the bus during the night, landed in Thompson and then ride in the bus during the day, landed to Lynn Lake and I never know what's going on. They sent me in here and that's all that I know.

Jeff Traeger: Wow, [crosstalk 00:47:39]-

Pia Morales: Then, I have a visitor visa at the time, because I never know that supposed to be I'm going to get the landed immigrant or something like that, so I came in here as a visitor visa. I'm volunteering in the Catholic church for two years before I got my landed immigrant or all that, permanent resident now.

Jeff Traeger: Was it a bit of a shock for you to start out in the Philippines and end up in Lynn Lake, Manitoba? I can't imagine that they're very similar places.

Pia Morales: Oh, yeah, very. I came in here in the middle of July 19, with this, I know, I have July 19 of 1996, summertime. I'm really freezing too much, because I said, "What's going on? Why it's really cold?" Of course, the sisters with me, "You go outside, Pia, because it is summertime." I said, "They get lots of mosquito and flies." With this, we don't have any flies.

Jeff Traeger: Then you found out what cold was really like when you got your first winter in Lynn Lake, I'm sure, right?

Pia Morales: Yes. Then, the first winter of that year, it's September 17 of 1996. See? I really know. I went outside and I really, like, asking all everybody, "Hey, is it snowing or something?" and nobody pay attention with me, said, "Oh, whatever. This is only snow." Everybody knows it already, but for me, it's like Heaven for me. I saw the snow falling down on the ground.

Jeff Traeger: Where do you work now, Pia? You work for the Northern Region of Health Authority, but where in Lynn Lake do you actually go to work every day?

Pia Morales: In Lynn Lake Hospital.

Jeff Traeger: Okay. What kind of work do you do at the hospital?

Pia Morales: Okay, first, I work as a casual in the dietary and housekeeping for almost like a week. Then, the nurses and the managers ask me if I can work in the wards being a healthcare aide. Since then, so at start of December 9, 1998 as a casual and then May of 1999 as a full-time healthcare aide. Then, September of 2012, I took the activity worker and so I have activity worker and a healthcare aide up to now.

Jeff Traeger: How many UFCW members are there in the Lynn Lake Hospital? There's not many, is there?

Pia Morales: Well, that's a good question, because I'm reading about that. I count it, anyway. Right now, like right now in this time, we have only, like, [inaudible 00:50:14].

Jeff Traeger: Oh, my goodness. Okay.

Pia Morales: Yeah, [inaudible] UFCW member, but of course we got lots of nurses and they got, like, [inaudible] or a technician, which is not belong to our union.

Jeff Traeger: Right. Now, you have been involved. Speaking of UFCW and the union, you've been involved in the union in many different ways over the years, haven't you?

Pia Morales: Yes. I've been a shop steward, that's for sure. It's 15 years already and health and safety seniors, for sure, and bargaining committee seniors.

Jeff Traeger: How many bargaining committees were you on, two? Two different times or three?

Pia Morales: Like, I did the bargaining already like twice.

Jeff Traeger: Twice already? You were hoping that we'd get a chance to negotiate, but it doesn't look like this government's going to let us negotiate with anybody right now.

Pia Morales: Look like.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah. Go ahead. What was it like being on the bargaining committee? Did you enjoy that experience?

Pia Morales: Yes, I really enjoy it. I need to begin with when I'm phoning with Mike or something and I said, "Yeah, I'm in the bargaining committee. Who's in the bargaining committee right now drive for four hours before you can go down for your bargaining?" Right? There's somebody?

Jeff Traeger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right.

Pia Morales: Except you guys, I know. I think sometimes, when you go down on the telephone, it's like if you aren't, then you'll travel many times for many hours.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah.

Pia Morales: Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Is there anything else about living and working in Lynn Lake that you can tell us? Have you gotten used to the climate now? Are you used to it? You've been here-

Pia Morales: Oh, yeah. I really love the cold and the hot right now. Hot bother me when it's like last two weeks, like minus 59 or minus 50 or something. It's not bother me at all.

Jeff Traeger: It doesn't bother you anymore, right? You're completely acclimatized to life in the North. For people that don't know, how far, when you said you took the bus from Thompson to Lynn Lake, we all know that Thompson's very far from here. By driving, it's about eight-and-a-half to nine-hour drive depending on, you know, how fast you drive, but eight-and-a-half to nine-hour drive to Thompson, how far is it from Thompson to Lynn Lake?

Pia Morales: Four hours.

Jeff Traeger: Four?

Pia Morales: Yes, exactly what I always start, from my driveway up to land in, like, maybe in the parking lot of Safeway or something, that's exact four hours for me.

Jeff Traeger: Oh, okay. All right. When I was in Lynn Lake, there really is no road out except back to Thompson, right? It's the only highway goes to Lynn Lake and ends there, doesn't it?

Pia Morales: Yes, only one way to go.

Jeff Traeger: Is there a winter road there? There's a winter road there as well, too, right, that the trucks can go out on to the lake?

Pia Morales: Yes. Right now, it's open, goes down to, if I'm not mistaken, go down to Lac Brochet from Lynn Lake or go down to Tadoule. I know they have big truck to deliver their supply and that's it.

Jeff Traeger: Wow.

Pia Morales: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jeff Traeger: Okay. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to tell us while you have all of UFCW on the phone? What would you like to say?

Pia Morales: Okay. Living in Lynn Lake is fun for me, because you know, I never experience. I landed in traffic, in the middle of traffic, before I can go down to work. Then, my

workplace is only, like, five minutes to drive, 10 minutes on the bike or 15 minutes for me to walk.

Jeff Traeger: Yeah, that's wonderful.

Pia Morales: Yeah.

Jeff Traeger: Okay, well thank you so much, Pia, for coming on our telephone town hall. Thank you so much for your many years as a shop steward, as a health and safety committee member and as a bargaining committee member. I really hope soon that we get a chance to get back to the bargaining table and that you can join us for your third time.

Pia Morales: Okay.

Jeff Traeger: Okay.

Pia Morales: Thank you very much.

Jeff Traeger: All right. Thanks, Pia. Bye-bye.

Pia Morales: Bye.

Jeff Traeger: All right, we have one more question on the line and that's just about perfect, because that's all the time we have. I do see that the last vote also passed, so our three motions have passed. We're going to go to Keith now. Keith, go ahead. Hello, Keith? Did we lose him? Huh? All right. Well, with that then, we have run out of questions and almost run out of time. I want to thank all of you for joining us on our February 2019 telephone town hall. Our next meeting of town hall will also be conducted by telephone on Tuesday, May the 14th, 2019 beginning at 7:00 p.m. Thank you all for participating in your union. We are now adjourned.