

PRESIDENTS REPORT TO THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

FEBRUARY 7, 2017



HEALTHCARE

As many of you may have seen in the media, Manitoba's largest unions were asked to a meeting with the Minister of Finance on January 5th, 2017. At that meeting we were told that Manitoba is in a financial crisis and public sector labour costs were a large part of the problem.

Government asked us to participate in two committees – one to provide ideas for how government can save money and another to strategize how to reduce the number of collective agreements in healthcare in Winnipeg from the current 113 to a more manageable number. Government also told us that they were going to implement legislation that will restrict our ability to negotiate wages for our members working in the public sector and were even considering opening existing collective agreements to scale back or eliminate wage increases that had been previously agreed to.

We question whether the financial crisis is a crisis at all as Manitoba's economy is strong and our deficit is similar to other provinces. If it is a crisis then why is the government reducing taxes for the wealthy and reducing the PST which will take over \$300,000,000 out of their revenue? Meetings have been scheduled for February and I will keep you posted on the results in my next report.

The Labour leaders also met with the CEO of the WRHA on December 21st, 2016 where we were informed that they have been directed by government to reduce their 2017 costs by \$98,000,000. This initiative has already had an effect on the working conditions for many of our members working in healthcare in Winnipeg.

SAVE ON FOODS

In November of 2016, Save On Foods opened three new stores in Winnipeg at Bridgewater South, McPhillips and St. James. We are currently working to open a dialogue with the Company as we represent the majority of retail grocery workers in the province.

SOBEYS

In the fall of 2016 Sobeys closed 2 more stores, one in The Pas and the other On Burrows St. in Winnipeg, bringing the total to 11 since they purchased Safeway. In 2016 the company posted financial losses in each quarter and has now written off \$2.8 billion of the \$5.8 billion they paid for the Company in 2013.

Bargaining is just starting in Alberta where UFCW Local 401 represents approximately 8,500 Sobeys members working at Safeway stores, and bargaining here in Manitoba will likely start late this year as the contract expires in March of 2018.

PRESIDENTS REPORT TO THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

FEBRUARY 7, 2017



LOBLAW

The "click and collect" program at select Superstores in Winnipeg has been very successful and it's likely that the company will expand the program to other locations in the future.

Loblaw has gained market share in Manitoba and the No Frills banner has been more successful than they had projected. Close to 23% of the groceries sold in Manitoba are at Loblaw locations.

LABOUR MANAGEMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE (LMRC)

The LMRC is a committee that is called by the Minister of Growth, Trade and Opportunity to discuss changes to the labour legislation in Manitoba. It's made up of equal representatives from unions and employers and I sit as one of the labour caucus members.

Recently we were asked to give government recommendations for future increases to minimum wage, which was frozen in 2016 after 17 years of annual increases. Labour's position is that the "Low Income Cut Off" for provincial taxes (sometimes called the 'poverty line') should be used to determine what minimum wage should be since nobody who works full time should live in poverty. We believe minimum wage should be raised to that line – currently just under \$15 per hour – and then the wage should be tied to the consumer price index each year so workers don't fall behind the poverty line in the future.

Management has yet to provide us with their proposal, but we are concerned that it may include a separate minimum wage for students and servers who receive tips. We anticipate the government making a decision on minimum wage when the budget is released in the spring.

STAFF REPORT

Late last year we had three staff members on medical leave and I am pleased to report that Marie Buchan, Wendy Lundy and Phil Kraychuk have all returned to work to start off 2017. In January, we hired Chris Noto who had been with us on a term since last fall into our full time position as communications coordinator.

In Brandon, we have hired a dedicated relief representative as our 4th full time Union Representative in Western Manitoba. Effective February 6, 2017 Claudia Colocho has joined the UFCW team and will spend the next several weeks going through our training program. Many of you may already know Claudia as she has been providing Spanish translation for our members in Brandon for many years.

PRESIDENTS REPORT TO THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

FEBRUARY 7, 2017



SECURITY CONFERENCE

On February 22nd, 2017 we will be holding a conference for our Shop Stewards and activists from the Security Sector to get together and discuss the unique challenges workers in that industry face.

The conference will be held at the UFCW Training Centre at 880 Portage Avenue and for more details or to register for the event please contact Union Representative Curt Martel at 204 786-5055.

DENTAL PLAN IMPROVEMENTS

For those of you who are plan members of the UFCW Dental Plan, we have some good news. The plan was significantly underfunded after the market crash in 2008 and the trustees had to reduce benefits to ensure the viability of the plan continued. Basic coverage was reduced from 100% to 90%, the Dental Fee Guide was frozen at the 2013 level and the number of hours worked to qualify for part time coverage were increased.

Since 2013 the plan has steadily recovered and as of January 1st, 2017 we have now implemented reimbursement of dental expenses based on the 2016 Dental Fee Guide meaning your portion of the dental bill will be much smaller. If the plan continue to improve it is our intention to get back to the current fee guide, restore basic coverage to 100% and lower the number of qualifying hours for part timers back to what they were prior to the changes.

Jeff Traeger

President
UFCW Local 832