

UFCW 832

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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 May 12th, 2020 Telephone Town Hall General Membership meeting for members of UFCW Local 832, which is now called to order. Before we get into the meeting tonight, I have to begin by saying a huge thank you to all of you who are working on the front lines during this pandemic.

Jeff Traeger:

I have always known the value that UFCW members bring to the fabric of our society. The only difference is now all Manitobans know it as well. I also want to say happy birthday to you and you and you and me to all of us because today, May the 12th, 2020 is Manitoba's 150th birthday. I was also going to say that this is our Spring Town Hall Meeting, but with the weather we've had so far this year, I'm not sure if it was warmer when we did the meeting in February. I understand we're in for a great May long weekend though, so something to look forward to finally.

Jeff Traeger:

With me in the studio tonight is our Secretary-Treasurer, B. Bruske, our Director of Operations, Marie Buchan, our Communications Coordinator, Chris Noto, and not in the studio but on the line from home is the Director of our Training Center, Erin Selby. We also have two special guests joining us on the call from UFCW Local 247 in British Columbia, where I'm pretty sure it's warmer than it is in Manitoba. And they are President Suzanne Hodge, and Secretary-Treasurer, Dan Goodman. Welcome to you both and thank you for joining us on the call here tonight.

Jeff Traeger:

I don't think it will come as a surprise to anyone that the focus of our GMM tonight is on coronavirus and how it has impacted 832 members in very unique and different ways. Each of the four of us here tonight will be focusing on how this pandemic has affected our members, or staff, or union, or province and how it will likely change the way we do what we do here at 832 permanently.

Jeff Traeger:

But before we get into the effects of COVID, our by-laws require that we vote to approve three reports at the meeting and they are the minutes of the previous meeting back on February the 11th, B's Secretary-Treasurer's report on the current finances and my report. We will not be reading the first two reports which will give us more time for you to ask any questions you may have. All three of these documents have been previously posted on our website at ufcw832.com for you to review and they will stay posted there in our archives so that you can see all of the documents from all of our Telephone Town Hall Meetings at any time.

Jeff Traeger:

Just a reminder, if any of you would like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the number three and you'll be placed in a queue to ask your question. I would also 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.

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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 second quarterly Town Hall Meeting of 2020 and given all the top and since our last meeting, I am going to start with my report right off the top instead of at the end. Just before I do that though, we will need a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting which took place on February the 11th, 2019.

Beatrice Bruske:

Moved.

Speaker 3:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded, so please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad or no by pressing the number two on your keypad. And once again, star key followed by the number three will get you in the lineup to ask a question.

Jeff Traeger:

I'm going to go straight to the president's report now and let that since the middle of March, much of what we've been focused at Local 832 is the same thing that most of planet earth has been focused on, and that is COVID-19. Since many UFCW members are considered critical during this pandemic and are still working hard each day, the first challenge we faced was ensuring that the workplaces where those members work were made as safe as possible and that the risk of any UFCW member contracting this virus was minimized.

Jeff Traeger:

That challenge has continued right up to today. As more is learned about the virus and how to protect ourselves from it, we have worked with employers to ensure that the best practices are employed in UFCW workplaces, and those practices change very frequently.

Jeff Traeger:

As an employer, it was also Local 832's priority to keep our staff as safe as possible while continuing to provide uninterrupted service to all of our members. To achieve that, we quickly arranged to have all of our staff work from home and since the third week of March we have shut down all of our offices in both of our training centers with just a couple of people working at the Winnipeg office at any one time.

Jeff Traeger:

Provincially, we've written to the Premier of Manitoba several times to lobby for better workplace protections for members working in retail, grocery, in food production, in food distribution, in warehousing, in security, assisted living, and in personal care. We have also sought better protections

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for workers who need time off due to COVID, and to have presumptive WCB coverage for any worker who can contract the virus without the need of having to prove that they contracted the virus at work.

Jeff Traeger:

Date, our province, surprise, surprise, has declined that coverage and is the only Canadian province to not have any money over and above the federal programs dedicated specifically to helping workers. They do, however, seem to have plenty of money to assist businesses, but not enough to keep Manitoba hydro working or our universities open.

Jeff Traeger:

Nationally, UFCW Canada has made many of the same lobbying efforts as we have provincially and just recently National President, Paul Meinema wrote the Prime Minister urging him to put regulations in place to protect workers in food processing plants such as the Cargill Beef Plant in Alberta, that has over 900 positive cases of the virus.

Jeff Traeger:

Here in Manitoba we have 5,000 members working in that industry, and luckily there are currently no cases in any of our three plants. Based on what has happened in other provinces, if there were to be a positive case in any plants in Manitoba, your union would be calling for a 14-day shutdown of the plant with full pay for all of our members.

Jeff Traeger:

We have also been inundated with media over the last two months and have probably commented on more stories and programs over that time than we have in the last five years combined. In every story we've showcased how hard our members are working and also reminded them that we have over 1000 members laid off, that we are also working hard to assist.

Jeff Traeger:

While, there is no doubt that we will survive this outbreak together, there's also no doubt that the world will not be the same place as it was before COVID. Here at your union, we are already preparing for a new reality that will mean doing much of what we've always done in very different ways in the future.

Jeff Traeger:

One of the many side effects with the pandemic has been the change to all of the events planned for 2020. Most of those have been postponed or canceled and that's the same story here at UFCW. All of the conferences and conventions that had been planned by UFCW Canada and other organizations that we partner with have been canceled as large group meetings are not allowed.

Jeff Traeger:

There are three of those that affect Local 832 specifically. The next session of the UFCW Youth Internship Program was to be held in Winnipeg from July 20th to 25th, but it has been canceled and won't be rescheduled until the spring of 2021. The National Defense Fund's Annual Conference was also scheduled to be held in Winnipeg July 26 to 28, and has also been canceled. As other venues for this event have already been secured for 2021 and 2022, now we'll not be returning to Winnipeg until 2023.

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Jeff Traeger:

As I reported in February, our Secretary-Treasurer, B. Bruske, has put her name forward to run for the position of President of the Canadian Labor Congress at the convention that was to be held the first week of May in Vancouver. Unfortunately, that convention has also been canceled due to COVID and the CLC is hoping to be able to run a convention in late 2020 or early 2021.

Jeff Traeger:

That is my report and I see by looking at the screen that the vote to approve the previous minutes has been passed. So it's time to take a couple of questions. We have three people on the line. I'm going to take two questions and then we're going to move on to the next report. So if you are in line for a question, stay there and we will get to you throughout the hour. So we're going to start with, Akim Daniel. Go ahead, sir or ma'am.

Akim Daniel:

Yes. This Akim Daniel, from Winnipeg, Manitoba. I work as a casual with Garda, and I had been working so many years and we've got a schedule. I have no full time and I have a family, my wife is not working. I have difficult currently with situational finance. My question is, I have been a member of a union. I asked 2019 about benefit and I never get any report and I suggested in 2019 that it's better that they send the report and benefit to my address, emailed my home address that I can be able to catch up because I have no what is going on, and what is the benefit with union and I'm paying money all the time. That is my question.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. What I'm going to do is I'm going to get the union representative for Garda, Sandy Forcier to give you a call and to review the benefits with you. Okay. We're going to move on to the next caller. Go ahead, Marty.

Marty:

Hello.

Jeff Traeger:

Hello. Go ahead. What's your question?

Marty:

Hello. So my question is that as a front liners, we are working hard, but we are still getting the same pay. Is there any-

Jeff Traeger:

Where do you work?

Marty:

Working with SRG.

Jeff Traeger:

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With SRG. Myself, and B. Bruske actually wrote letters to every single one of the security employers. G4S, Garda, Securitars, Impact, SRG. I know I'm missing one, but I think I got them off. But we have written to all of those employers requesting that they increase your pay by \$2 an hour to match what has happened in food processing plants and in retail grocery stores.

Jeff Traeger:

We have definitely not received an answer from all of them unfortunately. The only one that we had a fruitful conversation with, I think was G4S. But it's about time. It was about two weeks ago. So I think we're going to follow up with your employer and if nothing else, we're going to try to shame them into doing it because it's the right thing to do. Security guards are on the line along with everybody else on the front lines, putting themselves at risk every day through COVID. I know that it's important that you're recognized not just with words, but recognized with compensation for everything you do. We'll take one more. We'll take one more. Rajiv, go ahead.

Rajiv:

Yeah. Hello. Can you hear me?

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, I can hear you.

Rajiv:

My question is same like the other speaker that he has asked. I work for a security company and with the coming of COVID-19, these security companies are almost making double of their income what they were making before. And it's still like if you visit any grocery store we are at different times. We are managing the people over there. We are asking them to maintain a distance and there are some customers who don't listen and these become aggressive over there and we are the one who are facing them. And either hospitals or grocery stores or [inaudible 00:13:52], we are the people who are managing and even if somebody, if you look around Winnipeg, they opened a mall over here and-

Jeff Traeger:

Rajiv, just wondering what company do you work for? Which security company do you work for?

Rajiv:

I don't want not [inaudible 00:14:07]. I just work for one of the security companies over here. It is the same thing, like everyone is getting a raise but nobody's looking at us over here.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, no, I absolutely agree with you, Rajiv, a hundred percent. And that's why when we realized that security companies were not providing any hero pay or any COVID bonus or anything like that, that's why we specifically are now lobbying the security employers to do just that. We're also lobbying other employers and other industries that have not come forward and provided extra pay for people who are working on front lines during the pandemic.

Jeff Traeger:

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There's a couple more people in line, but we're going to move on to our second report of the evening. Just before we do that, I will need a motion to approve the president's report.

Beatrice Bruske:

Moved.

Speaker 3:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded. So please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad, or no by pressing the number two on your keypad. And if you have a question about that report or anything else at all, please press star three and we'll gladly take your question.

Jeff Traeger:

I'll now turn the floor over to B, Bruske, to talk about the effects of this pandemic on Local 832 members. B.

Beatrice Bruske:

Thanks for that, Jeff. COVID has of course impacted all of our workplaces in one way or another. For some workplaces that has simply meant adjusting to extensive cleaning, spacing up between employees and wearing more personal protective equipment, while for other workplaces that we represent it has meant a shutdown of parts of all of the entire workplace.

Beatrice Bruske:

Some of the workplaces we represent are working with a skeleton staff, very much reduced staffing where the majority of our members have been laid off. These workplaces include SSP, and Gate Gourmet, which are all airport workers, Winnipeg School Division, one bus drivers for the Bus School Division workers, Celebrations Dinner Theater, Stella's Restaurants, The Fairmont and the holiday and hotels. Refits, Arista, which is the former Gourmet Baker, and the Brentwood Legion are pretty much all shut down. Many other have had a number of layoffs in order to manage the decrease in business due to the coronavirus. All total in our Local, we've had over 1,100 layoffs to date.

Beatrice Bruske:

Many employers have also offered unpaid leaves of absences to address workers who are not able to attend to work due to childcare or family responsibility issues or other COVID related issues. Some employers who are fully functioning have provided hero payer COVID premiums. Approximately two thirds of UFCW members are now receiving some type of employer premium for at least a period of time over the past two months.

Beatrice Bruske:

Many employers have now started the announcing that they're going to be scaling back these premiums as our province is relaxing some of the rules and business openings. As Jeff indicated, we have approached all employers to provide these types of premiums including security firms. We had extensive discussions with the various different security firms. Jeff, myself, as well as the union rep,

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Sandy Forcier has had significant discussions with all of the management groups in the security industry to push them for additional funding.

Beatrice Bruske:

However, as this is an extremely client driven industry, we have not been able to make any headway for increasing the wages for security officers. We have called on government to also look at additional legislation dealing with these issues. And we've always focused on pushing our government to mandate additional wages for this particular group of employees. So we will continue doing that. However, we also are going to need our security members to as well assist us with some of those endeavors by connecting with their union rep and by getting engaged in participating in the security program that we have ongoing at this moment in time.

Beatrice Bruske:

Many of our members working in the retail food production, warehousing, security, healthcare group homes have continued to work during this particular challenge and have managed customers, clients, and the public in your workplace. In many instances, this has been a huge challenge, ensuring that the employers are doing the right things, that they've put the right safeguards in place and ensuring that everybody is following the rules to keep everyone safe.

Beatrice Bruske:

We know many of you have reached out to your reps to express your frustrations and concerns with the employers and with the public alike. We want you to know that we have your back. You heard Jeff's report on the multiple demands that we have made to employers as well as to the provincial government to address these issues. We will continue to advocate for you and to push for more standards and for better enforcement.

Beatrice Bruske:

The other reality is that this pandemic has provided society with an opportunity to reevaluate the value of all work being done by workers. All work is important and integral to keep society moving. So whether you're a grocery store clerk, a security officer, you work in food production, warehousing, or in healthcare, we need all jobs to be done to meet the needs within our community. I hope that the labor movement and workers can use this as a springboard to advocate for better wages and benefits for all service workers. And that has to include legislative changes to and enhance workplace safety and health rules.

Beatrice Bruske:

Thank you all for the hard work through this. And please check the UFCW website and social media pages for opportunities to get involved in pushing for this change. Please also make sure that your union rep has your most recent email and phone number because we are communicating a lot in various different ways with our members. Instead of having in-person meetings, we're relying on things like these telephone town halls and emails in order to ensure that you're getting the information that you need. So if you have recently changed email addresses or your phone number or even your physical address, please make sure that you're updating this on a regular basis.

Beatrice Bruske:

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Lastly, I also want to note that all of this has had an impact on your union staff as well. Your union reps, negotiators, and specialists are busier than ever before answering and dealing with all of the challenges each workplace is going through and responding to all of you, our members who've called or emailed with the many issues that this pandemic has raised for you. Our union staff are also dealing with their own family challenges, homeschooling kids, etc., while managing an extremely busy workload. I want to thank all of them for continuing what they do best, which is to stand up for you, our members in your workplace.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you very much, B. That was great. I see by looking on the screen here, the vote to approve the president's report isn't passed. So just so that we get the official business of the meeting out of the way, I'm going to look for a motion to approve the secretary-treasurer's report, which is different than the report that B. just gave. The secretary-treasurer's report on finances is posted on our website for the last week and will stay there afterwards. But we will just need a motion to approve that one and then we won't have to do that again.

Beatrice Bruske:

Moved.

Speaker 3:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. 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. And if you have a question about B's report or the treasurer's official report, please press star three and we will gladly take your question. We've got a few people in the queue right now. We're going to start with Sharon. Go ahead, Sharon.

Sharon:

Hi. My question is really selfish. I'm a night shift worker. I'm going to take a cab to work tonight so that I could be here. Is there any way these meetings could be like even 40 minutes earlier so I can still take a bus to work? I also have to wait for libraries to open in order to see the reports because sadly I'm one of those people, I can't afford a computer set.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Well, you know what? We will see what we can do. We have some limitations with the timing and schedule of our meetings based on people's work schedules. We can't do them. Ideally, we do them on Sunday nights, but we're not allowed to do-

Sharon:

Sunday night I work anyway.

Jeff Traeger:

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Okay. All right. Tell you what? Tell you what? I will take your request to our executive board. We have our meeting with the board on May the 22nd, and we'll raise the timing of these meetings and see if we can't do something a little bit more convenient for you.

Sharon:

Well, either that or get transit to realize there are night shift workers and having buses regularly run would be great. It takes me two and a half hours to get to work at night and 20 minutes to get home in the morning.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Perfect. Okay. Well, I know they've cut back the service on the buses. It's funny, it was, I think announced that they were cutting back all the schedules to weekend schedules the same time that the Manitoba government was announcing that they were starting to open up the economy. So people go back to work and now there's no buses. But all right, we're going to go to our next caller, Shalimar.

Shalimar:

Hi there. I'm employed at G4S Security at Winnipeg Parking Authority.

Jeff Traeger:

Are you one of the ones that was laid off?

Shalimar:

No, I am not. I am one of the chosen few who remained. Our site is made up of a mobile division as well as urban. So if you see us walking around downtown ticketing people, I'm one of those guys that are automatically hated.

Jeff Traeger:

I was just going to say one of my favorite people down. The important work that you do. It's important the work that you do.

Shalimar:

We do. But I have noticed that there is a discrepancy in the amount of PPE equipment being offered between the different companies. For instance, Pallet Security, who is not unionized at the Richardson Building has provided all their officers with gloves and masks. Garda at City Hall, they happen to have a plexiglass screens up as well as marked areas. As an urban controller, I have lost my partner in my beat. We are down to a skeleton crew. So if I have an emergency and I need to call for assistance, good luck on finding somebody nearby me. We're skeleton crew on our mobile. Again, if I need assistance from a mobile unit to come and get me to save me from a situation, I'm buggered.

Shalimar:

Most of the businesses, because I'm signed into the Chinatown area is closed except for City Hall. So the question really is what level should I expect from G4S to provide me with PPE and personal safety?

Jeff Traeger:

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Okay. All right. B. Bruske is very eager to answer your question, so I'm going to turn it over to her. Go ahead, B.

Beatrice Bruske:

Thank you for that really important question. And of course, every employer has to take into account the work that you're doing, the site that you're assigned to and to provide the appropriate equipment. And so whether or not your employer is providing the right equipment based on the site that you're working in is something that we will need to review with your union rep, with Sandy Forcier.

Beatrice Bruske:

But I do want to point out that a lot of the equipment mandates are also mandated by the clients. And so not just as your employer, as a security firm have to look at that, but the client is also mandated to ensure that every employee on their work site is safe. And so the amount of personal protective equipment is going to vary widely because quite frankly if security firms themselves have to provide it, they're going to be as cheap as possible. We know this and it's up to us to enforce it and make sure that they're providing what they absolutely need.

Beatrice Bruske:

However, some clients such as the City of Winnipeg may be more prepared to provide additional equipment than a security firm will. So again, I will ask Sandy to check in with you to see what exactly your employer is providing to you and hopefully we can address your concerns that way.

Shalimar:

Okay. I appreciate that. Currently I've bought gloves for our work site and found disinfectants and sanitizers for our work site and none of the WPA staff are actually pretty much in the office. They've been sent home. Right. Our client in that regards has been gone since mid-March. So it's really been G4S who's had to take care of us.

Beatrice Bruske:

Yeah. And as you know G4S, just like any of the other security firms, they try to minimize their expenditures as much as possible and only provide the bare minimums. And so we will definitely look into that to make sure that they're doing what they need to be doing.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Thank you, B. Now we're going to turn the floor over to our Director of Operations, Marie Buchan, who's been one of the busiest people at our Local since the pandemic began. Marie's going to focus on the steps we've taken to protect our staff while at the same time ensuring that the service we provide to our members is uninterrupted. Go ahead, Marie.

Marie Buchan:

Good evening everyone. Back in March when this pandemic quickly became reality for all of us in Manitoba, we had the difficult task of taking our entire operations across the province and figuring out ways to make each of our processes pandemic friendly. This was not an easy task as UFCW Local 832 is built on the principle of proactively meeting with our membership, from our full time servicing reps who are in the workplaces often to our open door walk-in policy at our offices to various in-person meetings

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for things like benefits, grievances or various other workplace issues and negotiations with in-person proposals, updates and ratification meetings.

Marie Buchan:

I could go on and on, but with all of this no longer allowed with a declared state of emergency and a provincial public health order put in place, the Local had to quickly review all departments and ask the question, how can we continue to give our members the service they deserve and come to expect while obeying these new rules being put into place?

Marie Buchan:

In mid-March we began by putting protocols in place at our offices and quickly notifying our executive board shop stewards, health and safety committee members, and then posting a message from our president on our website letting all of our members know what was happening. We at the Local had to make the difficult decision to stop all physical visits into the workplace. We met with our reps and set up new ways to communicate with you, our members. Some examples, phone call check-ins, emails, texts, Telephone Town Halls, Zoom or various other video calling apps.

Marie Buchan:

We began to transition staff from working at our office to working from home. This was not an easy task, but we all worked as a team and got it done and it was done without a service interruption to your members.

Marie Buchan:

On Thursday, March 25th we made the very difficult decision to temporarily close our Brandon and Neepawa offices due to the pandemic and all staff are required to work from home. Notices were posted and translated for our members. A mailbox was installed so members could continue to drop off important documents, and communication was sent out to all members via email or mail and on our website letting them know what was happening.

Marie Buchan:

Our physical office was closed in Brandon and Neepawa. We continued to be committed to our members and helping them deal with all of their workplace challenges during this very difficult and unprecedented time. We then had Mike Howden, our organizing coordinator do a call through of all of our shop stewards and health and safety committee members across the province to check in and see what they needed from their union.

Marie Buchan:

On Thursday, March 31st we temporarily closed our Winnipeg office due to the pandemic. All remaining staff that were in the office were transitioned to work from home. Constant communication was a huge priority for us throughout this entire time. Email and mail updates, website updates, social media posts, videos and links to helpful websites were just a few of the ways we were able to keep all of our members up-to-date on what was happening.

Marie Buchan:

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Our offices have remained closed to the public for just over eight weeks. So where are we now? Like many other workplaces in the province, we are slowly starting to reopen our offices. We are still not open for walk-ins and strict guidelines are in place to ensure both the safety and wellbeing of our members and our staff. Thank you to everyone for your support, kind words, and understanding. We will continue to keep all of our members updated on the status of our offices. Please continue to watch our website and social media pages for up-to-the-minute updates. Now is also a great time as Secretary-Treasurer B. Bruske, said to make sure we have your email address as this is always the fastest way for us to connect with each of you. You can head to our website, www.ufcw832.com and go under member resources and give us your email address.

Marie Buchan:

Your wellness, health and safety is always your union's top priority and will continue to be. As an employer we also need to ensure that our staff are safe and we are following all protocols and recommendations put forward by various government agencies. I am pleased to say that UFCW Local 832 was successful in balancing these two very important priorities.

Marie Buchan:

I also want to say a very special thank you to each and every one of our staff, to all of our reps and specialists. Your commitment to the membership never wavered regardless of where your office was. I'm so impressed with the creativity and willingness of our staff to adapt to every changing daily situation for the benefit of our members. Our membership consists of many frontline workers who are interacting with the public every day in various sectors. We recognize, appreciate and want to thank you all for your hard work and you continue to do during this very difficult time.

Marie Buchan:

As the COVID pandemic continues to evolve and unfold regardless of where our staff are working from, we want to assure you that your union will continue to be there for you and to advocate for your rights. All of us at UFCW Local 832 are with you.

Jeff Traeger:

Excellent. Thank you very much, Marie. That was great. I see that the vote to approve the Secretary-Treasurer's report has been passed and that means it is time for a few more questions before we go to our last report of the night. So we'll start with Merle Bell. Go ahead.

Merle Bell:

Yeah, this is Merle Bell. I work at Maple Leaf, Winnipeg. And some of my question's been asked before, like the PPE. I see some securities, they don't have proper PPE, and they answer the question. But, you said there's 5,000 members of the UFCW so-

Jeff Traeger:

Sorry, there's 5,000 members working in the media industry at Local 832. So we have the Brandon Maple Leaf plant with about just over 2000 members, about 1400 in HyLife plant in Neepawa, and another 14 or 1500 at the [inaudible 00:32:27], Winnipeg.

Merle Bell:

So how do you make sure that these people they have the proper PPE and you mentioned also that there is anything happened they should be paid. So this is for the full time or the part time?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Thank you, Merle Bell. Appreciate that. What I can tell you is that the employer, Maple Leaf in Winnipeg, as well as Maple Leaf in Brandon has actually been doing very well with providing PPE. They actually are providing disposable masks to all employees several times a day. I just got an update from your union representative, Sharon Grehan today, going through some of the new changes that they've made by installing flexi glass in the lunchrooms and understand that they're installing a flexi glass right on the lines as well, which is something that we have been calling for, for some time.

Jeff Traeger:

And when I said, if there was a positive case, that's what we would be calling for. We would be calling for Maple Leaf to shut the plant down for two weeks, do a deep cleaning, let everybody self-isolated at home and make sure that they don't lose any pay as a result.

Jeff Traeger:

We all saw in the news what happened in Cargill and Alberta, and what's happening right now in Cargill, in Quebec, and JBS, also in Alberta. And we know that just because of the size of these plants and the number of people that work in them and the proximity to which they work with one another, that once this virus gets in there, it will literally go through the plant like wildfire.

Jeff Traeger:

So now that we are very much aware and we've seen that happen before, we would be pushing Maple Leaf to shut their plant down and pay employees full time or part time. And if that wasn't working, we'd be pushing government to do that. And I think the lessons learned in other provinces, would definitely help. So we'll go to our, next caller. Go ahead.

Speaker 12:

Hi.

Jeff Traeger:

Hello there? How are you?

Speaker 12:

Good. Yeah, I would like to ask a question being one of the front line worker. I want to know the help that the union are doing to have some order nonprofit agencies that's are not registered to have a union. [inaudible 00:35:11], so that some of their staff can have some benefits, especially in these pandemic era. The way they are doing is not the same. I know the union doesn't have so much on them, but what else are they doing to help their staff too?

Jeff Traeger:

I know this is an initiative that actually we were just meeting with before, this meeting on the nonprofits because government in their incident bad judgment, actually pulled back funding to the day programs

with a lot of the nonprofit organizations. But B. has just been kind of taking the lead in working with an activist named Carlos Sosa. So B., is there any comment that you could make on that question?

Beatrice Bruske:

Sure. We are very much aware that our provincial government has underfunded nonprofit agencies for many years. And quite frankly, it's a shame in terms of the little funding that nonprofit agencies get to provide services to Manitobans, especially those with disabilities or other challenges. So whether they're unionized or not unionized the funding model and the structure from government is the same, for those particular agencies.

Beatrice Bruske:

In the past, we've worked with many of the executive directors of these agencies to demand better funding from government. And at this time, as Jeff just indicated, our government has again, cut more funding for most of these agencies because the day programs for many of the group homes are not functioning right now during this COVID crisis.

Beatrice Bruske:

So we are going to be participating with an initiative that Abilities Manitoba has put forward to demand additional funds from government for workers in this industry, and as well to demand a long-term better funding model and a better strategy in terms of how funding is allocated for all nonprofits that deal with vulnerable Manitobans.

Beatrice Bruske:

So this is something that the union is very much focused on. The union negotiator that negotiates in this field, Phil Kraychuk is very passionate about these issues and has been pushing these issues at the bargaining table as well. However, we are aware that based on the funding that these different employers get from government, it's minimal at best. So at bargaining there's only so much you can do, without having the proper funding from government.

Beatrice Bruske:

So we are going to be launching some significant things. Again, make sure we have your email address so we can communicate with you because this is also going to mean that we need our members in this area to participate and to have their voices heard. So stay tuned.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. We'll take one more question and then we'll go to our last one, our last report. Victor, go ahead.

Victor:

Yes. This is Victor. I don't know why they don't need security guard essential workers?

Jeff Traeger:

You want to know why. They are essential workers there working [crosstalk 00:38:14]. Sorry, I can't. You got to repeat your question.

Victor:

Why is we can't get PPE, and who is trying to make us essential worker?

Jeff Traeger:

Are you talking about money?

Victor:

I'm not talking about money. I just want to know why is it they don't make us essential workers? Everybody is talking, talking and they never see. They see health care. They see this, security guard [inaudible 00:38:45].

Jeff Traeger:

You're right. You're right about that.

Victor:

Even the Prime Minister.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. I can tell you, you're absolutely right about that, Victor, but I can tell you, there is one organization that's talking about security guards as essential workers, and that's UFCW. We represent over 2000 security guards, and we've always known the critical role that security guards play in our communities, in our city, in our province and our country. And I actually do think it's shameful that security guard employers are not coming up and paying properly, not providing enough benefits, not providing a good enough pensions or any pensions at all.

Jeff Traeger:

These are all things that we are lobbying for. So I definitely can say that we could not possibly agree with you more, that you are essential workers and you should be part of the conversation right along with healthcare workers, along with the people doing food processing, along with people working retail grocery, people working in assisted living, people working in all of the industries that have to go to work. You need to be a part of that conversation too.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. So now we're going to turn the floor over to our Director of Education and Training, Erin Selby, who has been really following government initiatives, and what's going on with COVID. So she's going to provide us with an update. Go ahead, Erin.

Erin Selby:

Thank you, Jeff. And good evening, everybody. I do want to give you a quick update off the top just of what's happening at the UFCW training centers. As Jeff said, we are closed just like all of our offices, which means we're not offering our classes right now for our shop stewards or for our health and safety committee members. But there are a few things going on at the training center.

Erin Selby:

Our Grade 12 students in Winnipeg are continuing their classes online. So those folks will be able to graduate. We won't be able to have the ceremony for them, for a little while. I suspect that they will be

able to graduate and that's good news. In Brandon, we started holding our online English as additional language classes online. We're not back to our full schedule yet, but every week we're adding more. And we'll hope to be back to normal in terms of how many classes we're offering very soon.

Erin Selby:

Now, I'll get to some of the numbers that are happening in the province. So, as Jeff said, I've been following a lot of the government reports to try to keep us all up to date, the latest numbers in Manitoba show that we had one new case of COVID-19 reported today. Total cases in Manitoba have now gone up to 290, but so far 251 of those people have recovered. So we've had some good news. Right now unfortunately, four people are in hospital with COVID-19 and one person is in intensive care.

Erin Selby:

Since February, the province of Manitoba has tested more than 30,000 people. Now, if you've been following the news or hearing from your friends, it's a little bit confusing of what some of the rules are. And particularly now, as the province is starting to open things up, it can be a bit confusing about what you are and what you are not supposed to do.

Erin Selby:

So if you go to the Government of Manitoba website, here's what they say you should avoid doing right now. Your children should avoid having play dates or sleepovers. Everyone should avoid group gatherings, and this includes family events, dinner parties, celebrations, and unfortunately funerals as well. You should avoid, even though stores are open, you should be avoiding visiting crowded stores or any outdoor spaces getting crowded. You shouldn't be having people over; you shouldn't be having non-essential workers in your home. So if your furnace breaks down, you probably need to get that fixed spot, if it's not essential, maybe you could save getting the living room painted until things are a little bit more back to normal.

Erin Selby:

You shouldn't be driving in the same car with friends. And if possible you should avoid peak trends at times. But of course, it's very difficult for some of you who are at work. We know it's not possible for many of our members to follow some of these rules. If you are looking for the most up-to-date COVID-19 information, the Government of Manitoba website address is a little bit long for me to read out right now. But if you do Google Government of Manitoba COVID, it should take you there. And we're going to put this information and the links up on our website as well at ufcw832.com. There is a much easier way to do that by going to our website, then trying to navigate all the different ones that I'm going to name here.

Erin Selby:

I know that some of you or possibly your family members are out of work, and we've got information for that on our website as well. Remember if you are out of work, you can't collect EIA and serve at the same time. If you're eligible for employment insurance, you can't apply for the COVID emergency relief benefit. If you do try to, the system will allow you to apply for both. So don't get confused by that, but you're going to at some point have to pay some of that money back. So start with EIA if you've lost your job, and if you can't get unemployment insurance, then you apply for SERP.

Erin Selby:

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If you and your family members are looking for work, we also have a list on our website, ufcw832.com of our unionized employers who are hiring right now. Because as well, we know that some of our members aren't working and other members are really busy and those employers are hiring.

Erin Selby:

If you've been laid off and you need help finding a job, UFCW members in Winnipeg can get free jobs support by calling opportunities for employment. Their website is ofe.ca. Or you can go to our website and we'll have a link there as well.

Erin Selby:

In the meantime, if you're looking to gain some new skills, you might want to check out UFCW's national program, webCampus. It's a free online learning site for UFCW members and your family. You could find out more about that on our national website, or you can go to ours as well and you'll see a link for web Campus.

Erin Selby:

There are hundreds of courses to choose from. You can choose from anything from workplace safety, labor history, computer skills, even some fun things like taking better pictures. So if you've got teenagers at home from school and they're spending a lot of time online, anyway, this could be a good resource for them to get a little bit of education while they're sitting at home. I know they're trying to do their homework online as well. But it might be an interesting thing for them to take a look at.

Erin Selby:

On a more serious note, this pandemic has been really hard on everyone. And if you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed out or even depressed, you can get free help through the Government of Manitoba website. There's a link on the provincial website, and we're going to make sure we have a link for you to be able to get to it. But if you do go to the Government of Manitoba COVID section, there is a link on how you can get some free online therapy.

Erin Selby:

If you or a family member are facing something more urgent in terms of mental health needs, there's also a number of links that will allow you to talk to somebody in person and give you some more urgent care.

Erin Selby:

Finally, I just want to say that things are tough right now and whether you're going to work or you're staying home, or you're looking for work, this is a pretty scary time that we're living in, but we're going to get through it. And eventually everything's going to look a little bit more normal and it might even warm up in Manitoba at some point. But in the meantime, please stay well.

Jeff Traeger:

Thanks for that, Erin. I appreciate it. All right. We have a bunch of people in the queue. We'll start with Kathy. Go ahead, Kathy. How are you doing by the way?

Kathy:

I'm doing good. Thank you. [crosstalk 00:46:16]. Yeah. My question to you is health and safety because I'm from Westfair and I work at the St. Anne's Store 1514 as my classification is a cashier. So a lot of times I work at [inaudible 00:46:33] and we have like six lanes on [inaudible 00:46:36]. At one time they were putting partitions up, but I refused to work there and some of the other girls did too, just because of our floor and stuff, and customers were tripping over them.

Kathy:

But I have been told by other people at other stores that those partitions are still up. I want to know why the difference between one store and another store.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. There shouldn't be any difference at all between those two stores. I had heard that. I had heard that they had done kind of like those office partitions, right? Like were cubicles or whatever goes up between the stations and then customers tripped and they removed them. So I thought they had removed them all. Do you know which other stores they're in? Because I can get our reps to follow up with Natasha from human resources and find out.

Jeff Traeger:

But one of the things we've been pushing very hard with Loblaw is to make sure that when they say that they've got a practice going, that it's consistent across all of their stores. You know how the store managers are sometimes, they sometimes will accidentally forget what one of the rules is so that they can get a few more customers in the store. You know how that works. So if you could let us know what story have you heard that the partitions are still up?

Kathy:

I can't remember what the girl told me. I'll ask her again which one it is, and I'll give you a call. But I just think that the health and safety meetings are not happening because I think they're just saying that, "We're busy." Or whatever, but I think it's very important for people to have their say about the health and safety. And we've got a lot of new workers. In our store alone, I think they hired 21 cashiers, new cashiers. That's a lot.

Jeff Traeger:

So I had heard. Yeah, it's absolutely a lot. What I'd actually heard from Loblaw is that they have hired 498 people in Manitoba and almost 15,000 nationwide. And so health and safety, as Marie said, as B. said, is an absolute priority for us. It's the most important thing. And especially when you've got a whole bunch of new employees, it's even more so. Now we're going to move on to our next caller. Go ahead, Tramenda.

Tramenda:

I'm good. I'm good. Just give me a second. I have this discussion about a few times. I [inaudible 00:49:08] for like nine years now. I always do evening shifts like closing shifts. And there is a shift premium of 65 cents for every 30 minutes if you have minimum 24 hours in a week, which I never have. So I'm suffering for last nine years and I've never maybe a few times, but I was to 24. So I've never got that premium. I raised this question before, last two [inaudible 00:49:36], but nothing was done.

Jeff Traeger:

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Well, it's not a matter of that nothing can be done. The unfortunate part, Tramenda is that's what your contract actually says. So you don't qualify for the premium of 65 cents until you've put in 24 hours. It's a good proposal though, for us to take to a bargaining the next time around, obviously that's something that we will put in our proposal package for the next round of bargaining. But there's nothing that we can do about it as far as that's concerned right at this time. So we'll go to Russell next. Go ahead, Russell.

Russell:

Hello, Jeff. How are you doing this evening?

Jeff Traeger:

I am doing well, Russell. How are you?

Russell:

Good. Thank you. My quick question is basically for all UFCW members out there, I'm kind of in a situation to where I've seen some stuff that probably shouldn't be happening. But anyway, I was just wondering if somebody were to call in sick, for example, even during this pandemic, can your employer require that you bring in a sick note saying that you don't have COVID so that your employer can't make yourself isolate for two weeks?

Russell:

Because I've been to some other shops around town here that have UFCW members and I've seen employees that probably shouldn't be at work that particular day, but I'm sure because with this pandemic, people are reluctant to call in sick because they're probably afraid their employer is going to send them home for two weeks. So can your employer make you bring a sick note saying that you're not COVID related?

Jeff Traeger:

Well, your employer certainly can make you bring a sick note, and your employer should be telling you that if you are sick, you shouldn't be coming to work. I think that's been made extremely clear. I know it might mean that you get sent home for two weeks, but the possible result of going to work is that you spread COVID-19 throughout your workplace. So I got to tell you, if anybody was asking UFCW that question, I'd say if you're sick, stay home. And yes, they do have the legal right to require a doctor's note.

Jeff Traeger:

And that is subject to some conditions under different collective agreements. You mentioned other UFCW workplaces, you work at Safeway, right?

Russell:

Yes.

Jeff Traeger:

So there's Loblaw workers in Brandon, people that work at Brandon Community Options, people at Maple Leaf, people at McKenzie Seeds, people at variety of different places where we have contracts.

And so I would hate to just say your employer can or can't do that. Some of that is dependent on what's in the collective agreement.

Jeff Traeger:

But certainly your employer does have the right to ask for that question. And if your employer does suspect that you have symptoms that look like COVID-19, they can also send you home.

Russell:

Okay. Thanks a lot.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. No problem, Russell. We're going to move to Kashif now. Go ahead, Kashif. Hello?

Kashif:

Hello, Jeff. How are you?

Jeff Traeger:

I am, well. How are you, sir?

Kashif:

I'm good. Actually, all the questions have already been raised. So I think there's nothing to ask now. Just a little question about the safety. At the site we don't have any gloves, sanitizer at work. We normally ask our contractor to provide that stuff. We're short of hand sanitizers and gloves and we didn't get anything.

Jeff Traeger:

What's your employer, Kashif?

Kashif:

Garda.

Jeff Traeger:

Garda, okay. So we'll get your union representative, Sandy Forcier to make a call to Garda tomorrow, and he'll give you a call back to let you know when you can expect to have hand sanitizer. I do know that it's in very short supply these days, so I imagine Garda is having trouble getting their hands on it. Okay. Our next caller is Debra. Go ahead, Debra.

Debra:

Hi. It's just a compliment. I contacted my union rep, got an immediate answer and some great follow-up and I know how hard it is when your reps are working from home. But the quality of response is just outstanding, Jeff. And you just need to hear that sometimes.

Jeff Traeger:

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Thank you so much, Debra. Thank you so much for that. That's wonderful. Yes. The group of union representatives that we have working for us both B., and Merissa they're doing an amazing job and I got to tell you they make me look good. So there you go. Thanks for that comment. Yeah. Thanks for that comment, Debra. Really nice to hear. Okay. Ashley is up next. Go ahead, Ashley.

Ashley:

I'm just wondering [inaudible 00:54:43] are so sparse, a few employees are having to take on different duties than they normally would. So I'm just wondering if they're allowed to refuse these duties and if they can lose hours, if they refuse them. Because a lot of them are not liking the things that they're having to do.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. You clipped out a little bit right at the beginning of the call there. Where did you say you worked at?

Ashley:

Safeway?

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, at Safeway? B. is nodding like crazy. So I'm going to flip that one to B. Go ahead.

Beatrice Bruske:

Yes. Hello. So definitely your employer can ask you to perform other duties than what you would normally be assigned. And of course it has to be within reason and they have to be safe duties. If you choose to refuse those duties, then yes, the employer does have the ability to send you home as long as they're doing it based on seniority and based on the scheduling in terms of who's the most junior person working that particular day.

Ashley:

Perfect. Thank you.

Beatrice Bruske:

You're welcome.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Thanks for calling in, Ashley. Elise, go ahead.

Elise:

Jeff, how are you doing? I'm calling from Neepawa, Manitoba. We so far have no cases that we know. We're doing pretty good down here. We're just wondering about the proper protocol inside. I work at Extra Foods grocery store. I'm actually a GM worker and I am a union rep also. I'm kind of confused on the proper protocol of the grocery store. We have masks and we've been provided masks, but the thing is our boss, I love the guy. He's a really good guy, and I think all our staff can stand behind him. He's done pretty good for social distancing, and putting every second till up there. He's been putting sanitizer, he has been providing gloves.

Elise:

But the thing is the masks, what I'm bringing up is, are we supposed to be wearing them every day because I've got one mask since this epidemic started and I haven't received any more?

Jeff Traeger:

What kind of mask is it though? Is it-

Elise:

The paper ones. So our workers are a little confused because we don't know if we're supposed to be wearing the mask 365 days out of the year, more or less or whatever. And we weren't offered a second one or a third one. He says that he's been keeping the masks in his office and then he's been sending them to the hospitals that need them and stuff like that. I'm just thinking if there's really a bad case down here or something does happen, we aren't going to have the supplies to provide our workers for a safe environment. So I thought somebody should have a heads up on that one.

Elise:

And then another thing is that we're grocery workers and there's 65 staff members on the floor. We're a Northern community. So the thing is, there's a lot of people that come in from the North. We have [inaudible 00:57:38], Easterville, Cranberry Portage, [inaudible 00:57:40], and stuff like that, when the roads are closed and we know the roads are closed, but they still come into the store and they shop that day, what is the proper protocol on that? We don't really know.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. All right, Elise. At least hang on. I got to come up for air for a second here and to let Marie try to tackle a couple of those issues. Go ahead, Marie.

Marie Buchan:

So with regards to any protocols, we don't want to speak about specifics for a store on the GMM, but one thing I would tell you is, going forward, don't wait for the GMMs. Make sure that you contact Joe, your union representative right away. And then you guys can have these conversations and discussions and he can make sure that he's looking into the specific issues for your workplace.

Marie Buchan:

The masks are not an absolute that you have to wear them, but they're recommended and you are supposed to be able to have them. If they're paper masks, you should have more than one. You shouldn't have to keep using them. But again, those are all things that you and Joe should discuss one-on-one. So we'll make sure that Joe gives you a call back to discuss.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. So now we're going to move on to Daniel. Daniel, go ahead.

Daniel:

Hey, Jeff. How's it going today?

Jeff Traeger:

Not bad. How are you doing?

Daniel:

Not bad. I'm a new union member. Just curious about all this COVID stuff and trying to protect family members and stuff. Great job. My union rep has been getting back to me with any questions in particular as I've had for him. But I was curious, I was injured recently in the last few months, and with all this COVID crap going on, he's been doing an awesome job, but I just wondered, is there any information you can give me or is there any way that we can look at, I guess beefing up priorities or... can't talk right now. WCB, because dealing with WCB and talking with my union rep, he was unable to, it sounded like he was unable to do a lot because he didn't want to get involved with WCB or couldn't.

Jeff Traeger:

Where do you work, Daniel?

Daniel:

I work at Pepsi in Winnipeg.

Jeff Traeger:

Pepsi in Winnipeg. Well, I tell you what? What I'm going to do is I think this is a kind of a real specific case, so I'm going to suggest that we get your union rep to get back to you. We'll follow up with your union rep tomorrow, have a discussion with them and then we'll get them to give you a call tomorrow.

Jeff Traeger:

We're going to move on to, we're getting really close to the end here. We're supposed to break right at eight o'clock. So I really only have time to take one more question. But what I will say is that for those of you that are still waiting in the queue and there's, I think seven of you, then we will have your full time union representative contact you tomorrow to find out what your question is, and we'll make sure that we get an answer for you, but we are limited to just over an hour or at an hour we're supposed to be off the call.

Jeff Traeger:

So I'm just going to take, Reginald, you are our last caller of the night. Go ahead.

Reginald:

Hi, Jeff. I work at Coke following Pepsi. Great.

Jeff Traeger:

There you go. Okay.

Reginald:

When are we expected to see our union rep start monthly visits again?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. I'm going to let Marie answer that because she's our Director of Operations and she oversees all the servicing reps. Go ahead, Marie.

Marie Buchan:

Right now we have limited the servicing reps from entering into any of the workplaces for a couple of reasons. Number one, is for the health and safety of our union reps. The second one, is that a lot of the workplaces have put protocols in place where they're not allowing any outside visitors to come in. So we will be assessing it on a weekly basis, monthly basis.

Marie Buchan:

In the meantime, we are still servicing. We're just not physically being in the workplace to service. So if you want to have some discussions with your union representative, you can definitely call or email or text. If there's groups of people that want to talk and have meetings, we've been able to do different Telephone Town Halls or Zoom conference calls. Just get in contact with your union rep and they should be able to figure something out for you.

Reginald:

Sorry. My concern was that they limit people coming into the workplace, but we still have third party fixing, overhead doors, we have exterminators come in, we have people coming and doing [inaudible 01:02:42], and we're essential services. So we're supposed to be a safe work site. So why wouldn't our union rep come to a safe workplace?

Marie Buchan:

Right, and again, it's about taking care of the number of people that are there and we don't want to add to the problem. We want to make sure that people are physical distancing. It's very different from having someone come in and complete maintenance on a workplace where it's necessary versus a union rep coming in. And our goal is a servicing rep, when you walk into the workplace is to walk up to people and have one-on-one conversations with them.

Marie Buchan:

If I need to have a conversation with someone it's of a confidential matter about something, I'm not going to stand six feet apart from them and yell about a personal issue. So it doesn't make sense to do the physical servicing at this time. However, there are various ways that you can definitely get in contact with your rep and that we are still here for you and available.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. And you have to remember that we also have 127 workplaces. And some of those, like one of those would be Safeway with 22 different locations. So the possibility if one of our reps was to be out doing regular servicing visits all over the city and they contracted COVID, they could be spreading it to all these different workplaces.

Jeff Traeger:

So we have to balance off the need to service our members with the need for public safety. And I'm pretty sure that whatever issues are happening at Coke, we can deal with without having to necessarily be physically in the building. It's certainly not our intention to do that for a very long time. And plus we

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are an employer, so we have to be careful about exposing our staff to COVID through multiple contacts out there as well.

Jeff Traeger:

Just a reminder, if you were one of the four or five people that was waiting for your question to be asked, we will have your full time union representative contact you soon to answer your question.

Jeff Traeger:

I want to thank all of you for joining us on our Spring Telephone Town Hall General Membership meeting. We will be conducting our next GMM on Tuesday, September the 15th, 2020 by Telephone Town Hall as well, beginning at 7:00 PM, unless Sharon gets her way and we begin at 6:40. That's all. Have a good night everyone. We are adjourned.