



The Closing of St. Mary's Hospital *Editorial Comment*

When the Liberal Government was elected in 2001, the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO) congratulated the Premier by letter and pointed out the huge responsibility his government had taken on particularly with the deterioration of our health care system. The Premier himself stated in his "New Era for BC" election campaign document the following:

"It's time to put patient care first. To do that, we must renew public health care, through better management, adequate funding, proper staffing and sound strategic planning."

COSCO, at the time of the election, was concerned about the deterioration of our Health Care System both at the Federal Level and provincially, under the NDP government. The cuts to home care for seniors had become a major issue between COSCO and the previous provincial government. We stated publicly that we would support changes and improvements to health care and social programs beneficial to seniors that the new Liberal Government introduced and would oppose any cuts or changes that adversely affected us. **To date, we are not aware of any beneficial changes or improvements to support.**

The current move by our government to close St. Mary's Hospital in New Westminster at a time when waiting lists are growing, all of our other hospitals are barely coping because of staff shortages, closed beds and chronic under funding, makes no sense whatsoever. This directly contradicts the government's and the premier's statement that patient care must come first. We are at a complete loss to understand the closure of St. Mary's Hospital at this time. As a result, COSCO has joined with Seniors of Guard for Medicare in the Coalition to help save St. Mary's Hospital. We will continue to work with the coalition to try to save the hospital because we firmly believe that no hospital should be closed at a time when we are faced with a growing population in this province and waiting lists for surgery continue to lengthen.

The Provincial Government has their priorities wrong! They should be ashamed that they are closing St. Mary's and ashamed of the long list of other cuts which have already been made to our health care system contrary to their ***New Era election promises.***

COSCO continues to grow in strength as we now have 50 seniors organizations under our umbrella, up from the 31 at the time of 2001 election. More seniors are speaking out. Our President was in Vernon, BC in November to speak to a group of over 200 seniors from various parts of the interior. People are coming together regardless of political persuasion to form a common bond to help each other stand up for seniors' concerns and especially our deteriorating health care system. That Vernon meeting fitted COSCO'S plans to expand its operations Province wide. We are currently working with a number of groups in various parts of the Province to assist in the formation of COSCO chapters in their area.

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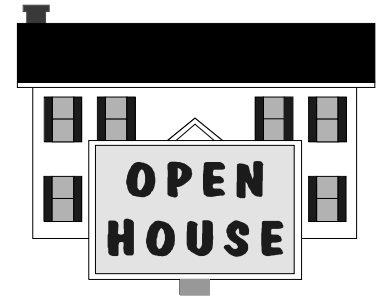
HOME OWNERS GRANT

With the surge in real estate values lately the assessment notices mailed to home owners in January 2004 have come as a shock to many seniors. With houses now valued at more than \$525,000 the home owner grant begins to diminish, until at \$575,000 it vanishes completely.

Seniors who purchased homes forty and fifty years ago are in shock. Asset rich and income poor, the lack of a home owner grant will cause much hardship.

Rudy Lawrence, president of COSCO, spoke out in an interview with the Vancouver Sun. "It's starting to hit close to home," he said. "Seniors have already been hit by reduced pharmacare benefits and higher medical premiums in the past three years. Seniors don't have the resources to go back into the work force and find more money."

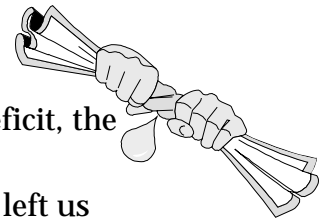
Assessments may be challenged but the time line is short.



Our continued thanks to the BCRTA provincial office staff for assistance in producing this newsletter and to Silver Harbour for assistance in assembling it.

COSCO will be hosting the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation AGM in the fall of 2004

PROMISES....PROMISES



Tax cuts will pay for themselves

- We have a \$3.5 Billion budget deficit, the largest in BC History

More money in our pockets

- All the tax and fee increases have left us with less spending money.

Create a new era of prosperity

- The debt and deficit have increased. BC is now the slowest growing province, economically.

The most dramatic tax cuts will go to those making less than \$60,000

- The richest 5% of British Columbians received 40% of all the tax cut money

The minimum wage will not be reduced.

- A “training wage” that is \$2 *BELOW* the minimum wage is introduced.

Youth unemployment will be reduced

- Youth unemployment rate higher than before the election.

Health care will NOT be cut



- Hospitals closed, beds cut, long term care facilities cut, nurses and health care workers laid off, services privatized, and 250,000 people pay more for Pharmacare.

Waiting lists for surgery to be reduced

- Waiting lists are up by 42% since the election.

BC will live up to the standards of the Health Care Act

- BC is being investigated for more health care violations than any other province.

Home care service for seniors and the chronically ill to be expanded

- Workers and visits cut, leaving frail and elderly people alone for up to a week at a time.

Health care services will NOT be privatized

- Millions of dollars worth of important Services have been turned over to the Private sector.

The education system will NOT be cut

- Schools have been closed, class sizes increased, programs eliminated and teachers laid off.

Legally negotiated and signed labour Contracts will not be torn up

- That is **EXACTLY** what happened.

There will be responsible, accountable management of our tax dollars

- Millions of dollars have been wasted on dubious pet projects.

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Money will NOT be spent on unnecessary advertising and self promotion

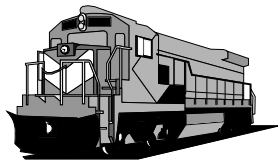
Public service will be non-partisan

This will be the most open and accountable government in Canada

BC Hydro and its core assets would be protected

Our environment would be protected

BC Rail will NOT be sold



Public Services will not be cut

Costs will not be downloaded onto Municipalities

Childrens' needs would be adequately Funded

Social Assistance will not be cut

Gambling will not be expanded

- Almost a million dollars has been spent trying to put a better spin on reckless health care and Pharmacare promotion with newspaper and television advertising, and a brochure mailed to all households.

- Friends and insiders were hired for plum jobs with big salaries.

- The offices of the Ombudsman, the Information and Privacy Commissioner and Elections BC were either shut down or had funding reduced. The flow of information to the public was restricted, and there was no consultation with the citizens.

- BC Hydro was broken up and secret deals Were made to privatize 1/3rd of operations.

- Air and water quality protection was cut, the Fish farm issue was mishandled, the Forest Practices Code was gutted and the creation of protected areas was threatened with cancellation.

- BC Rail is now CN rail, although BC still owns the track and the right of way.

- The largest cuts to public services in Canadian history have begun. Programs have been slashed by 25% affecting vital services from child care to wild life protection.

- Increased costs for policing, jails, drinking water, access to justice, public transport and MSP premiums were passed to municipalities. Some parents are being urged to “buy” their own schools.

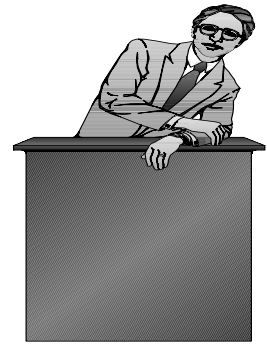
- \$490 million was cut from the budget of the Ministry of Child and Family Development. The office of the Child, Youth and Family advocate was eliminated.

- Social service benefits were cut and it was harder to qualify. The disabled had to fill out a 27 page document to ensure they met the criteria for assistance. In April, many welfare recipients will lose their allowances.

- Gambling revenue is expected to increase significantly, putting charities and communities into turmoil.

This information is taken from the website of radio broadcaster Rafe Mair and first printed in the newsletter of the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Retirees Assn.

Highlights of 2003 COSCO Activities



January:

President in Toronto for meetings regarding seniors issues at the Federal level.

Lobbied Ottawa for the full and immediate implementation of the Romanow Report recommendations.

February:

Met with the Mayor and Vancouver City Council regarding seniors reaction to the 2010 Winter Olympics.

COSCO participated in the Peace March at the Canadian/US border.

Member Pat Brady attended Government Budget lockup in Victoria, BC on behalf of COSCO.

COSCO lead seniors rally in front of the Legislative Buildings in Victoria, BC

Member Arthur Broomhall attended a meeting on behalf of COSCO regarding the "End of Life" workshop put on by the Provincial Government.

Second Vice-President spoke to a seniors group in North Vancouver on seniors issues.

March:

Attendance at meetings regarding the formation of a Co-op Pharmacy.

President on the Bill Good radio show and CBC radio regarding the means test for Pharmacare.

President speaks to Parkgate Seniors in North Vancouver, regarding Pharmacare changes.

President speaks to the Executive of the BC Government Retired Employees' Association.

President had an article on BC Hydro in the spring issue of the *COSTCO* magazine.

President met Rick Hansen and established an informal understanding that COSCO would support his Man In Motion fund raising campaigns.

April:

President interviewed on Fort St. John radio, CBC radio, CKWX radio, North Shore News and BCTV.

Successfully lobbied Ottawa for a review of the Patented Medicine regulations under the "Notice of Compliance Regulations".

May:

President attended the National Seniors' Forum on Health and the Congress of National Seniors' Organizations in Ottawa.

COSCO participates in BC Health Coalition health forum in Vancouver.

June:

COSCO makes changes to its by-laws to allow for the expansion of the organization.

President and Second Vice-President speak at the BC OAPO convention in Parksville, BC

First Vice-President and COSCO members at the Save the Coquihalla rally on the highway.

COSCO in attendance at the BC Citizens for Public Power meeting at the Vancouver Public Library with former Premiers Dave Barrett and Bill Vanderzalm.

July:

President interviewed by the Georgia Straight newspaper and Fort St. John radio.

September:

COSCO participates in Save BC Rail rally in North Vancouver, BC

President interviewed on CO-OP radio.

President in Ottawa for meetings regarding problems for seniors with filing income tax returns.

President in Gander Nfdl for National Pensioners Annual Convention.

First Vice-President participates in Labour Day Rally.

Director Addie Derby represents COSCO at the BC Retired Teachers AGM.

June Jensen represents COSCO at BCEAS meeting at the South Granville Seniors Centre.

President quoted on the front page of the Victoria Times Colonist opposing Autoplan premium increases for seniors.

COSCO participates in planning meeting with the 411 Seniors Centre for another Seniors' Summit in 2004.

COSCO becomes an active member of the new "Pharmacare Watch."

October:

COSCO holds a successful Health Conference for Seniors in Richmond with over 400 seniors in attendance.

President speaks to a component of the BC Nurses Union in Burnaby,

COSCO has an information table at the BCGEU convention and the President attends the meetings.

COSCO attends the City of North Vancouver Council meeting to hear Minister Katherine Whittred speak about "Assisted Living."

President and First Vice-President address the AGM of the BCGREA.

COSCO with Seniors on Guard for Medicare interview patients at the Pearson Centre on the impact on them as a result of the privatization of hospital security and support staff.

November:

COSCO joins with Seniors on Guard for Medicare and others in coalition to save St. Mary's Hospital, both financially and by attending and speaking at public meetings.

President addresses over 200 seniors in Vernon, BC regarding the impact on seniors of the numerous cuts and changes to health care in our Province.

President & First Vice-President attend the BC Federation of Labour Convention in Vancouver.

President back in Toronto for meetings regarding seniors' issues at the Federal level in late November and early December.

December:

First Vice-President attends BC Ferry strike to show support from COSCO for ferry employees.

President addresses the Surrey Component of the BC Nurses Union.

Other

First Vice-President involved in meetings on seniors' health and housing throughout the year.

Second Vice-President involved in meetings throughout the year with BC Health Coalition.

A very special thanks to our members who answered the call to show up at public rallies and meetings or did background work from home such as phoning etc. to support the COSCO Executive and all of our seniors.

FIVE POINT PLAN FOR DRUG COST SAVING



Canadian Generic drug makers have unveiled a five point plan to save Canada's health care system hundreds of millions of dollars annually in the cost of prescription medicines.

Proposal One: Eliminating the Automatic Injunction under the Patented Medicines (Notice of Compliance) Regulations of Canada's Patent act to stop legal battles that keep generic drugs off the market even after original 20-year patents expire.

Proposal Two: Increasing resources at Health Canada to reduce the time needed to properly review generic pharmaceutical products.

Proposal Three: Shortening the time it takes for the provinces to add generic drugs to their drug-plan formularies after they have been approved by Health Canada.

Proposal Four: Instituting Off-Formulary Interchangeability in Ontario to allow easier access to less-costly prescription drugs for employer-sponsored drug plans and those Ontarians who pay for prescriptions out of pocket

Proposal Five: Eliminating Quebec's 15-year rule to take full advantage of the cost savings from generic drugs.

The leading source for prescription drug sales data, IMS health, shows that between 1997 and 2003, spending on prescription drugs in Canada rose from \$6.8 billion to approximately \$14 billion. Most health care experts believe it is a trend that will continue to grow as the population ages, as expensive new medicines replace existing ones, and as drug treatments form a larger part of patient care. Will Canada's generic drug makers be allowed to meet the demand, deliver billions of dollars in savings and make their full contribution to the country's health-care system and its economy?

For more information visit www.canadiangenerics.ca

SNAPSHOT OF BC

(From an Editorial which appeared in the Vancouver Sun, January 5th 2004)

The third annual benchmarking report of the Progress Board shows that there has not been much progress on economic fronts. If anything BC has lost ground against other provinces. We dropped from sixth to seventh in employment while ranking eighth out of ten in economic growth in 2002 compared to the other provinces. The long term view is even worse. Between 1982 and 2001 BC ranked 29th out of 32 when compared to OECD jurisdictions. Despite this comparative lack of economic growth British Columbians still have the third highest standard of living in Canada based on disposable income. The bad news is that over the last decade, BC has been dead last in the growth of disposable income. BC is ninth in the country in terms of the percentage of the population that is under Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoff, which is a measure of relative poverty.

The Progress Board Report shows how far we have to go on the economic and social fronts and how little progress has been made so far.



So much for subsidized housing, or seniors' living accommodations.

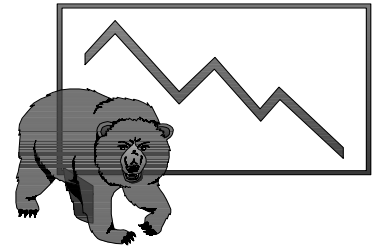
The Provincial Government has sold most of the historic Woodlands property in new Westminster to ONNI Development Capital Corporation for \$18.3 million for a housing development, a BC Buildings Corporation official confirmed Monday January 5th.

Onni will convert 20 hectares into about 1,300 townhouses and condominium units. BCBC will retain ownership of 2.5 hectares on which the Queens Park Care Hospital, currently leased to the Fraser Health Authority for a seniors' facility, is located; and a one hectare cemetery which will be turned into a memorial and landscaped by BCBC in 2004.

NO GOLD IN GOLDEN YEARS

See yourself frolicking on winter getaways and pursuing hobbies in your golden years?

Well a Decima Research poll for the Investors Group mutual fund organization found that only 30 per cent of retired respondents said they escape the worst of winter, while just 35 per cent said they pursue their hobbies to any significant extent. Just 38 percent said they enjoy life more than before they retired, while 15 per cent are unhappier than when they were working full time. Unsurprisingly, retirees who report enjoying life are likely to have substantial savings and significant pension income.



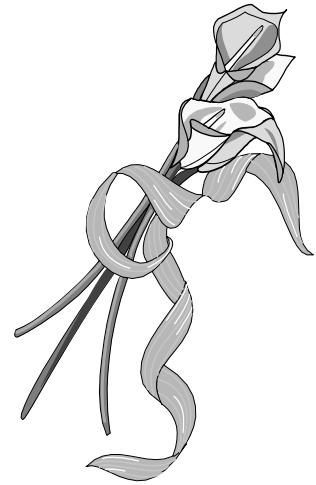
CAN YOU HELP?

B.C. Cancer Agency is looking for volunteers for a study which will require ninety minutes of interviews, and a blood sample. The purpose of the study is to understand how inherited genetic factors contribute to long term good health and freedom from age associated diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular disease.

For this reason volunteers must be over age 85, have NEVER been diagnosed with cancer, Heart disease, Stroke, Pulmonary disease, Diabetes or Alzheimer's disease and must live in the lower mainland, experiencing a good quality of life. If you fit the description or know of somebody who does, this would be a great way to help the BC Cancer Agency with its research. Call Lisa Oliveira at 604 707 5967 for more information on the "Study of Healthy Aging".



MEMORIAL SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



The Memorial Society of BC, the original not-for-profit memorial society has been serving BC since 1956.

A simple, dignified and low cost funeral is available to members in various locations in BC as the society contracts with selected funeral providers to provide services to members at costs that are 15-45% less than those charged to non-members.

Members, family or executors are able to take advantage of additional support services and information to help with making arrangements at time of death.

A lifetime membership costs just \$20 and a small additional charge of \$35 is collected at the time of death for records administration.

Society staff and volunteers are working on various initiatives in order to provide even more services to members and one such project is a Green Burial, which emphasizes environmental preservation and continuation.

For more information about membership or Green Burial, and to book a speaker for the lower mainland and some parts of Vancouver Island contact the Society at

212 -1847 West Broadway, Vancouver BC V6J 1Y6 604 733 7705 of 1 888 816 5902

memsocnw@telus.net www.memorialsocietybc.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (TO BE MAILED TO THE ADDRESS BELOW)

I wish to join COSCO as an associate member and I enclose a \$25 membership fee ____

I wish to make a donation to COSCO - please find enclosed a cheque for \$ ____

Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____ Telephone _____

Date _____ Signature _____

Please make cheque payable to **COUNCIL OF SENIOR CITIZEN'S ORGANIZATIONS OF BC**
and send to

Ernie Bayer (Membership Secretary)

6079 184 A Street

Surrey, BC V3S 7P7

Phone 604 576 9734

Seniors' Organizations wishing information about joining COSCO should
write or phone Ernie Bayer.