



COSCO NEWS

Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC
www.coscobc.ca

Number #67

Fourth Quarter 2007

TORY MINI BUDGET – AN OPPORTUNITY LOST!

Editorial

The recent Tory budget shows again, very clearly, that the Harper Government is not only heartless but economically incompetent. The announced tax reductions continue to favor the well-off and the corporations. COSCO, through the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation, has asked the Harper Government to increase the Income Supplement to help alleviate the great amount of poverty among seniors, especially among widowed or single women. Harper's largesse is based on the Fraser Institute's ridiculous assumption that the poor have too much and the rich not enough. The statistics that prove the income gap between the rich and the poor is widening do not seem to fizzle on this government.

The announced further reduction of corporate taxes does not make any sense. Canada's corporate taxes are already the lowest in the industrialized world and if anything they should be increased to reflect the corporate taxes paid by our major trading partners. The reduction in the sales tax is chided by most economists. A reduction in the general income tax rate would have made more sense, especially if it had been done in a way where greater progressivity could be built into the tax system.

It is not too often that Canada experiences a 16 Billion dollar surplus! Let's make it clear that this surplus has nothing to do with the way the Harper Government manages the economy, but everything to do with the world's high energy and commodity prices. This windfall could have provided Canada with the great opportunity to renew our crumbling Infrastructure and to move in a major way to deal with the environment. Retrofitting our industrial, commercial and residential buildings, cleaning our lakes, rivers and streams and investing in alternate energy sources and public transportation would have been positive moves. On the social side Canada still has to spend an additional two billion dollars a year to implement reforms in our healthcare system so as to eliminate wait times and fill some gaps. A national PharmaCare program would be a start. As stated earlier, poverty still plagues many Canadians. How can a government with such a huge surplus stand idly by and ignore the plight of those less fortunate among us?

Reports out of Western Europe indicate massive investments by government in Infrastructure, in cleaning up the environment, in research and development. All these actions are leading Europe out of a long recession, and bringing it into compliance with the Kyoto Accord. Yes, the Harper Government has failed miserably in not using our windfall surplus to rebuild Canada's Infrastructure, to meet our obligation under Kyoto, to invest in education and research and fill the widening gaps in our social programs. Lets hope the opposition has enough intestinal fortitude to oppose the direction in which the Harper Government is leading our country, even if it means defeating it.

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**STEPS TOWARDS A STRONG
NATIONAL SENIORS
ORGANIZATION**

Delegates at the last COSCO meeting voted to re-affiliate to the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation (NPSCF) and also to affiliate to the Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC). This action occurred as a result of the NPSCF Convention electing a majority of reform minded Executives (Art Kube is among them), who are committed to reform the organization in line with the recommendations made by COSCO delegates at a previous NPSCF convention. Our affiliation to the CPC came as a result of discussions that COSCO representatives had with CPC representatives at their last convention. As reported in previous issues of the COSCO NEWS we would like to see a merger between the NPSCF and the CPC into one strong national seniors' organization capable of a strong voice for seniors nationally. We would urge all COSCO Affiliates to affiliate to the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation, so we can successfully complete the necessary reforms to bring about one strong national organization. COSCO delegates voted to invite the NPSCF to hold their next convention in BC, and this likely will happen.

*PLEASE FEEL FREE TO
PHOTOCOPY YOUR COSCO
NEWS AND PASS ALONG
TO OTHERS WHO MAY BE
INTERESTED*

Worried about memory lapse? Now you can forget about it

By Michele Hanson

Fabulous news; our little memory lapses, known as “seniors moments,” are not senior any more, they are at any age. They are even hip, with a Homer Simpson name-”D’oh moments”-and are nothing to do with gender or intelligence, either, but everything to do with stress and busy lives.

They happen up to 30 times a week, and to anyone. Thank you so much, Finnish researcher Maria Jonsdottir and your team of psychologists, for these revelations. What a relief for us older persons who have, until now, been mocked and assumed to be losing our marbles.

We even believed it ourselves, it happens so often. I listen to my answering machine messages, I press delete, the messages have gone, but so has the memory, within seconds. Same with call-waiting. Who called? Who did I promise to ring back? Haven’t a clue. I decided to look up a word in the dictionary. By the time I get to the bookshelf, I’ve forgotten the word.

But it doesn’t matter any more, because the darling Ms. Jonsdottir says so. The brain is at fault, says she, but there’s nothing wrong with the brain. To her, memory loss isn’t a sign of decrepitude, it’s just a normal “storage failure” or “action slip.” (I do love Ms. Jondottir’s heavenly new technology.) And it’s on the increase because of our lifestyles and high levels of stress.

Perhaps all this will silence those show-offs with perfect recall, who are always banging on about my memory and taking lapses personally. Rosemary thinks my memory ought to retain details of her week’s schedule; my mother used to think it should remember whether she wanted a cup of tea or not; and numerous others think it should remember their names and birthdays. Or that I should have told them such and such a thing, because I’d told everyone else, and I’d even told some people twice, because I can’t remember who I’ve told what to and probably thought I’ve told them already.

All these people have been insulted by my “storage failure.” To them, it was a personal slight – a subconscious truth surfacing. They are sure I didn’t remember them because I didn’t really love them, was not interested in their lives, and couldn’t be bothered to pay attention.

Well, think again, you people. Why would one do such a thing on purpose? It was just an “action.”

I think I have written about this before. But did I? Can’t remember.

(Michele Hanson writes a humor column – My Two Cents – for the (UK)Guardian Weekly, where this piece first appeared.)

COSCO has a website.
www.coscobc.ca
**Please check it out for past issues
of the COSCO NEWS,
and senior-related issues.**

Minister locks eyes with Campbell, Premier blinks

Vaughn Palmer, Vancouver Sun, Nov. 1st/07

VICTORIA- Early September, just after Labour Day, and the B.C. Liberals are holding a big caucus at Harrison Hot Springs. The agenda was intended to provide a look ahead at policy development and proposals for the fall and spring sessions of the legislature. Heavy on the briefings, Premier Campbell loves briefings and he sets the tone at these things, sometimes (see below) to the near – exclusion of everyone else. But on that particular day, Health Minister George Abbott was holding the floor, giving his fellow B.C. Liberal MLA's a rundown on the conversation on health.

Abbott had been involved deeply in the landmark consultation – 16 regional forums, another 60 meetings with interest groups, thousands of written submissions – for the better part of a year. He and the ministry staff had heard many ideas for improving the system.

People wanted government to promote healthier lifestyles and practice more preventive medicine. There were calls for holistic care, integrated care for addicts and the mentally ill, more support and training so families could look after the sick and elderly at home. There was support for bulk-booking of certain types of surgery to reduce wait times, like the experiments with hip and knee replacements. And support, too, for expanded training for and use of health professionals, nurse practitioners and the like.

But Abbott was not in the position to relay many calls for radical change. British Columbians want to build on the current system, not replace it with a different model. Most of the Liberal ministers and backbenchers, if they'd been paying attention

to the feedback from their own communities, can't have been all that surprised at Abbott's summary of the conversation. But one of them did take issue. And as the briefing unfolded he started ragging Abbott, challenging him on some points, offering contrary views on others. As you probably guessed by now, the challenger was the premier himself, Gordon Campbell. Starting with the 2006 speech from the throne, he has been promoting a switch to a "mixed health care delivery model," with more emphasis on privately run (though still publicly funded) services. He was looking for a more ambitious input from the conversation. But the tone of his comments also led observers to conclude that he was unhappy with messenger Abbott.

It's a side of Campbell that is rarely on display in public and only occasionally in private. There were hints of it during those open cabinet meetings in the Liberals' first term. A couple of times Campbell laid into ministers publicly as he sometimes does privately, leading to speculation that he had momentarily forgotten that the cameras were present and the meeting was open. Most of the Liberals are familiar with the premier's bad days, when he pours out his frustration on those around him

Abbott, an 11-year veteran of the Campbell caucus and cabinet, put up with the interruptions for a while, but then something extraordinary happened. The health minister looked up from his notes, looked the premier in the eye, and asked if he wanted to take over the briefing. Intake of breath all around the room. Nobody could recall a minister having spoken to the premier that way, least ways not in front of so many others. How dare he? But Abbott has been through a lot on the

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health file. Not just the never-ending conversation, but day in and day out in the political arena, fielding questions about the biggest, most complex ministry in government.

He's built respect among his colleagues for the way he handles the partisan stuff in the house and the interest groups outside. He probably figured he'd taken enough – four letter word beginning with “s” –for the government in public, without also having to take it there in the caucus room, simply for delivering the straight goods to a boss who wasn't getting the answers he wanted. The health minister's push back had an immediate effect. The premier quieted down. Abbott was able to finish his briefing.

Not many stories leak out of the B.C. Liberal caucus room, but this one did. The Liberals have told and retold it, partly as a disparaging comment on the boss's dark side, partly out of admiration for a minister who dared stand up to him. But of course that wasn't the end of it. Abbott survives as minister of health for now at least. He's working on a summary report, intended for public consumption, on what he and the ministry learned from the conversation on health. But he is still under pressure to reconcile what he heard with Campbell's expectations, a challenge no less daunting now than it was that day in the caucus room.
THE LESSON OF THIS STORY IS THAT YOU CAN'T TRUST GORDON CAMPBELL TO PROTECT MEDICARE OR ENHANCE MEDICARE-PERIOD

COSCO MEETING WITH BC MINISTRY OF HEALTH A SUCCESS

A COSCO delegation composed of Art Kube, Sheila Pither, Sylvia MacLeay, Jean Sickman and our UBC Advisor Dr. Garnet Grosjean met with Assistant Deputy Minister Andrew Hazelwood and his staff to discuss COSCO's Health Literacy Program. This meeting was the most cordial and successful meeting COSCO has had with government representatives in the last six years. Andrew Hazelwood and his staff expressed strong support for COSCO's Health Promotion and Illness and Accident Prevention workshops, to the extent of inviting us to submit a funding proposal for the second stage of our program. Hazelwood and his staff were well briefed on our work dealing with seniors' health. Since the meeting we have been contacted by his staff inquiring as to the state of our funding application. In addition the Ministry has provided us with a good supply of food guides for seniors which we have already started to distribute. All in all it was a good beginning for our future dealings with the BC Ministry of Health.

COSCO'S HEALTH LITERACY PROGRAM, OFF TO A GOOD START

The COSCO Health Literacy Program is off to a flying start. COSCO volunteers have presented the Fall Prevention Program to over three hundred seniors. Our hardworking Treasurer Sheila Pither has completed the rewriting of five modules for health promotion and Illness and Accident Prevention. These are; Fall Prevention, Healthy Eating for Seniors, Safety in the Home, Prevention of Elder Abuse, and Medication Awareness for Seniors. In conjunction with expertise and help from S.F.U. and U.B.C. we have now completed two five day training sessions for 22 Instructor/Regional Coordinators. These Instructor/ Coordinators in turn will coordinate the delivery of workshops in their regions and facilitate the training of more resource people who will be able to offer the different modules to different seniors' groups. If you know of a seniors group interested in having a presentation of one of these modules, or if you wish to volunteer to help in this program, please contact one of the coordinators in your vicinity. They are:

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Help us to bring about new directions in Health Care! Help us to inform our fellow seniors of ways to promote and protect their health and to avoid accidents, therefore extending and expanding their quality of life. Participate in the highly satisfying volunteer work of “SENIORS HELPING SENIORS”.

Oh she’s young for her age! Isn’t Granny cute?

by Gudrun Langolf

What kind of mindset or conditioning allows otherwise smart adult grandchildren to say these things about a grandmother? Somehow a chronological fact diminishes another human being, albeit a senior? The grandchild, my bright niece, meant no disrespect or harm to my mother. I would go as far as saying that she loves her dearly. My mother is a mature woman who happens to be 83, survived wars and economic depression, raised 6 children mostly on her own, travelled from her homeland to distant lands twice to finally make her home in Canada, lives independently, still pays taxes, takes care of her business and drives herself to places she needs to get to.

Our North American culture seems to equate aging with decrepitude and another opportunity for marketing and profit-making. Of course aging bodies will have some significant changes but it isn’t necessarily pathology or disease! Seniors as a group are no more homogenous than the rest of the population. We are married, single, widowed, divorced, male, female, gay, straight, bi, rich, poor and everything in between. We enjoy good health and suffer from poor health, we enjoy having a good time, social interaction and some are loners. A number of us live on the street, many rent, while others can afford mansions. The only thing we have all in common is advancing years...

We are members of all kinds of cultural or ethnic groupings, political parties and socio-economic categories. We continue to make significant contributions to our society. Why then are elders only consulted by political parties when election time rolls around or when we can help provide some political pressure?

Let us “un-condition” ourselves first. Let’s question the stereotypes. Let us pay attention to the words we use to describe ourselves and/or others.

Let’s make our economic conditions (that includes the environment) our priority not simply for future generations but it is the right thing to do for OURSELVES! It is OUR world – not some mythical “theirs”.

Recommended reading in your library: Learning to Be Old; Gender, Culture, and Aging by Margaret Cruikshank

Watch for a future book review of John Calverts Liquid Gold and Maude Barlows Blue Covenant

WATCH OUT – for yourself, that is!

by Sheila Gair

Not all COSCO members are going to be able to take advantage of the workshops which have been planned to make sure seniors stay safe and well in their own homes for as long as possible. A few simple inexpensive fixes, from lowering the temperature of the water heater to getting brighter light bulbs can go a long way to minimize the risk of accidents. Here are more ideas which may jog you into action and keep you safe and well.

THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE.

- put a night light in every room, near floor level
- get rid of small scatter rugs or back them with non skid fabric
- put handrails on both sides of all steps/stairs
- frosted bulbs and dimmers can reduce glare near stairs
- try not to use extension cords
- install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and if deaf get the ones with strobe lights
- levers are easier to use than door knobs or taps
- buy a small two step, sturdy stool for those hard to reach items
- invest in a phone with very large numbers
- take in your mail and papers every day

ENTRYWAY

- have a porch light bright enough to illuminate your entry, and replace when burned out
- have somewhere to rest packages when you use your key to open the door
- install a peephole at eyelevel and have a chain and deadbolt

BEDROOM

- place a lamp and phone within arms reach. Blockwatch suggests you keep your car keys beside you, if you have an alarm that can be activated with a clicker
- move clothing rods so you can reach them easily, and install lights in closets

BATHROOMS

- have grab bars installed for the tub and the toilet
- use a non-skid mat in the tub
- a hand held shower, and small stool can make showering easier
- use plastic containers in the bathroom
- make sure medicines are labelled clearly, and use those divided boxes for the days of the week if memory is failing
- take unused prescriptions back to the pharmacy

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(cont.)

KITCHEN

- **drawer pulls are easier than knobs**
- **keep well used items close at hand**
- **store heavy things at a lower level**
- **clean up breakages and spills right away**
- **buy a small fire extinguisher and keep it handy**

IN GENERAL

- **get to know your neighbours**
 - **tell people when you are going to be away**
 - **drive defensively and always wear a seat belt**
 - **be aware of what is going on in your neighbourhood, your city and around the world**
- Enjoy your retirement and senior status – you have earned it!**

THIS YEAR'S ELDER LAW CONFERENCE A DEFINITE IMPROVEMENT

This years Elder Law Conference was a definite improvement over previous conferences. Not only were seniors' organizations represented at the conference but they also had strong input. The major topic was Elder Abuse, which was still addressing the after effects of abuse rather than its prevention. There was some demand from seniors to incorporate zero tolerance in Elder Law. We must thank Laura Watts for having the registration fee reduced for non-profit organizations. In talking to some seniors' representatives from Ontario they informed us that the Ontario Government paid for their registration fees and their expenses coming to the conference. The mix of representatives from different countries pointed out many differences in the approach to Elder Law. Many of the services seniors need require the use of lawyers and health consultants in the United States but are free in Canada and delivered through our health care. All in all it was a worthwhile conference and COSCO should continue participating in the future.

Exxon mutiny?

Is the world's dirtiest oil company facing a mutiny? In May, Exxon-Mobil investors owning more than 100 million of the company's shares, joined forces to oppose the reappointment of board member Michael Boskit because of his denial of climate change.

A month later, 31% of Exxon's shareholders voted in favour of a resolution to force the corporation to set greenhouse gas emission targets for its products and operations.

Exxon has recently been forced to admit the realities of global warming and revise its funding of self-styled think-tanks that have been denying climate change and trying to undermine climate science.

—*The Ecologist*

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 cheque for \$ ____

Name _____

Address _____

Postal Code _____ Phone _____ Fax _____

Email address _____

Date _____ Signature _____

**Please make cheque payable to COSCO and send to: Ernie Bayer, Membership Sec.
6079 184 A Street, Surrey, BC. V3S 7P7 (604 576 9734)**

Seniors' Groups or organizations wishing information about joining COSCO should write or phone Ernie Bayer and request a membership package.