



Editorial: BC budget sets the wrong priorities for difficult times

The recent provincial budget shows that the government is out of touch with British Columbians. Almost \$400 million for a new roof for BC Place, but not a single cent for seniors' income based housing, to put a roof over a homeless senior's head.

Housing sham

The whole promise to do something about social housing is a sham, seeing that the budget for the BC Housing Authority which is the province's social housing agency had its budget reduced by \$91million.

What we have seen however is continuing massive spending on massive slow starting infrastructure and other projects of questionable value, like the \$6 billion and counting for the 2010 Winter Games. For \$6 billion we could have build 20,000 social housing units. That would have helped people find a home – and it would have provided much more of an economic stimulus than the winter games can ever provide.

The budget also clearly shows that the province is not

serious about gang violence. It reduced the budgets for crown prosecutors and the court system. This Law and Order touting government cannot be trusted to keep our communities safe and deal with the underlying causes of gang violence. This government is sacrificing public safety on the altar of fiscal restraint.

The Minister of Finance was less than forthcoming about revealing costs, like the ballooning cost of security for the winter games, now at twice the sum of previous projections. It was completely silent as to the allocation of the \$186 million Community Development Fund. Is it the political slush fund to buy the upcoming provincial election?

Real concerns

There are some real concerns now that an enlarged road network from the Delta Port is designed to expedite the closure of the Vancouver Port rather than to accomodate any real increases in container traffic from offshore. There are additional concerns that taxpayers are asked to pay what should be

the responsibility of the beneficiaries of such a deal.

We knew then and have proof now that the BC Liberal legislation forbidding budget deficits was political window dressing.

When economies are in recession there is nothing wrong with running budget deficits – but what is very wrong to is to hand out huge tax giveaways to the wealthy in good times to the extent that you can't build up some reserves to deal with the cyclical down turns in the economy and massive global recessions.

Worse to come?

There are indications that the BC Economy will continue to suffer as a result of continued falling commodity prices and that the projected \$400 million budget deficit will be considerably higher.

We are afraid that should this government be re-elected in May that we will see even more major cuts in services to families and seniors, like the ones we saw following the 2001 election.

Yes folks, be forewarned and be forearmed.

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COSCO receives Premier's award

The Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of BC (COSCO) has received the Premier's Award for Promoting Innovation and Excellence. The award is a recognition of COSCO's work on the Age-Friendly Community Initiative.

COSCO has been actively working on the World Health Organizations initiative to humanly deal with the changing demographics of an aging population.

The award is a tribute to the many COSCO volunteers who work on the senior's health literacy and advocacy programs.

COSCO's work on seniors' health literacy and seniors' advocacy is gaining lots of recognition not only here in BC but also internationally.

Art Kube, Past President, accepted the award from the Premier on behalf of COSCO.

Please help us spread the word

Please feel free to reproduce this edition of COSCO News, or to pass it along to others. We want to share information with everyone who may be interested.

For those who have access to the internet, you can find this edition of COSCO News, as well as previous issues, at www.coscobc.ca.

We welcome your letters and articles on issues that interest or concern you. Send them to Sheila Gair, Secretary of COSCO, 14372 Ridge Crescent, Surrey, V3X 1B6, or via e-mail to sscribe@telus.net.

Getting out and about

An update from COSCO's Transportation Committee

By Lorraine Logan
Chair,
Transportation Committee

HandyDart services

As of January 1st, 2009, a company called MVT Canadian Bus Inc. is the new employer hired on a contract by Translink to oversee HandyDart Services. The services are now divided into three areas in the lower mainland, South of the Fraser, North of the Fraser and Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows.

The employees now all belong to one union – ATU, the Amalgamated Transit Union. This concept of one employer and fewer transfers between municipalities has been directed by many sources and is still in the transition phase having begun only two months ago.

As most can understand there are some issues still not resolved and it will take more time to investigate

and work them out.

If you or members of your family or friends are users of HandyDART who find difficulties with the “new” service or are confused about booking a ride, talk to your driver, the HandyDart office where you booked the ride or contact Access Transit at 604 453-4634 website: access_transit@translink.bc.ca.

I am sure that the company would also appreciate hearing from you if the service has improved and made your appointments or outings more timely. The website for MVT is: www.mvtcanada.com. This will be a service for all of us to watch and monitor so we can continue to provide our seniors' input.

Taxi services (Lower Mainland)

Taxi Services have been in the news again recently with the focus on customer complaints such as not being

picked up, ignoring the “flag” or refusing you the ride for no apparent reason.

These issues were addressed previously and did result in the “Taxi Bill of Rights” which is posted in each taxi and should be easily accessible.

If any passengers have a complaint, compliment or an issue to discuss please contact the following phone number: 1-888-564-9963 or the website: www.infobpcpa.ca.

Fraser Valley transportation (old Interurban lines)

Not much to report at the moment. Last October, the government launched a strategic review of transit in the Fraser Valley. Making use of the old interurban rail lines was proposed by transportation advocates in the Fraser Valley. This review will not surface prior to the May election. Stay tuned.

The biggest myth about retirement!



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"No" to Residential Care and "Yes" to expanded Home Support

By Gail Harmer

The federal government's budget of \$400 million for seniors housing across the country has been earmarked for supportive or assisted living, only.

The BC experience with assisted living has left a bad taste in our mouths.

Supportive and assisted living means residential facilities for seniors.

This has become a thriving industry for opportunistic private, for-profit companies.

It is a very expensive choice by government to ensure that seniors requiring assistance or supervision with activities of daily living remain safe.

Seniors should not have to give up their homes to be safe and secure!

COSCO for years has been lobbying with governments to have seniors age in their own homes with a far less expensive programs of enhanced non-medical home support.

We have the practice of Denmark, for instance, (recently awarded the happiest country in the world) where they haven't built any new care facilities for seniors since 1987!

Instead, they have developed extensive, innovative programs of home

support that keep seniors at home and in their own community. (By the way, Danish seniors rarely chose to live with their children.)

Just imagine how much further our tax dollars would go if we spent those scarce dollars on keeping vulnerable seniors at home rather than in facilities!

It is with some optimism that we notice that the BC government has been advertising for a position called Director, Seniors' Independence.

The successful candidate

is expected to establish a comprehensive, innovative and sustainable non-medical home support program for the province.

We can only hope the successful applicant and the BC government will act on the COSCO motto of "No planning for Seniors Without Seniors" in the development of a variety of sustainable, cost effective, innovative models of home support. That is the approach we need to enhance the lives of seniors and ensure their ability to age at home safely!

National seniors' groups discuss merger

The Executive of the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation (NPSCF) recently forwarded to Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC) a merger proposal which calls for the amalgamation of the two organizations under the banner of the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation.

Canadian Pensioners Concerned would become the NPSCF Education, Training and Program Development Arm and maintain its Charitable Tax-number.

Both the NPSCF and CPC would have the same Executive and be governed

by the same convention.

For the first two years of the merger the President of the CPC would be the 1st Vice President of the NPSCF and one CPC Executive Member would also be automatically on the NPSCF Executive.

The merger proposal would have to be approved their respective conventions this October.

If approved the total membership of the new organization would be in excess of 1.3 million people. The COSCO Executive deserves a lot of credit for their support of this merger.

Stay safe. Stay healthy.

Learn how to live better at one of COSCO's free health and safety workshops

By Sheila Pither

The Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C. has developed eleven health and safety promotion workshops that are available free of charge to any seniors' group.

Each session lasts for approximately 90 minutes and a trained senior facilitator delivers the program.

The workshops contain practical and useable information and are free of technical jargon.

Participants are encouraged to make concrete plans to create a safe physical environment and to adopt strategies for healthy living.

Falls Prevention

After a brief review of the alarming impact falls have on the well-being of seniors and health care services, the workshop identifies many of the hazards that contribute to the likelihood of seniors falling in their homes and communities. Safeguards are recommended and exercises to improve balance and strength are demonstrated.

Healthy Eating for Seniors

Canada's recently revised Food Guide provides the basis for this workshop. The Guide is reviewed in detail and participants are shown how to use food label information when they choose what they will purchase. An excellent Ministry of Health publication is distributed to provide ongoing guidance.

Preventing Elder Abuse and Neglect

After an explanation of the many forms that abuse and neglect of seniors can take, participants learn how to identify suspicious signs and symptoms. The potential causes of abuse are reviewed and intervention techniques and sources of assistance are described.

Safety in the Home

Participants are given very detailed checklists of potential dangers for both the outside of the home and for every room indoors. Fire hazards, medication use and childproofing the home are all reviewed. Safety devices are shown and tips for effective

renovations are provided.

Medication Awareness for Seniors

This workshop examines the potential misuse of medications and provides information about how seniors can interact with doctors and pharmacists to ensure that their medications are wisely used. Participants are encouraged to develop a partnership relationship with their medical advisers. A short quiz is used to inform people about possible side effects and drug interactions.

Understanding Osteoarthritis

This debilitating disease is the most common form of arthritis. The workshop describes the symptoms and recommends ways in which people can cope with the effects of the deterioration of cartilage in their joints. Self-management strategies are explained and various therapies are reviewed. An instructive DVD accompanies the workshop to demonstrate how exercise can help.

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Great workshops for seniors available free from COSCO now

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Osteoporosis: The Silent Thief

This bone disease is often the underlying cause of falls which can be devastating in their impact on the quality of life for seniors. The workshop examines the cause of the disease and the risk factors contributing to an individual's susceptibility. Some of the most recent treatment options are discussed.

Doing It Your Way - Legal Documents You Need

This workshop reviews three important legal documents everybody should prepare - Wills, Powers of Attorney and Representation Agreements. Each of these documents has very specific uses and each requires the appointment of someone to see that the provisions are faithfully carried out. Participants will be encouraged to understand the importance of these documents in terms of estate planning and security should disability strike.

Caregiving

Many seniors undertake the care of family members or friends and sometimes the workload and stress involved can do harm to the caregiver.

This workshop examines the causes of caregiver burn-out and suggests how it may be avoided. Sources of assistance are reviewed.

Emergency Preparedness for Seniors

When disaster strikes older adults need to be ready to take the necessary measures to survive for lengthy periods of time, sometimes without assistance. Emergency kits, safety procedures in dangerous situations and advice about when and how to seek help are explored in this workshop.

Understanding Gambling Addiction

This workshop is presented in cooperation with Family Services of Greater Vancouver. It presents the causes and consequences of excessive betting and examines the warning signs which signal that harmless gambling is turning into addiction. Sources of assistance are listed.

Book your workshop today!

For more information or to book a workshop for your group please contact Sheila Pither at 604-684-9720, email: pither470@shaw.ca.



COSCO Health Bytes

Myths about flu shots

A survey of 2,000 adults by the National Research Center of Consumer Reports found that 52% did not plan to get a flu shot in 2009. The two most common reasons given were both myths:

- Some thought it would be better to build the body's immunity by having the flu. Viruses mutate frequently, so that at best immunity would last only a few months.
- Others thought that they could use a nasal spray version of the vaccine made from a weakened flu virus. But the injected vaccine is made from a dead, inactivated virus so the injection would be safer.

Truthfully a few unlucky people will get the flu from the shot. Most will get some protection.

P-3s – a nightmare for taxpayers

By Sylvia MacLeay
President, COSCO

Public-Private-Partnerships, or P-3s, have been used for many years in some countries. Their true cost was not clear until some of the contracts had expired.

Private enterprise was encouraged to bid on construction projects like hospitals, care facilities, bridges and roads. Contracts were signed supposedly covering all details and lasting for 20 to 40 years. The private company would do the construction.

Each year the government would make a payment towards construction, maintenance and a profit for the company (maybe 10% or more). Any special staff (health care workers for example) would be hired by government or some other contracted company.

At the end of the contract the private company would have received all the funds owed including capital costs, maintenance, and profit. This never made economic sense and of course the original government that made the deal was long gone by the end.

Many variations of contracts evolved but none were able to predict what might happen before the end of the contract. So whenever there is an

extra cost not covered in a contract or an unavoidable increase in labour or material costs the private company will demand more money. The taxpayer pays.

The private companies, mostly internationals, would borrow large sums of money. Lenders see this as high risk and charge high interest rates. Governments have a better credit rating than a P-3 company thus the taxpayers pay more

“The British Medical Association found that the cost of P-3 projects was 18 - 60% more...”

interest costs with a P-3.

Governments want to have a good outcome for the project, but the private company wants to maximize profits so they cut corners by hiring cheap labour often from other countries, by skimping on the construction and generally doing a substandard job. Service provisions and maintenance are often not satisfactory.

The British Medical Association found that the cost of P-3 projects was 18-60% more than they would have been if government funded the projects. In the turbulent financial markets of today, these costs would be much more.

When the P-3 contracts for many British healthcare facilities built in the

Margaret Thatcher era expired the facilities were in such poor shape that most of them had to be demolished and re-built. The country has been forced to replace most of these facilities which were on average only about 20 years old.

This method of funding big projects often leads to unexpected problems which the governments is forced fight at high cost in the courts. The P-3 company

goes bankrupt, merges with another company, or is taken over and the contract is not honoured. Extremely complex negotiations and law suits may follow where a government is “out lawyered” by experts. In Britain the contract for the Walsgrave Hospital was 1,400 pages long.

Almost none of the jobs that could be done by citizens materialize due to imported cheap labour. The local economy suffers a loss of revenue.

BC has already experienced problems with the Abbotsford Hospital.

The recent decision to undertake the construction of the Port Mann bridge not using a P-3 was good news for the taxpayers of BC.

A shocking increase in your monthly electricity bill

The government is giving away our rivers and streams for private power plants.

That's bad enough on its own.

It's also going to cost all of us billions of dollars.

BC Hydro customers can expect their electricity bills to escalate dramatically in coming years, thanks to the provincial government's energy policy. It bans BC Hydro from developing new power generation, instead forcing the Crown Corporation to buy more and more energy from high-cost private developers -- at prices far higher than those of other options.

"Our electricity bills are going to be hiked, but the citizens of BC won't get any new assets or long-term energy security in exchange," says John Calvert, author of *Sticker Shock: The Impending Cost of BC Hydro's Shift to Private Power Developers*, published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Calvert examines the high costs of the growing number of new energy purchase agreements between BC Hydro and private power developers, and calculates the impact they will have on future electricity

rates. He finds that:

- In its 2006 tender call, BC Hydro committed to a staggering \$9.5 billion in new electricity generation contracts from private power developers over the next 25 years at prices far, far higher than current electricity market rates.
- BC Hydro's own estimates show that the 2006 tender call alone will mean an 8.1% increase in consumer rates -- and the new BC Energy Plan ensures there will be many more such calls, as energy demand continues to grow.
- Yet despite the enormous sums ratepayers will be spending, the public will get no assets, no protection from future price increases and no energy security once the contracts terminate.
- Private investors will be free to export energy to the US, once the initial contracts with BC Hydro expire.

"The government claims these deals are needed to meet our growing energy demands, but this simply isn't true," says Calvert. "BC Hydro has a number of much

better options that would maintain public control over our energy resources and provide long term energy security and price protection for BC residents."

Calvert recommends that the provincial government:

- Repatriate the large block of "downstream benefits" energy owed to BC by the US under the terms of the Columbia River Treaty.
- Make greater use of the potential energy that can be provided by Columbia Power, the publicly-owned regional energy utility.
- Restrict private energy exports to ensure that energy generated in BC is available to meet the needs of BC customers.
- Lift the current ban on BC Hydro building new generation facilities and allow it to construct small hydro, wind farm and other renewable energy generating facilities instead of purchasing this energy from private power developers.
- Expand Power Smart energy conservation programs.

BACKGROUND

Quick facts on how government policies are driving up Hydro bills

If you're wondering why your Hydro bill keeps going up – and why it's going up another 25 percent within two years – you need only look as far as government policies.

With little regard for the public interest, the government has opened the floodgates to private corporate power producers and higher bills for you.

When you flip on a light switch, 12 percent of the power now comes from private corporations. But they account for more than 60 percent of the cost of producing electricity.

In the last six months, B.C. Hydro produced over 24,000 gigawatt hours of electricity at a cost of \$144 million. In the same period, B.C. Hydro paid \$228 million to private corporations for the small fraction of power they produce. (B.C. Hydro Second Quarter Report, 2008)

Hydro-based electricity is by far our number one source of carbon-dioxide-free energy. It doesn't mess up the thin layer of atmosphere that we can breathe. Yet for some homeowners, the government's policies will drive up the cost of electricity to the point where it may be cheaper for them to

switch to fossil fuels that contribute to climate change.

Turning off public power, switching on private profit

For decades, B.C. Hydro has been responsible for meeting our energy requirements. It has planned and built generating facilities in the public interest, for the common good.

The government has changed that. Without even giving British Columbians a hearing, and even though it costs much more, it has decreed that all new power must be bought from private corporations. Instead of allowing B.C. Hydro to continue to provide the clean energy needed by your family and local businesses, the government has turned Hydro into a guarantor of private profit.

Under the government's direction, B.C. Hydro has been forced to enter into long term agreements to buy power from so-called Independent Power Producers (IPPs) at \$70 to \$90 per megawatt hour. By Nov. 2007, we were on the hook to pay IPPs a staggering \$28.5 billion.

Because of our existing public infrastructure and economies of scale, B.C.

Hydro's cost of production is much less – just \$5.85 per megawatt hour. Spot market prices are also much lower – about \$54 per megawatt hour, falling to about \$10 during the spring freshet.

“The wildlife and flora of the areas affected (by private power plants, access roads and transmission lines) will be severely at risk if not destroyed outright so that private companies can supply the power that B.C. Hydro as supplied us for over 40 years, and do so at a huge profit thanks to high sale prices fixed by the Campbell government,” writes Rafe Mair, April 14, 2008, in the Tyee.ca.

Worse to come

The government is considering more than 500 applications to turn even more B.C. rivers into guaranteed profit centres for private corporations.

Understandably, the applications are pouring in at a furious pace.

Only one application has ever been rejected

It's a modern day gold rush – a rush to convert public rivers to private profit at the expense of everyone who turns on a light bulb.

Advances in treating and avoiding Alzheimer's provide better options

The standard treatment for Alzheimer's has involved two drugs given separately. These are cholinesterase inhibitors like donepezil and galantamine or another drug called memantine.

They only slow the disease in 10 to 20% of patients. Now the Alzheimer Disease and Associated Disorders journal reports that combination

therapy which uses both types of drugs at once and has been tested for three years and works better.

This is not a cure but it cuts decline rate in half. These drugs are expensive, about \$1,700 to \$2,600 US per drug per year.

Mild side effects including headache, constipation and diarrhea may occur.

The drugs must be

taken with a heart-healthy lifestyle. This includes:

- Good nutrition, including fish, five servings of fruits and vegetables, and vitamins – especially B12 – each day.
- Staying fit, with 30 minutes of moderate walking most days.
- A range of activities that provide social and mental stimulation daily.

Membership Application

Please mail to the address below

- I wish to join COSCO as an Associate Member. I enclose my \$25 membership fee.
- I wish to make a donation to COSCO. Please find enclosed a cheque for \$_____.

Name: _____
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

- Please make cheques payable to COSCO.
- Mail your application to Ernie Bayer, Membership Secretary, 6079 - 184 A Street, Surrey, BC V3S 7P7 604 576-9734.
- Senior's groups or organizations wishing information about joining COSCO should write or phone Ernie Bayer and request a membership package.