

Building strong, effective organizations to speak for seniors throughout Canada

By Art Kube
President of COSCO

AS WE APPROACH the Convention of the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation (NPSCF) we should reflect on the reasons for the strength of our own organization (COSCO) and the relative weakness of the NPSCF. COSCO is a strong voice for seniors because it has brought into affiliation at least two different types of seniors organizations – community-based organizations like local seniors clubs and seniors centres, and organizations which are based on previous common employment.

Both types of seniors organizations contribute their special attributes to the success of COSCO. The employment based groups are very successful in recruiting younger seniors, and their members have a great number of skills and talents acquired in their previous employment, talents and skills which COSCO is in need of. In addition, these groups tend to have greater access to financial and in-kind resources. For instance, retired teachers are the force behind COSCO's health

literacy program; the retired nurses look after seniors health issues; the retired government employees deal with regulatory issues like Drive-Able; retired skilled trades people participate in the seniors minor home renovation and home repair program; retired union members

“The need for strong, united provincial seniors councils, and a strong, united National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation, has never been greater.”

provide organizational, advocacy, fund raising and communications skills.

The community-based clubs and seniors centres have a harder row to hoe. Their membership is getting older and dying off.

Newer recruits are hard to come by, because younger seniors are more individualistic and not attracted to the more social club atmo-

sphere of these organizations. These clubs and seniors centres are making attempts to update their organizations to attract younger seniors and it appears that the hemorrhage is slowing down. These community-based affiliates are also important to COSCO because they provide good community contacts, especially with municipal officials in smaller communities. In addition these groups are honing up their advocacy skills and starting to provide more representation to public bodies on behalf of their members.

All COSCO affiliated seniors groups are committed to the need for a strong united seniors council and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to a strong national seniors federation. Why to a lesser extent? Because they recognize that a strong national seniors federation can only come about when we have in all provinces strong provincial seniors councils like COSCO.

Let's look at the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. Its financial survival for the

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Council Of Senior Citizens' Organizations Of BC (COSCO)

www.coscobc.ca

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The Joys & Tears OF LIVING LONGER

THE JOYS & TEARS of Living Longer – a national conference that has important implications for all of Canada's seniors – will be held Oct. 1-2 in Richmond.

"There's a key reason why we are organizing this conference," says Art Kube, COSCO President.

"We believe seniors and their organizations must have continuing involvement in ensuring that policies affecting their lives are fair and just. We were very pleased with the rave reviews we received for the 2008 COSCO conference on Age-Friendly Communities, and the blueprint for action laid out in the follow-up report on best practise. We are confident this conference will have an even greater impact," he said.

The conference will bring together expertise from around the world.

"Other jurisdictions are well ahead of Canada, both in terms of the demographic shifts that are happening, and in coming up with appropriate policies to deal with them. We're living longer, and that should be a good thing, not something that's considered a problem," said Pat Brady, chair of the volunteer organizing committee.

"At the conference, we'll review how other countries, states and provinces are dealing with demographic changes. We'll explore their impact on the health, housing and incomes of seniors, and the implications for society as a whole," he said.

"This conference will really tackle the key issues facing seniors in British Columbia and Canada. It's both important and timely, because Canadians are getting older" says Secretary-Treasurer Sheila Pither. "With the program we've developed, I'm confident participants will be both interested and inspired. We'll be exploring the wonderful opportunities, and the challenges, faced by seniors and civil society as Canadians live longer and fuller lives."

National and international experts will address plenary sessions. The organizing committee has also assembled high level panels to present and debate varying points of view on key issues.

Workshops will give every participant the opportunity to discuss and share their first-hand experience, and to delve even more deeply into the impact of changing demographics on public resources and private lifestyles.

As governments continue to slash services – including the 1,700 layoffs announced this month at Service Canada which administers OAS and GIS payments – it's more important than ever for seniors to present clear alternatives. This conference will do that.

Public pressure forces TransLink to change course on scrapping the TaxiSaver program

By Lorraine Logan

- On May 16, Translink issued a media release which in effect was cancelling the TaxiSaver Program. It was to be phased out from August 2012 through to June 2013. Translink claimed the savings of \$1.1 million from phasing out the TaxiSaver Program would be re-invested into the HandyDART system.
- On May 16, COSCO and BCCPD (Coalition of People with Disabilities, CEO, Jane Dyson) released a joint media release opposing Translink's plan.
- On May 16, the City of Vancouver's Senior Advisory and Persons with Disabilities Committee issued a media release opposing the cancellation and started a process for their Town Hall meetings.
- On May 30, Translink held their Annual General Meeting in Vancouver. It was attended by over 100 concerned citizens: seniors and persons with disabilities. There was a public meeting held immediately after the Board meeting. Translink then decided to suspend their decision until further public input could be attained.
- On July 11, Nancy Olewiler, Translink Board Chair, issued a media statement that Translink will maintain the TaxiSaver Program, reversing its original decision to eliminate the program.

THE ABOVE IS a chronological outline of events that did finally lead to the reversal of this devastating decision.

What happened between all those dates was a true humble lesson in advocacy.

Individuals wrote, and in particular the City of Vancouver com-



Lorraine Logan gave many media interviews, and spoke out strongly at public events, to help convince TransLink to maintain a needed service to seniors and people with disabilities.
— Photo by Gudrun Langolf

mittees staged town hall meetings. I arranged meetings and conversations with seniors. I received e-mails and telephone calls from seniors and seniors' children indicating their distress, their intimate, personal stories that drove people to almost beg for this service to not be discontinued.

This decision did create a storm of protest, but from a portion of society, who for the most part, just want to live their lives as well as they are able, with some assistance.

I met and talked to some incredible people, people I would never get to know unless they came under attack. Frail seniors who may be able to walk or take the bus to the stores, but tire, their legs give out and just want to call a taxi and get home. HandyDART is not able to do "same day" service and rides must be booked well in advance. This works for medical appointments and fu-

ture dates that are known, but does nothing for spontaneous outings to meet friends/family, go to a movie, or just out on a visit or to shop.

These voices were heard and very loudly. Radio, community papers, and television picked up on this public outcry. Translink also listened.

During this three month period, COSCO along with BCCPD were communicating behind the scenes, feeding information to Translink managers, along with documents received from seniors, e-mails and telephone numbers attempting to persuade the Board of Directors to alter their decision. None of this would have occurred if our seniors, persons with disabilities and their families stayed quiet. I am so proud of the people who spoke up and out. You were heard – congratulations!

Lorraine Logan is the Chairperson of COSCO's Transportation Committee.

Increasing the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS is *not* gender neutral

By Louisette Hinton
and Diane Wood

THE OLD AGE SECURITY (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) are the only income for many women where they are guaranteed to receive the same amount as men, regardless of their labour force history. The proportion of income replaced by the OAS and the GIS is much higher for women and seniors with low incomes, about 70 percent for those with individual incomes of less than \$15,000. For women between the ages of 65 and 69, OAS and GIS reduce poverty by 21 percentage points. For men of the same age it's 15 percentage points. So, it is clear that increasing the age of OAS and GIS is *not* gender neutral.

The OAS and the GIS reduce the lower income rate from about 30 percent to about 12 percent (more for women than men).

Raising the age of eligibility for the OAS/GIS from 65 to 67 would mean that non-working, low income seniors on provincial social assistance and disability programs would have to wait another two years to transition to the OAS/GIS program, raising social assistance costs for provincial governments. The provinces would also have to pay more to provide drugs and essential services to low income seniors who are unable to pay on their own.

Changing the eligibility age to 67 would mean the 35 percent of OAS recipients who would be entitled to GIS at age 65 – mostly women – would lose those benefits as well. For those seniors entitled to this maximum amount (projected at 320,000 in 2012, mostly women) the loss of two full years of benefits would represent over \$30,000.

Those workers most dependent on OAS/GIS income - women, work-



Women will be hard hit by the Harper government's plan to force Canadians to wait to age 67 before qualifying for OAS and GIS payments.

ers with disabilities, individuals with lesser residency, the lowest income and long term unemployed - will be hardest hit.

Also, in some provinces low income seniors age 65 and 66 could lose their eligibility for additional provincial supplements that are linked to GIS eligibility. For example in British Columbia, seniors receiving OAS/GIS stand to lose a \$49.30 income supplement, a discount on bus passes and perhaps a reduction in property taxes. Another example, in Quebec, Employment Minister Julie Boulet said the age hike would cost her province "tens of millions of dollars" in welfare payments to low-income seniors between the ages of 65 and 67.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and various government officials and MPs have attempted to justify the proposed cuts to the OAS/GIS program by arguing that the retirement of the baby boom generation and the related increase in the

nominal dollar cost of OAS and GIS benefits are not sustainable. There is no evidence for this argument. It is noteworthy that Canada's independent Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page has stated OAS is affordable into the future without changes. The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) urges Canadians to reject the Harper Government's proposed changes to OAS/GIS and fight for improvements for retirement security for all.

Louisette Hinton is a Member at Large, responsible for women's issues, on the Executive of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC).

Diane Wood, President of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM), a COSCO affiliate, is the B.C. representative on the CURC Executive.

This article is one of a series of columns published by CURC on the "News for the rest of us" website: rabble.ca.

Black out, Speak out

Hundreds of Canadian websites – including www.bcforum.ca – went black June 4 as part of a protest against Harper's unconscionable budget bill C-38

THE BLACK OUT, SPEAK OUT campaign was launched by an unlikely coalition of environmental groups, corporations, church groups, unions and others. Many of the participants had never taken such political action before.

The massive omnibus bill ran to almost 500 pages and included many items that would usually have been debated separately. Critics see the process as an effort to stifle debate in the House of Commons, and the bill itself as an effort to silence opposition to the government's plans.

"Today, hundreds of organizations and individuals – representing millions of citizens – are speaking out in support of two core Canadian values: the protection of nature and democratic discussion," said David Suzuki at a news conference in Vancouver.

"These values are the foundation of the peace, order and good government that define our nation, yet they are threatened by the federal government's omnibus budget bill, C-38."

The budget bill:

- Replaces the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.
- Empowers the federal government to crack down on charities, including environmentalists and seniors' groups that advocate for better laws and policies.
- Gives cabinet the power to override decisions made by the Na-



Bill C-38, the Harper government's omnibus budget bill, has been criticized on many fronts, including its provisions to raise the retirement age to 67. COSCO executive member Jerry Gosling (right) organized a protest in Abbotsford, one of the many such protests held across Canada.

tional Energy Board.

- Rushes projects through a weakened environmental review process to speed up approvals.
- Shuts citizen groups out of environmental reviews for pipelines.

"The continued survival of icons like migratory salmon and steelhead are put at risk through this bill. It's bad policy and it's bad democracy," said John Fraser, former Conservative fisheries minister.

"Over one-third of C-38's text is devoted to short-circuiting Canada's most important environmental laws," said Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence Canada. "The government did not run with this as part of its platform. There was no mention during the election campaign."

The "Black Out, Speak Out" campaign organizers noted that the changes will slash environmental protection. It will concentrate deci-

sion making in the federal cabinet, and silence balanced policy advice from scientists and researchers.

Éric Hébert-Daly, the national executive director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, said joining this campaign was "unusual" for his organization, but "you can't just say nothing."

Hébert-Daly noted that the government is planning for some \$500 billion in resource development over the next decade or so. "In that context, we need stronger environmental regulation, not weaker... you need to do more, not less."

Gideon Forman, the executive director for the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment said "the Conservative government's attack on democracy and the environment is unprecedented."

Reprinted from The Advocate, published by the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members, a COSCO affiliate.

Workshop helps patients “Talk with their Doctor”

Evidence shows that patients who take a more active role in their health care are more satisfied with the care they receive, pursue treatment more actively, and get better faster. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, many people report challenges in communicating with their doctor and other health care professionals.

TALKING WITH Your Doctor and Other Health Care Providers is a two-hour workshop led by trained peer facilitators, introducing a simple, evidence-based framework called PACE:

P - Presenting detailed information about how you are feeling.

A - Asking questions if desired information is not provided.

C - Checking your understanding of information that is given to you.

E - Expressing any concerns about the recommended treatment.

The workshop was piloted by the Patient Voices Network (PVN) and the UBC Division of Health Care Communications in 2010/2011, and was extremely well-received by both facilitators and participants. Based on the pilot's success, the program has been adapted and rolled out in communities throughout BC as part of the Ministry of Health's Patients as Partners initiative.

Laurie, a PVN member from Richmond, is a Talking With Your Doctor facilitator. “It is a very rewarding experience,” she says. “I’m passionate about health education and especially believe that if people have tools to take charge of their health, they will feel more empowered to do so. If you don’t take charge of your own health, who will?”



The “Talking with Your Doctor” workshop is especially helpful for seniors, and people who have chronic conditions.

She’s excited to see the program expand and to be involved with future sessions. “The workshop is especially beneficial for patients who may not be knowledgeable or comfortable communicating with their health care provider, and there may be various reasons for that. From a cultural perspective, for example, some may feel that the provider dictates the treatment plan, and they may feel uncomfortable asking questions, exploring other treatment options or expressing challenges in following the plan. The workshop encourages patients to take ownership of their health, and demonstrates how medical visits can optimize the partnership between the health care provider and the patient.”

Under the guidance of a diverse steering committee, the workshop has been offered in Prince George and Vancouver locations in partnership with local community groups. It has special resonance for people

with chronic conditions, seniors, and others who work closely with a health care team. A participant from a recent workshop at the South Granville Seniors Centre in Vancouver said, “The presentation was very comprehensive, easy to understand and had tangible takeaways for attendees.”

PVN’s Community Project Coordinator, Justin Harder, is building partnerships with local community organizations to host and promote the workshops. If you know of a local group or organization that might be interested in partnering to offer this workshop, please contact Justin at jharder@patientvoices.ca.

Talking With Your Doctor and Other Health Care Providers is a Ministry of Health, Patients as Partners initiative administered by ImpactBC. For more information on Talking with Your Doctor, visit the PVN website: www.patientvoices.ca/what-we-do/workshops.

COSCO executive member honoured with presentation of Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal

MOHINDER GREWAL, a COSCO board member, has won the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of his contribution to Canadian society.

Mohinder is a very active volunteer on many committees and boards. He has worked in race relations, immigrant services and cultural and social policy development, and served as a member of the Convention Refugee Determination Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

"Mr. Grewal has dedicated his life in Canada to the well-being of immigrants and Visible Minorities and to creating a just society in which all are welcome," said the program prepared for the ceremony.

Mohinder immigrated to Canada from Malaysia in 1977. His first regular employment in Vancouver was as an Intake Worker, and later as the Race Relations Worker, with an agency serving immigrants.

He has held many positions in the National Association of Canadians of

Origins in India (NACOI), including B.C. and national president. He has served as a director of the Vancou-

Media Advisory Committee, the Global Television Network's Diversity Committee, and the federal Cross Cultural Roundtable on Security.

In addition to his work with COSCO, Mohinder currently serves on nine other boards and committees. These include Richmond's Intercultural and Seniors Advisory Committee, the Richmond Seniors Network, United Way Seniors Regional Planning Table, the Vancou-



Liberal Senator Mobina Jaffer (right) recommended Mohinder Grewal for the The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. To the left of Mohinder is Conservative Senator Yonah Martin.

ver Multicultural Society, a member of Vancouver's Special Committee on Race Relations, a delegate to the Committee for Racial Justice, and vice-chair of the B.C. Seniors' Advisory Council. He has also served as a member of the Vancouver Sun's

ver Cross-Cultural Seniors Network Society, the Provincial Committee on Diversity and Policing, the Richmond Addiction Services Society, 411 Seniors Centre Society and the United Way's "Better at Home" Advisory Committee.

Seniors need strong organizations

Continued from page 1

last number of years has largely dependent on the generosity of United Autoworkers Retirees and COSCO's funding. That unfortunately creates the impression that unions dominate the NPSCF. Some of us have tried with limited success to broaden the NPSCF membership by affiliating four retired teachers groups and two provincial government retirees groups.

Just like in COSCO it is paramount to convince the retired teachers groups, province-wide seniors groups both union and non-union to give leadership, and coalesce and form united province-wide Seniors

Councils similar to COSCO. All seniors groups across the country should advocate and support such goals.

The need for strong united provincial seniors councils and a strong united National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation has never been greater.

Governments of all stripes are attempting to erode the gains we have made over the years to assure us a secure retirement. We have many issues which need our attention like seniors poverty, lack of seniors housing, ageism in the delivery of service, increased elder abuse, protection of pensions and retirement

benefits, the protection and enhancement of Medicare, promoting a universal program of home care and home support, pharmacare, and dental care.

We are the generation which fought for public services for all. Now we have the responsibility to protect, and if possible to enhance them. For this we need strong and united seniors' organizations, strong provincial councils and a strong National pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. We have to make sure that seniors' voices are heard locally, provincially and nationally. All seniors should work towards that important goal.



Art Kube, Jerry Gosling, Linda Forsythe and Al Peterson share a quiet moment at the Lower Mainland Labour Day Picnic at Trout Lake Park. Um, well, ok, we'll admit

it. It's never all that quiet when this group gets together. They handed out hundreds of flyers and information about COSCO. – Photo by Gudrun Langolf

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.
- Seniors groups and organizations wishing more information about joining COSCO should write or phone Ernie Bayer and request a membership package.