

# Economic Indicators and Labour News

## December 2006

### Labour Force Participation – Saskatchewan (November)<sup>1</sup>

The Saskatchewan seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for November 2006 was 3.9 percent, which unchanged from the October 2006 rate, and a 1.3 percent decrease from the November 2005 rate of 5.2 percent. The Canada seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for November 2006 was 6.3 percent, which is 0.1 percentage points higher than October 2006 rate of 6.4 percent and 0.1 percentage points lower than the November 2005 level of 6.4 percent.

The unadjusted unemployment rate for Saskatchewan for November 2006 was 3.5 percent. This is a 0.2 percentage points increase from the October 2006 rate of 3.3 percent and is 1.3 percentage points lower than the November 2005 rate of 4.8 percent. Canada's unadjusted unemployment rate for November 2006 was 5.9 percent and is 0.3 percentage points higher than the October 2006 level of 5.6 percent. Canada's unadjusted employment rate in November 2005 was 6.0 percent.

	November 2006	October 2006	November 2005
Labour Force	516,300	518,900	503,300
Employed	497,900	501,700	479,100
<i>Full-time</i>	400,600	404,100	382,300
<i>Part-time</i>	97,300	97,600	96,800
Unemployed	18,300	17,200	24,200
Unemployment Rate (%)	3.5	3.3	4.8
Unemployment Rate (%) Seasonally Adjusted	3.9	3.9	5.2
Participation Rate (%)	69.2	69.5	67.2

<sup>1</sup> Government of Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics – Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey

Alberta had the lowest seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Canada in November at 3.1 percent. Saskatchewan had the second lowest rate at 3.9 percent, followed by Manitoba at 4.6 percent and British Columbia at 4.9 percent unemployment rate.

Saskatoon recorded the second lowest unemployment rate of 3.1 percent in Canada among 28 cities surveyed for the month of November. Regina recorded the seventh lowest rate at 4.7 percent. Calgary posted the lowest unemployment rate at 2.8 percent.

## Average Hourly Wages – Saskatchewan (November)<sup>2</sup>

	November 2005		November 2006		November 2005 to November 2006
	Number of employees* (thousands)	Average Hourly wage (\$)	Number of employees* (thousands)	Average hourly wage (\$)	% change in hourly wage
15 years and over	380.2	17.60	403.0	18.62	5.8
15 to 24 years	75.8	10.19	84.3	11.57	13.5
25 to 54 years	261.0	19.41	270.7	20.52	5.7
55 years and over	43.4	19.66	48.1	20.25	3.0
Men	186.7	19.06	201.5	20.08	5.4
Women	193.5	16.19	201.6	17.15	5.9
Full-time	302.3	18.86	324.9	19.81	5.0
Part-time	77.9	12.72	78.10	13.63	7.2
Union Coverage <sup>*1</sup>	137.9	20.73	144.2	21.99	6.1
No union coverage <sup>*2</sup>	242.3	15.82	258.9	16.74	5.8
Permanent job <sup>*3</sup>	334.8	17.97	358.1	18.92	5.3
Temporary job <sup>*4</sup>	45.4	14.87	44.9	16.21	9.0
Management occupations	18.0	27.86	22.7	28.01	0.5

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada

\*1 Employees who are members of a union and employees who are not union members but who are covered by a collective agreement or a union contract.

\*2 Employees who are not members of a union or not covered by a collective agreement or a union contract.

\*3 A permanent job is one that is expected to last as long as the employee wants it, given that business conditions permit. That is, there is no predetermined termination date.

\*4 A temporary job has a predetermined end date, or will end as soon as a specified project is completed. Includes seasonal jobs; temporary, term or contract jobs including work done through a temporary help agency; casual jobs; and other temporary work.

## The Consumer Price Index – Saskatchewan, Canada, Regina, Saskatoon (November)<sup>3</sup>

In Saskatchewan, the All-items CPI decreased 0.4 percent between October 2006 and November 2006. The Canada All-items Index increased by 0.2 percent. Regina's and Saskatoon's CPI decreased 0.3 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively.

The decrease in Saskatchewan was primarily due to the decreases for gasoline, women's clothing, and for recreational equipment & services (excluding vehicles). Prices also decreased for water, men's clothing, telephone services, and for fresh or frozen chicken. Moderating these decreases were price increases for natural gas, automotive vehicle parts, maintenance and repairs, and for bakery products. Prices also increased for mortgage interest cost, cigarettes, and for other fresh or frozen poultry meat.

	Index		Percent change	
	November 2006 (1992=100)	October 2006 (1992=100)	October 2006 to November 2006	November 2005 to November 2006
<b>Saskatchewan</b>				
All-items	<b>134.5</b>	<b>135.0</b>	<b>-0.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Food	130.4	130.2	0.2	5.8
Shelter	148.8	148.5	0.2	2.8
Transportation	146.9	147.5	-0.4	-1.4
Health & Personal Care	116.8	117.1	-0.3	1.0
All-items excluding energy	130.0	130.3	-0.2	1.8
Energy	182.7	183.8	-0.6	-2.7
<b>Canada</b>				
All-items	<b>130.0</b>	<b>129.7</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.4</b>
Food	132.4	131.4	0.8	3.1
Shelter	129.8	129.9	-0.1	2.9
Transportation	151.6	150.1	1.0	-0.4
Health & Personal Care	123.2	122.6	0.5	1.2
All-items excluding energy	127.6	127.3	0.2	1.8
Energy	160.5	160.5	0.0	-2.8
<b>Regina</b>				
All-items	135.4	135.8	-0.3	1.4
<b>Saskatoon</b>				
All-items	133.8	134.3	-0.4	1.4

<sup>3</sup> Government of Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics – Statistics Canada

## Labour News

The following news items are pulled from various sources, and some items have been condensed from their original format. If you would like more information, please visit the respective website to find the full version, or contact Kathy Fiedelleck for a paper copy.

## Economy

### Saskatchewan

#### **Saskatchewan job numbers jump**

(StarPhoenix, December 2, 2006)

Reporter: [Dan Yates, Saskatchewan News Network](#); with files from [The StarPhoenix](#)  
Paper copy only

The number of people working in Saskatchewan in November 2006 beat the total from November 2005, a Statistics Canada labour force survey shows. According to the survey, there were 497,900 people employed in the province during November. That's down from October, but up 18,800 from November 2005. "October was a really good month for Saskatchewan -- we broke records in terms of employment growth," said Doug Elliott, publisher of the Sask Trends Monitor newsletter. "The November numbers are good, but they're not as good as October -- but then again we didn't expect them to be." Eric Cline, minister of industry and resources, said the results are encouraging, adding the 497,900 people represents the largest workforce for a November in the province's history. Most of those new jobs, 18,700 in fact, come from non-agricultural employment. Cline said the numbers are indicative of a strong and diverse economy, which goes beyond the resource industry. He pointed to steady growth in construction, trade, finance, insurance, real estate, leasing and the service sector, which Elliott explained is bouncing back from a bad year after last year's smoking ban. Even agriculture employment, although down 3,100 jobs from October, was still up 100 from the November 2005 level of 44,500...

#### **Labour shortage looms, expert warns**

(Leader-Post, December 1, 2006)

Reporter: [Neil Scott, Leader-Post](#)

Paper copy only

The good news is that there could be 10 million new jobs opening up in Canada over the next 30 years, but the bad news is the country could have difficulty finding enough workers to fill them, a Regina audience was told Thursday. Andrew Ramlo, director of the Urban Futures Institute, said Saskatchewan and the rest of the country could face difficulties in finding the workers needed in the future. Speaking to an audience of more than 100 at the Hotel Saskatchewan-Radisson Plaza, Ramlo said the aging and retirement of the baby-boom generation, low birth rates and a variety of other factors will affect the size of the labour force...It is also important to find new young workers so the economy can remain strong enough to support quality health and social programs, including programs for the large contingent of baby boomers who will be retired, Ramlo said...Immigration will be one of the keys in sustaining Canada's labour force into the future, Ramlo said. But attracting new migrants to Saskatchewan is only part of the solution, Ramlo said. It is also important to retain new immigrants

and to retain people who are born in Saskatchewan, said Ramlo, who noted competition is -- and will be -- stiff for employees. While education and training is frequently mentioned as key to future economic growth, Ramlo said the irony is that people who receive good education and training will be among those most courted by other jurisdictions looking for workers...The most recent unemployment figures for the province (3.9 per cent) essentially represent full employment, he said.

### **Purchase of pulp mill good news for community**

(Leader-Post, December 5, 2006)

Reporter: James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

It appears that Meadow Lake will get some good news just in time for Christmas. The lawyer for the Meadow Lake Pulp Mill, which is jointly owned by the provincial government and Alberta forestry company Millar Western, said a purchase and sale deal was signed on the weekend. Bankruptcy protection was extended Monday by the Court of Queen's Bench until Dec. 21, when the court will be asked to give its approval for the sale after the final details are hammered out, said Conrad Hadubiak. Terms of the agreement and the buyer still have not been made public but news of a deal was greeted enthusiastically in Meadow Lake. The mill employs about 150 people directly and has a "huge" impact on both employment and the economy throughout northwest Saskatchewan, said Meadow Lake mayor Darwin Obrigewitsch...Obrigewitsch said there was always optimism in the town that a deal could be struck despite the mill's checkered history. Meadow Lake Pulp is the biggest money-losing government investment in Saskatchewan's history. The province has lost \$321.6 million since 1990 and the government calculates it has missed out on another \$595.7 million in interest that was never paid over that period. Hadubiak has said the government will not recoup its total losses under the deal. Eric Cline, minister responsible for Investment Saskatchewan in the NDP government, told reporters he could say little until the final deal is signed but he welcomed the fact that the end of government ownership appeared to be in sight...

### **NDP gov't must do better**

(Leader-Post, December 8, 2006)

Reporter: James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

The province's financial watchdog said Thursday that improvements to financial controls haven't come fast enough after a pair of major fraud cases in the Saskatchewan government first came to light two years ago. In Volume 3 of his 2006 report, Auditor Fred Wendel said the Environment Department is making slow progress in improving its safeguards on public money after an employee was fired and later charged with fraud for allegedly using phoney payments for goods and services never received to take the government for about \$500,000. Things are slightly better in the Community Resources Department, where a manager was fired and later convicted of fraud for misappropriating more than \$1 million in social assistance payments over 10 years by creating fake welfare recipients. But in both cases, employees aren't following the rules and guidelines that are in place and the conditions that allowed the loss of public money are continuing, Wendel told reporters at a news conference at the provincial legislature...Advanced Education and Employment Minister Pat Atkinson couldn't explain the slow going in the two departments but pledged to reporters that there would be improvements by the time the auditor releases his report next year...But Saskatchewan Party finance critic Ken

Cheveldayoff said: "For the life of me I can't see why these things aren't happening." The auditor's report also shed new light on a case that has seen the firing of a SaskPower employee in April after the misappropriation of \$190,000 from the Crown corporation over four years. The employee was assigned a wider-than-normal range of duties because the person had experience in environmental engineering, business administration and information technology. That allowed the employee to make unauthorized purchases, ineligible expense claims and unauthorized cellular phone charges. The report says the case showed "poor supervision" and "ineffective direction" of staff. "There was no segregation of duties," Wendel said...Wendel also raised concerns that there is inadequate monitoring of the \$86 million distributed by Community Resources to about 300 community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide social services in the province. The auditor has reported for years about concerns over the government not being able to judge the CBOs performances, as well as problems with the timeliness and thoroughness of their financial reporting...The auditor's report also raised concerns over \$4 million in overpayment of wages to health-care support workers stemming from a pay equity agreement. The Health Department directed regional health authorities in 2004 to pay out employees where wages were owed based on initial evaluations, despite the fact that jobs could still be re-evaluated into a higher or lower rate of pay. The government decision was based on agreements with the unions involved that employees who opted to take the wages owed would pay the money back if that situation arose. But a recent decision by the Labour Relations Board suggests the government may have a hard time getting that money back.

### **Sask. tries to lure expatriates**

(Leader-Post, December 8, 2006)

Reporter: Bruce Johnstone, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Post-secondary students home for the holidays can expect to be bombarded by messages from the provincial government to come home where jobs are plentiful. And next year, stressed-out Albertans will see billboards and ads urging them to come to Saskatchewan, land of living skies -- and a low cost of living. It's all part of the province's "go-where-the-jobs-are" campaign aimed at bringing students and expatriate Saskatchewanians back home. And that campaign is driven by the need to find people to fill jobs. With more jobs than people to fill them, Saskatchewan is looking at home, abroad and even next door in booming Alberta for workers, Advanced Education and Employment Minister Pat Atkinson said Thursday...That's why the NDP government is redoubling its efforts to educate and train aboriginal youth, increase immigration to 5,000 annually by 2008 and encourage ex-pat Saskatchewanians living in Alberta to come home, Atkinson said...Atkinson said the province has a "unique advantage" other jurisdictions don't have; Saskatchewan has the "youngest population in the country," thanks to our growing aboriginal population...Recently, the province committed \$1.6 million to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, and directed training institutions, such as SIIT, regional colleges and SIAST -- to do training on-reserve...The department is attracting students, former residents and other Canadians to the province through its Saskjobs.ca job order system -- where employers can find skilled workers and workers can find jobs. But even if the province fully engages the aboriginal population in the workforce -- and attracts students and ex-pats back to the province -- the province will still need immigrants to fill many skilled and unskilled jobs. Atkinson said her department is aiming at bringing 5,000 newcomers to the province by 2008 --

2,400 in this fiscal year -- roughly double last year's nominations. But the province also has to retain and settle immigrants by making them part of the community through language and job training and other services, she said.

### **Sask. petroleum land sales booming**

(Leader-Post, December 15, 2006)

Paper copy only

Saskatchewan had the second-best year ever in sales of petroleum and natural gas rights in 2006 with \$176.5 million in total bonus bid revenues, according to Industry and Resources. The best year ever was 1994 when \$199 million in land sale revenues were garnered by the province, thanks to a shallow gas drilling boom in the southwest led by Renaissance Energy of Calgary. This year, light oil in deeper formations in the southeastern part of the province was the main attraction to oil and gas companies, said Ed Dancsok, director of the geology and petroleum lands branch of Industry and Resources. And the December sale, which netted the province \$24.8 million -- \$16.3 million of which was spent in the Estevan-Weyburn area -- followed the trend toward light deep oil in the southeast...Not surprisingly, the southeast area also attracted the largest price for a single parcel of land -- \$4.2 million for a four-section lease parcel in the Kisbey-Forget area. Peerless Energy Inc. of Calgary, a newcomer to the province, was the buyer...The top price for a single licence was \$2.4 million paid by O & G Resource Group for a 1,100 hectare block, 17 kilometres east of Stoughton...Dancsok said the \$525 average price paid per hectare in December brought the average price for the year to \$388 per hectare, another record. "In the southeast, they're paying \$950 per hectare. That's better than what they're paying for oil rights in Alberta." Dancsok attributed the record high average prices and land sale activity to high oil prices, as well as royalty and taxation changes made by the provincial government in recent years. By contrast, gas-prone areas attracted only \$1.2 million in the December sale. Dancsok said softening gas prices and a large inventory of land acquired over the last four or five years are responsible for low level of interest in gas-prone lands. After the Weyburn-Estevan area, the Lloydminster area was next highest at \$5.1 million, followed by the Kindersley-Kerrobert area at \$1.9 million and the Swift Current area at \$1.5 million. The next sale of Crown petroleum and natural gas rights will be on Feb. 5.

### **Pulp mill sold to controversial company**

(Leader-Post, December 16, 2006)

Reporter: James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

One of the world's largest -- and most controversial -- pulp and paper companies has bought the Meadow Lake Pulp Mill, the biggest money-losing government investment in Saskatchewan history, it was revealed Friday. Industry giant Asia Pulp and Paper Co. Ltd. (APP) will pay \$38 million for the fixed assets of the mill, which is jointly owned by the provincial government's Investment Saskatchewan arm and Alberta forestry company Millar Western, said the mill's lawyer Conrad Hadubiak...Under the deal, expected to close in late January, APP has pledged to operate the mill for five years, with penalties if they shut it down before that time...The deal is being done through a Canadian numbered company that is a subsidiary of Indonesia-based Sinar Mas, which owns Asia Pulp and Paper, Hadubiak said. Singapore-based APP, which is already the biggest customer for the pulp produced in Meadow Lake, is estimated to be the sixth-largest paper and paperboard company in the world. However, it has a checkered history. The company went through major financial difficulties in 2001,

including a massive default on bank loans and bonds. It has also been a focus for environmental groups, which say the company has been involved in illegal logging of natural forests in China and targeting highly ecologically sensitive forests for conversion into plantations in Sumatra. "I would see it as being a bad sign that they are coming into Saskatchewan," said Richard Brooks, head of the forest campaign at Greenpeace Canada. "This isn't an issue where they're just slightly bad on the environment. They're one of the worst offenders when it comes to protecting the environment, particularly protecting natural forests and forests that have very high conservation values. They rank very, very low on our list of companies operating in places like Asia." Eric Cline, the minister responsible for Investment Saskatchewan, said he couldn't comment on the company's practices elsewhere in the world. "But they're not going to have a bad environmental record in Saskatchewan, I can assure you of that. They, like any mining company or forestry company or other company in Saskatchewan, are going to comply with the laws and regulations of the government of Saskatchewan and we have good environmental laws and regulations. And they know that," he said. Cline said he would have liked to have recouped the more than \$900 million lost, but it wasn't possible.

### **Labour shortage tackled**

(Leader-Post, December 19, 2006)

[Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

The shortage of skilled labour has the government of Saskatchewan looking to the Philippines for help. During a ceremony at E.D. Feehan High School on Monday, the governments of Saskatchewan and the Philippines signed off on an agreement to increase the number of Filipino workers recruited to the province. The government expects 500 Filipino workers will be nominated under the agreement in the next year. When families are accounted for, Saskatchewan could be welcoming up to 1,500 Filipinos annually. There are more than 3,100 people born in the Philippines who live in the province, according to the 2001 census. Advanced Education and Employment Minister Pat Atkinson said the agreement will help plug the growing labour shortage in the province. There are close to 10,000 jobs currently sitting unfilled in Saskatchewan, a number that could climb to well over 50,000 by 2017, according to Atkinson's estimate. The agreement is a welcome development for Gurcan Kocdag, whose company, Doepker Industries Ltd., a highway trailer maker, is currently short around 135 workers, mostly welders, painters and metal fabricators. With this agreement, employees will be screened and tested by government in the Philippines, which, Kocdag said, will lower the cost and help shorten the time frame to get skilled workers to the province.

## **Canada**

### **One in eight workers earns too little to cover basics of life**

(NUPGE, December 13, 2006)

[http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n13de06a.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n13de06a.htm)

One out of every eight Canadian workers is stuck in a low-wage job that does not cover cost-of-living essentials such as rent and food, and the number is rising despite unemployment rates that are at or near 30-year lows, says the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). These workers, along with part-time and self-employed workers,

live in a "precarious" state of insecurity, the three-million-member central labour body says in an overview entitled, Report Card 2006 Is Your Work Working for You? CLC president Ken Georgetti says more jobs in the economy have not meant better jobs for too many Canadians..."There was a marked increase in wage inequality in the first half of 2006, with the top 10% now making 6.5 times more than the bottom 10% - up from 5.6 times more in the first half of 2005," the congress says. "The people with the highest incomes are getting more than their fair share. Meanwhile, everyone else struggles to get by and the poorest workers get left behind. A truly healthy economy would do a better job of sharing its prosperity," says Georgetti. His remarks are backed up by the Canadian Association of Food Banks, which recently reported that people with jobs make up the second largest group of food bank clients. Georgetti says the growth in poverty among working families has more to do with the poor quality, not the quantity of jobs being created...The CLC says the new jobs being created are not replacing the jobs being lost in the country's manufacturing sector, which has shed 300,000 jobs over the past four years. Many of the disappearing jobs were full-time, high-skilled positions paying an average of \$21 per hour. The Western Canadian energy boom has helped offset this decline but only one in six jobs has been replaced...[Georgetti] called on the government to come up with a jobs strategy focusing on the long-term prosperity of working families, improving access to collective bargaining and raising and enforcing employment standards. "Raising the wages of the poorest workers would be a good place to start, which means bringing minimum wages above the poverty line and providing the means for the working poor to improve their skills, including basic literacy and numeracy programs," Georgetti adds.

### **Fulfill fiscal promises, Ottawa warned (CA/SK)**

(Globe and Mail, December 14, 2006)

Reporter: [Steven Chase, Globe and Mail](#)

Paper copy only

Saskatchewan is warning that its voters will be furious if the Harper government fails to deliver on a \$750-million election promise to the Prairie province during this week's Vancouver meeting of Canadian finance ministers. "Our fear is . . . they are getting ready to break their word," Saskatchewan Finance Minister Andrew Thomson said of the Tories on the eve of the get-together. That's the sort of acrimony that will greet federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty as the meeting begins this evening amid competing demands for a bigger slice of Ottawa's wealth-sharing programs. Mr. Flaherty, for his part, is warning provinces it will be their last chance to agree on revamping Canada's \$12-billion equalization program before the Tories impose their own solution in Budget 2007...Mr. Flaherty said he is not optimistic about the chances for a consensus and has made it clear that, if no deal arises by tomorrow he'll give provinces some idea of the minimum equalization cut they'll get...The Tories had promised oil-and-gas-rich Saskatchewan that they would exempt non-renewable resource revenue from equalization calculations, a move that would save it an estimated \$750-million. Saskatchewan Premier Lorne Calvert left a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper last week saying he felt that the Conservatives plan to renege on this promise...Ontario Finance Minister Greg Sorbara said he is not supporting Saskatchewan's fight for a special deal, because doing so would leave Ontario contributing even more...Don Drummond, a former finance official who is now chief economist of the Toronto Dominion Bank, expects the Tories will largely embrace recommendations made by former Alberta deputy treasurer Al O'Brien to enrich equalization by close to \$1-billion for the provinces and \$300-million for the

territories. But he thinks Ottawa would have to tweak a recommended equalization cap to prevent it from effectively taxing back all non-renewable resource revenue from provinces. The Tories are also expected to adjust transfers so that all provinces receive their full per-capita share -- a move that will greatly benefit Ontario, and somewhat help Alberta -- and cost close to \$1-billion.

## **Bargaining**

### **Government Services**

#### **SGEU Public Service gets strike mandate**

(SGEU News Release, December 1, 2006)

Public service members of SGEU have given their Negotiating Committee a strike mandate. The collective agreement covering 13,000 public service workers expired September 30, 2006. "Since beginning our discussions in September, we have made virtually no progress," said Barry Nowoselsky, Vice President of the Public Service sector. "The tone of the discussions at the table and the lack of response to our proposals led us to believe we need to take a different course of action in order to reach an agreement," Nowoselsky said. A strike vote was conducted throughout the province from November 13th to November 30th. In addition to the lack of progress at the table, members supported strike action to resolve long-standing problems in some departments, blatant abuse of the collective agreement in terms of the staffing process, harassment of workers, workload problems (especially in the area of child protection services), safety concerns in 24 hour institutions, unresolved grievances, and retention problems for skilled workers (making salary supplements an increasing necessity). "I'm very pleased that we were given a strong mandate from our members," Nowoselsky said. "Over 81% voted in favour of strike action. Government hasn't been listening to us or its workers and hasn't been addressing people's concerns. I hope they're listening now and will come to the table ready to bargain a collective agreement."

#### **Big raises for Crown executives**

(Leader-Post, December 1, 2006)

Reporter: [James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

Hefty pay raises for the top executives of Saskatchewan's Crown corporations will definitely be a bargaining chip as rank-and-file workers head into negotiations with the government, says an official with a union that represents many workers at the Crowns. The NDP government announced Thursday a new compensation plan that will see an immediate average salary increase of 5.5 per cent and affect 64 positions within the Crowns. It also sees a substantial increase to salary ranges for executives - with a top level of up to \$259,650 for the chief executive officers of SaskTel, SaskPower, SGI, SaskEnergy and Crown Investments Corp, (CIC) -- and new short-term performance incentives, which at the top end would allow those same CEOs to earn a bonus of up to 16 per cent of their salary annually. CIC Minister Maynard Sonntag acknowledged the compensation plan may be hard for some members of the public to swallow but said the new plan was needed to recruit and retain top officials in a much more competitive labour environment. But Doug Anderson, a national representative with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) union,

said he's not aware of the Crowns actually losing many of their executives. But the new compensation plan does raise expectations for employees, he said...The new plan divides the Crowns into three tiers with three standardized salary scales. SaskTel, SaskPower, SGI, SaskEnergy and CIC are at the top for salary range, Information Services Corp. is in the middle, and SaskWater, STC and Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation are at the bottom end. There are 20 individuals who will receive no immediate increase under the plan. Two SGI vice-presidents will receive the biggest raises -- 38 and 36 per cent over three years...Average yearly earnings for Saskatchewan residents in 2005 were \$34,823, according to Statistics Canada. The CEOs of the major Crowns currently receive salaries at the top end of scales ranging from \$194,868 to \$207,777. They will start at the bottom end of the new CEO scale - \$207,720. Sonntag said the new package has rates comparable to positions outside government in both the public and private sector. The Saskatchewan Party also signed off on the new plan, although Crowns critic Donna Harpauer said the Opposition would scrutinize the performance standards used to determine bonuses...The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a lobby group that calls for tax cuts and lower government spending, also said its biggest concern was over the bonus plan. Union official Anderson also said he has issues with the bonuses. "The problem I have with those incentives is that the rest of the people who have to do all of the work on the ground on the floor, don't share in that bonus even though we know they have to do most of the work to help that CEO reach their incentives," he said.

### **Strike plans on hold as show of good faith**

(Leader-Post, December 18, 2006)

Reporter: James Anne Kyle, The Leader-Post

Paper copy only

The union representing Saskatchewan's 13,000 government employees put strike plans on hold this weekend as a show of good faith. "We are hoping that the employer takes that to heart and considers that on Tuesday when we are back at the bargaining table," said Jason Rattray, chairman of the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU) strike committee. Don Zerr of Saskatchewan's Public Service Commission told local media the decision is "a positive sign" for talks. The employees, whose existing contract expired Sept. 30, were in a legal strike position as of 11 a.m. Saturday...While negotiators for the province and the workers are still talking they remain far apart on the issues of wages and benefits. SGEU's chief negotiator Barry Nowoselsky said he is planning to have some exploratory discussions with the employer's side on Monday, but the main table won't convene until Tuesday. The union tabled its opening position by asking for a 27-per-cent increase in wages and benefits over three years. That was the union's opening position subject to negotiations, he said. "The 9.5 per cent the government offered us isn't a wage increase -- it's wages and benefits," Rattray said. "That 9.5 per cent is an increase that costs everything (all benefit enhancements) out of it. So that means that our health plan where we desperately need more money -- where other collective agreements have it automatically built in -- we have to cost it out of our mandate every time we come up for a new contract. That takes a big chunk out of that mandate." Meanwhile the 340,000-member National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) has written SGEU president Bob Bymoer throwing its full support behind the union...

## **Manitoba corrections employees reject provincial offer**

(NUPGE, December 19, 2006)

[http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n19de06b.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n19de06b.htm)

The Corrections Sub-Component of the Manitoba Government and the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU/NUPGE) has strongly rejected a tentative settlement reached in November. The union, which counted ballots last week, reports that 86% of those taking part voted against the proposal. As a result, negotiators will now attempt to return to the bargaining table and re-open talks. If the government refuses, the union will file for arbitration...

## **Other**

### **STEELWORKERS' Anti-Goodyear Message Rolling in Ottawa, Regina on Saturday**

(USW Canada website, December 1, 2006)

<http://www.usw.ca/program/content/3775.php>

The campaign asking Canadians to refuse to buy Goodyear Tire and Rubber products until the strike involving 15,000 families across North America is settled will be going to Ottawa and Regina this weekend. In both cities, shoppers will be offered information about the strike, which started Oct. 5 over the company's demands to close factories and import tires from low-wage countries. Besides the Goodyear brand, Canadian Tire's Motomaster tires are also made by Goodyear. In Ottawa, strikers and their supporters will be at two Canadian Tire stores, 330 Coventry and 2010 Ogilvie. In Regina, leafleting will also take place at Canadian Tire, 4520 Albert Street South, 655 Albert Street North and 2325 Prince of Wales Drive. Goodyear is using replacement workers to make tires that are sold in Canada and the USW is extending its campaign to boycott Goodyear until the dispute is over and the company's legitimate employees are back on the job. The campaign makes reference to a Princeton University study, which considered whether a long, contentious strike and the hiring of replacement workers by Bridgestone/Firestone in the mid-1990s contributed to the production of an excess number of defective tires. That study found that labour strife in Bridgestone/Firestone's Decatur, IL, plant closely coincided with lower product quality. The study examines the causes of the Firestone and Ford recall of 14.4 million tires in 2000. These tires were linked by the US National Highway Safety Transportation Administration to complaints involving 271 fatalities and more than 800 injuries. The USW will intensify the public campaign for a fair union contract at Goodyear throughout the holiday season and as long as it takes to gain justice.

### **Sobeys workers back on the job soon (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 6, 2006)

Reporter: Neil Scott, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Chief shop steward Susan Butson was beaming at a news conference Tuesday held to announce details of the strike settlement. Also on hand was Brian Haughey, the union's chief negotiator. A 450-day strike at the Sobeys store on South Albert Street is now over and workers will be returning to the job over the next few days. Officials with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which represents the Sobeys workers, say the contract settlement will provide workers with pay raises averaging 25 per cent, spread over three years... "We learned that if you fight hard enough you can

succeed in getting a good deal for the employees," Haughey said at a press conference Tuesday at the RWDSU offices on Winnipeg Street. Wayne Zook, owner of the store, said he was glad the strike was over but he wasn't interested in discussing the strike or the terms of the settlement...The contract settlement was actually reached, and ratified by the union members, on Monday...The workers who were on strike at South Albert store will be beginning to return to work this week but a majority will not be back on the job until Monday, said Haughey. He noted he anticipates that replacement workers used by Sobeys to keep the store open during the strike will be terminated. But workers who were employed at the store prior to the strike -- and who crossed picket lines to work during the strike -- will be able to continue to work at the Sobeys store, Haughey said. Information released by the union indicated that workers will be receiving pay raises of between \$2 and \$4 per hour, depending on their job classification, over the three years of the contract...The data released by the union indicated the wages of a courtesy clerk will rise to \$9 per hour from \$7.75, with additional raises to follow in the subsequent years of the contract. In addition, all employees will get a 50-cent-per-hour cash bonus, based on the number of hours they worked between Jan. 1, 2005 and Sept. 11, 2005 when the strike began. For example, an employee who worked 1,000 hours in that period would get a \$500 cash bonus...Butson said she wanted to thank people in the community, and from other unions, who supported the striking unions...

### **Labour dispute ends (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 13, 2006)

[Paper copy only](#)

Workers with the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union have returned to Morris Industries Inc.'s plant in Yorkton following a weeklong labour dispute. Roughly 100 unionized employees went on strike at the beginning of last week. But workers were back on the job Monday after an agreement was forged late Sunday night, said Graham Gardner, communications manager for the Saskatoon-based manufacturer and distributor of agricultural equipment. Gardner called the three-year contract "great news" for both management and the union...The Yorkton plant produces seeding, tillage and haying equipment.

## **Law and Legislation**

### **Saskatchewan**

#### **Speedy passage for some bills, not others**

(Leader-Post, December 4, 2006)

[Reporter: James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

Legislation approving a new February statutory holiday and making official the two-point cut to the provincial sales tax has sailed through the provincial legislature sitting that will wrap up on Wednesday. But other high-profile pieces of legislation from the NDP government -- such as bills that eliminate mandatory retirement, require hospitals to contact police when they treat gunshot and stab wounds, enable the government to set rules for disclosure of health inspections of restaurants and sue tobacco companies for health-care costs -- won't be subject to a final vote until the legislature reconvenes next spring. New rules for the legislature adopted this fall have

standardized the practice of introducing legislation in the fall with a guaranteed vote in the spring sitting. While the government can ask the Opposition to allow bills to be fast-tracked, the NDP has only pushed for a small number of bills to receive speedy approval despite comments by various ministers calling for their particular bills to be passed...Among the fast-tracked pieces of legislation are changes to the Labour Standards Act to create the new holiday, approval of the PST cut and an associated increase to the tobacco tax, income tax bracketing and the creation of a new infrastructure fund for cultural and recreational facilities. Government House leader Glenn Hagele said the government is pleased that it has been able to move forward on the holiday and tax cut...[Saskatchewan Party House leader Rod] Gantfoer said the Opposition also plans to ask for five bills to be moved to the legislature's committees for review between now and the spring sitting. On one bill specifically, the Gunshot and Stab Wounds Mandatory Reporting Act, the Saskatchewan Party wants to invite public comment because of concerns raised about the legislation by the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and some health care workers...

### **Local gays, lesbians beaming with pride over marriage vote (SK/CA)**

(Leader-Post, December 9, 2006)

Reporter: James Anne Kyle, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

The death of the political debate on same-sex marriages is cause for celebration within Saskatchewan's gay and lesbian community. "It's quite a relief that it's finally done. At least we are keeping our fingers crossed that it is finally done although we've heard some people say that if (Conservative Prime Minister) Stephen Harper gets a majority government at some point they may bring it up again. We're hoping that is not the case," said Donna Smith, a spokeswoman for the Gay and Lesbian Community of Regina. "Mr. Harper has quite clearly stated that he has no intention of bringing it up again and as far as he's concerned the matter is settled." Harper made the declaration that the same-sex marriage issue was settled Thursday after a vote in the House of Commons defeated a motion to revisit a 2005 law recognizing gay and lesbian marriages. Constituents living in Dave Batters' Palliser riding may have been left wondering if the Tory MP was trying to revive the issue after receiving calls Friday quizzing them on their position on same-sex marriages. Batters told the Leader-Post on Friday he initiated the poll anticipating a lengthy debate on the issue. He was caught off-guard by Thursday's vote, which result in pollsters still canvassing constituents after the vote had already taken place...This is the third time in three years that there has been a vote on this issue under three different Parliaments and three different prime ministers. There was the first vote dealing with the Alliance motion in 2003 with Jean Chretien, and then there was C-38 in 2005 with Paul Martin and then this one...Gens Hellquist with the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition said every time the issue is raised it unleashes a torrent of hate and intolerance directed at gays and lesbians so it's a relief to have the issue put to rest. Even if the political debate is finished Smith said the issue of same-sex marriage is still a matter of social acceptance...Social acceptance comes with educating people and letting them know that gays and lesbians are ordinary people like everybody else who lives in your community, she said. With the marriage issue no longer taking up so much energy, Hellquist said, it's now time to focus on improving the health and well-being of gays, lesbians, bi-sexuals and trans-gender people who have been largely ignored in any national health strategies.

## **Questions about anti-scab legislation return to Saskatchewan**

(Leader-Post, December 13, 2006)

Reporter: James Wood, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

With a strong possibility the House of Commons will soon pass legislation backed by the federal NDP banning the use of replacement workers in job action in federally-regulated industries, members of the union movement are wondering why Saskatchewan's NDP government won't enact its own "anti-scab" legislation. Delegates to the recent provincial NDP convention in Saskatoon passed a resolution backed by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, three riding associations and Saskatchewan Young New Democrats calling on the government to pass such legislation, similar to that in place in British Columbia and Quebec. But provincial Labour Minister David Forbes said Tuesday that banning replacement workers isn't on the government's agenda and that his department's priorities are occupational health and safety and dealing with the recommendations of the panel on vulnerable workers that were released 10 months ago...SFL president Larry Hubich said he's puzzled by the continued foot-dragging on an issue that should be dear to the hearts of the NDP after 15 years in power provincially. He said it was feeble to cite planned work in areas such as health and safety as a reason not to act on banning replacement workers...Hubich said banning the use of replacement workers would benefit both workers and businesses because strikes would be less violent and angry because non-unionized workers would not be crossing picket lines. It would also mean strikes would end a great deal more quickly, he said. But Marilyn Braun-Pollon of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said not allowing replacement workers gives too much of an advantage to unions during job action and leads to longer strikes. Enacting legislation on either the provincial or federal level would scare away investment and make the economy less competitive, she said...Both sides on the issue are closely watching the debate in Ottawa over anti-scab legislation that would apply to sectors such as banking and airlines...Forbes said he was also following the issue but was non-committal on whether the government supported federal legislation. Among the recommendations were for a sharp increase to the minimum wage, the creation by government of supplementary medical benefits and pension programs for vulnerable workers and a commitment by the government to give first preference to qualified aboriginal workers for professional government jobs and to hire aboriginal workers for one-quarter of entry-level government jobs.

## **Canada**

### **British Columbia may scrap mandatory retirement**

(StarPhoenix, December 2, 2006)

Canadian Press

Paper copy only

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell says he agrees mandatory retirement should be scrapped, the key recommendation in a report released Friday by an advisory group he chose. Campbell says the government will take action on the issue next year because it's an idea whose time has come...Already, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba have done away with mandatory retirement and this month Saskatchewan introduced legislation to do so. The B.C. report notes the B.C. Human Rights Code doesn't protect people 65 and older from discrimination on the basis of age. It says people

older than 65 who continue to work can't count on getting the same pay, benefits and working conditions as their younger colleagues. "The vast majority of older people are not finished being productive at 65 and it is inappropriate to have laws suggesting otherwise." Keeping older, experienced employees in the workforce makes economic sense, the report argues.

### **Strike worker hearings extended (CA)**

(StarPhoenix, December 8, 2006)

Reporter: Paul Vieira, CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

The lone independent witness to testify before MPs on a proposed ban on replacement workers during a labour dispute warned the bill, as written, is "one-sided," and would prompt employers to retaliate. The testimony from a former senior Labour Department bureaucrat highlighted the second day of hearings on the controversial bill. As with the first session on Tuesday, the hearings at times were dominated by nasty and heated exchanges between MPs and business groups, which want to see the bill defeated. Business groups have accused MPs on the human resources committee of trying to rush the Bloc Quebecois-sponsored legislation through a minimal amount of hearings. But industry groups won a reprieve when the committee voted, five to four, to extend the hearings and invite more witnesses to offer their expertise. The new schedule and who will be asked to appear could be determined as early as Tuesday, when the committee next meets. One witness who offered his analysis Thursday was Michael McDermott, a former senior federal labour bureaucrat with 33 years on the job. While taking pains to say he was not taking sides, he told MPs the private member's bill could have unintended consequences. He said the bill "invites retaliation and corrosive pendulum swings," and ignores the balance achieved between labour and management in the last set of major labour reforms in the late 1990s -- changes he took part in developing. Those changes allowed for the use of replacement workers in labour disputes in industrial sectors under federal regulations. But if the use of replacement workers was shown to be an unfair practice, federal labour regulators would have the authority to stop the practice. Prior to those 1998 changes, the federal government had to intervene 17 times to end labour disputes through legislation. Federal intervention has not been necessary since that time...

### **Few remain working past 65 (ON)**

(Globe and Mail, December 12, 2006)

Reporter: Jill Mahoney, Globe and Mail

Paper copy only

Ontario's decision to ban mandatory retirement, effective today, puts it in line with several other provinces. But what effect will the legislation have? If history is any judge, little will change. In jurisdictions that have already stopped forcing workers to retire at 65, few older employees have remained in the work force, experts say...Indeed, most workers retire well before they turn 65, largely because they can afford to or for health reasons. Across Canada, the median retirement age has been declining: In 2005, it was 61, down from 65 in 1976. Ontario, which amended its Human Rights Code to protect people 65 and over from age discrimination, joins Manitoba, Quebec and Yukon in banning mandatory retirement. (While some other jurisdictions also have similar policies, there are often loopholes, including allowing mandatory retirement if it is part of a collective agreement or a pension plan.) However, Ontario is allowing employers to stop benefit payments and pension

contributions at 65 even if workers remain on staff. Ontario officials estimate that up to 4,000 of the 100,000 Ontarians who turn 65 every year -- just 4 per cent -- will keep working when given the choice. (As is the case in other provinces, occupational requirements may still force out some workers, such as police officers or pilots.) While there have been few studies analyzing elimination of mandatory retirement in Manitoba and Quebec, analysis has found that such bans have produced "fairly small and in some cases insignificant impacts" on the number of 65-plus workers, said Jon Kesselman, an economist and professor in Simon Fraser University's graduate public policy program in Burnaby, B.C. While the short-term impact will be relatively small, experts predict that more and more employees will decide to keep working past 65 in coming decades. Retirement is something people think about for years, meaning that Ontarians who are now in their 40s and 50s could be the first wave of workers who decide to stay on the job longer...Changing mandatory-retirement laws has the most concentrated effect on those who work in the knowledge economy, including university professors...In addition, many people who continue to work past 65 are self-employed, such as doctors and business owners, and are not affected by mandatory-retirement rules. As well, women and immigrants are more likely to benefit from eliminating mandatory retirement. Many women take time off to raise children, which may mean their pension benefits are insufficient to allow them to stop working. And immigrants who move to Canada as adults may get a late start in the workplace.

## Pensions and Benefits

### Saskatchewan

#### Plan called too rich

(Leader-Post, December 5, 2006)

Reporter: Veronica Rhodes, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

SaskTel Minister Deb Higgins defended a centennial retirement plan for employees of the Crown telephone utility Monday, saying it recognizes their service to the company. But the Saskatchewan Party says the new plan gives workers a bonus just for going to work every day. Higgins said the Centennial Plan -- which came into effect during the province's centennial year -- came about through collective bargaining and is contained within the agreement with the Crown corporation's employees. It was implemented in March 2005 to replace the previous service recognition plan, which at the time of an employee's retirement would pay out the equivalent of two days for every year they worked for SaskTel. Under the new plan, the two days increased to six days and would no longer be available only upon retirement, but would be put towards one of three options annually: A newly created tax-deductible centennial RRSP, the superannuation fund or a lump-sum cash payment that would be taxable. Existing employees were given until October 2005 to choose one of the three options while the annual payout for new employees who started after the October deadline automatically goes into a centennial RRSP. Higgins said the creation of the new plan will help the corporation in its efforts to attract and keep skilled employees...According to SaskTel's consolidated financial statements, the total cost of the new plan was just over \$5 million. Opposition MLA Donna Harpauer said it is a pricey bonus for the Crown corporation to be handing out to all employees, which she believes should be based on performance...Negotiations

between SaskTel and the employee's union had occurred while the province's 0-1-1 mandate was in place, but the new plan is considered a benefit. As often occurs with negotiated benefits, the plan was also extended to management.

### **Mandatory retirement taking centre stage**

(Leader-Post, December 18, 2006)

Reporter: Ray Turchansky, For CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

Pension authority Malcolm Hamilton, of Mercer Human Resource Consulting, recently said the concept of mandatory retirement is "going to become a big issue" for Canadians. Disparity of opinion on the topic is certainly growing. A month ago, Desjardins Financial Security released results of a survey showing that half of Canadian workers over the age of 40 felt an ideal retirement age is 60, but 34 per cent wanted to retire before age 55. Then two weeks later, the Saskatchewan government proposed changes to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code that would end mandatory retirement for people aged 65 and older. This follows a global movement in which Britain is gradually raising its age of retirement for full state pensions to 68, while the United States and Germany plan to raise their retirement age to 67. According to Statistics Canada, our median retirement age (half was higher, half lower) fell from 65.1 years in 1976 to 60.6 years in 1997, levelled off for five years, then rose to 61.8 years by 2003. "There's a widespread acceptance in policy formulation circles that if people live longer, that means they can and should work longer," Hamilton said...He said there's a leap of faith that people are growing old more slowly, that today's 65-year-old is like a 60-year-old used to be, and a 45-year-old is like a 40-year-old used to be. "The question we should be asking is not whether we're living longer, but how confident are we that people should be expected to work longer. I don't think it follows longevity. If you're telling me that because I live longer than my father I should work longer, what about this one -- women live longer than men, so women should work longer. Is that compellingly, equally axiomatic? It's almost like, here's a problem, here's the most obvious fix. Those problems are only going to go away if you find those 65- to 70-year-olds can retain their jobs and function productively, and my guess is a lot of them can, but probably a lot of them can't." For instance, Dr. Michael Smylie, a senior medical oncologist with the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, has noted that while cancer patients are now living 10 years longer than they used to, many are living those years with cancer. "It's like someone saying that because they can be treated 10 years longer they should somehow be back in the workforce," Hamilton said. "It just doesn't connect."..."If you ask the question, who's got the most to gain by people working longer, it's the federal government," said Hamilton. "For government, retirement is the line where people go from paying way more tax than they get in benefits, to getting way more benefits than they pay in taxes. So it's very natural for governments to say it would be wonderful if that line was up here." He feels the issue is a slippery slope. "If we're starting with 'people should be able to work longer,' how long before that morphs into 'people should be expected to work longer,' and from there to 'people will be required to work longer?' "...The disparity in pensions is one reason why the median age of retirement in 2004 was 58.6 years for people in the public sector, 61.8 years for those in the private sector and 65.1 years for those self-employed. Among industries, public administration employees retired at an age of 58.4 years, farmers at 67.3 years of age...

## Canada

### **Hard at work, even in retirement**

(Globe and Mail, December 11, 2006)

Reporter: Tavia Grant, Globe and Mail

Paper copy only

Retirement may conjure images of exotic travel and lingering lunches, but many Canadians plan to keep working in their golden years, several surveys showed Monday. The studies come a day before the Ontario government joins other provinces in abolishing mandatory retirement, meaning employers can no longer force someone into retirement on the basis of age. Governments are easing the rules amid a looming skilled labour shortage in the country. Almost half of Canadian baby boomers are planning to retire early, but an equal amount plan on continuing to work in their retirement, a survey from Fidelity Investments found. "This new 'transition into retirement' phase, where you consider yourself retired from your primary occupation, yet you continue working, is a very interesting trend developing with Canadian baby boomers," said Peter Drake, Fidelity's vice president of economic and retirement research...Its survey found that 43 per cent of people plan on retiring before they reach 65 and 19 per cent do not plan on ever retiring. More than three-quarters of those who plan to work into retirement identified the need to earn more income as one of the top reasons for continuing to work. An equal proportion said they see work as a means to stay involved in the world and a quarter of respondents said they were afraid that if they stop working they will have nothing to do. A Bank of Montreal survey, meantime, found that almost three quarters of people plan to work past the age of 65 and 91 per cent of Ontario boomers are willing to keep working if they don't have enough to fund their retirement...Canadians are living longer and many said they want to continue to work. "To boomers, working longer is not just about earning money, it's about staying active," BMO said.

## General

### Government Services

#### **New four-year contract ratified by 13,000 Manitoba employees**

(NUPGE, December 12, 2006)

[http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n12de06c.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n12de06c.htm)

Manitoba's 13,000 civil service employees have ratified a new four-year contract with the province. The deal, accepted by a vote of 78%, provides increases of 2.5% a year (retroactive to March this year) for the first three years and 2.9% in the final year. "This has been a long and sometimes challenging round of negotiations for the Civil Service Bargaining Committee," says Peter Olfert, president of the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU/NUPGE). "But based on feedback we've been getting at information sessions we've conducted across the province, our members see it largely as a fair and reasonable deal." Olfert is pleased that the dedicated workers who keep Manitoba safe, secure and on the move can

now plan for their future. The MGEU will be working with government to ensure that retroactive pay goes out to members by the end of January.

### **NSGEU reduces number of bargaining units from nine to four**

(NUPGE, December 12, 2006)

[http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n12de06b.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n12de06b.htm)

The Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU/NUPGE) has voted to reduce its number of bargaining units from nine to four. The restructuring was approved in a province-wide vote with 76% voting in favor of the change. Existing units will be reconfigured into the following groups:

- Clerical (CL)
- Professional (PR and HSN classifications)
- Educational (EDC)
- Technical and Services (TS includes TE, HSA, HSB, MOS and SE classifications)

The current master agreement (which covers all bargaining units with the exception of EDC, expires next March 31. The last meeting of the current Bargaining Unit Negotiating Council (BUNC) will be held Jan. 19-20. Members will review bargaining priorities for 2007 and meet again in early March to elect a new chair and vice-chair for each of the four new units...

## **Health**

### **Sask. rated poorly in wait-times report**

(Leader-Post, December 1, 2006)

Reporter: [Veronica Rhodes, Leader-Post](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

Saskatchewan received only two passing grades on a recent report card of provincial wait times in five priority areas. According to the Wait Time Alliance Interim Report Card released this week, Saskatchewan received an A in cardiac care and a D in sight restoration, which includes cataract surgery. The province earned an F for joint replacement, which covers hip and knee replacement surgeries. For diagnostic imaging and cancer care, Saskatchewan received incompletes, which indicate insufficient data. Health Minister Len Taylor said the limitations section of the report states the data was collected from government Web sites, and every province posts their data differently...The alliance is made up of several national medical societies, including the Canadian Medical Association and Canadian Cardiovascular Society. The report card assesses the performance of Canada and its provinces for meeting benchmarks for wait times in the five priority areas. For example, a grade of D means 50 to 59 per cent of the population is treated within the benchmark. Opposition Saskatchewan Party MLA Don McMorris said people should not be happy with Saskatchewan's performance in the report card, which is nowhere near achieving its benchmarks. He expressed frustration that Taylor used the report's data collection as an excuse for the province's poor performance, which McMorris said the minister has done for other recent wait time reports...Taylor said he welcomes the report card, adding he's just noting the report's limitations and argued that his criticism of the reports has been consistent. He also pointed out that the benchmarks were set just 11 months ago. Comparing Saskatchewan Health data year upon year shows improvements, he said, such as 600 more surgeries this year in the first quarter than

in the same time period last year. While he did express pleasure with the high grade for cardiac care, Taylor admitted the area of joint replacement is a significant challenge for the province. Saskatchewan has the longest wait for hip and knee replacement surgery in the country but the minister said the province also does more surgeries than any other province...

### **Union says government must hire 130 registered nurses (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 2, 2006)

Reporter: Pamela Cowan, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Nurses are calling for immediate government action to stabilize the condition of the province's intensive care, critical care and surgical departments. To properly staff these departments, 130 registered nurses are urgently needed, said Rosalee Longmoore, president of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN). Throughout November, SUN has presented Health Minister Len Taylor with information about nursing vacancies in the province, daily issues that registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses face and what nurses believe will keep them working in Saskatchewan. On Friday the health minister received the latest recommendations that included a call to increase the nurse- to-patient ratio and hire more staff to fill vacant shifts...To resolve the nursing shortage, a three-prong approach is required to be done, simultaneously: increase nursing seats, retain nurses throughout their careers and recruit people back to the bedside who have left nursing, [Longmoore] said. "Recruit, retain and train -- we're on it," said Bonnie Blakley, Sask Health's executive director of the Workforce Planning Branch and co-chair of the provincial health workforce steering committee. In September, \$25 million in funding was announced by the provincial government for recruitment and retention to accelerate the three-year provincial workforce action plan. That included \$15 million for nurses. That's on top of the \$5.5 million spent annually on recruitment and retention of health professionals outside of physicians, Blakley said. In October a relocation program was announced to encourage people to come back to Saskatchewan or make Saskatchewan their home for the first time. At the same time a recruitment agency was launched, which sent recruiters to a number of provinces to identify where vacancies were in Saskatchewan...

### **Canada's health bill (CA)**

(Leader-Post, December 6, 2006)

Reporter: Meagan Fitzpatrick, CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

What's your health worth? According to the annual report on national health expenditures by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the answer \$4,548. That's what per capita spending in Canada is expected to reach by the end of 2006, according to the report released Tuesday. The CIHI forecasts the grand total of health-care spending will be \$148 billion this year -- up about \$8 billion from 2005 -- and will represent 10.3 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product. That figure marks the highest level seen in 31 years. The increase translates into a growth rate of 5.8 per cent, slightly lower than the estimated annual growth rate of 6.4 per cent in 2005. Still, it's the 10th consecutive year where health-care spending is set to outpace inflation and population growth, the study found...Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, president and CEO of the Canadian Healthcare Association, said the report should give a boost to Canadians' confidence in the health-care system. "What it tells us is that the health system is sustainable," she said. "It tells us that our spending is not out

of control compared to growth in GDP, it's not out of control compared to other countries, but certainly we want to make sure that we get value for money and that we run as efficient and effective a system as we can," she said. Sholzberg-Gray was also happy to see more re-investment in public-sector health care after years of decline in the 1990s, but said there is still much work to be done to play catch-up. Wait times and access to services are areas that need to be targeted and Sholzberg-Gray would also like to see a focus on a national pharmaceutical strategy to combat the rising cost of drugs...The public- and private-sector shares of total health care spending have remained fairly stable over the past decade at a 70/30 ratio, but for the first time in three years, public-sector spending is expected to grow slightly faster than the private sector...Health care is most costly at the beginning and the end of life, the report showed...In 2004, the most recent year for which data are available, provincial and territorial governments spent \$7,565 on every person under the age of one and \$8,969 on those aged 65 and over. Seniors consumed more than 45 per cent of all provincial government health spending, while comprising 13 per cent of the population, the study said. Hospitals take up the biggest piece of the spending pie, followed by drugs -- prescribed and non-prescribed medication -- and then physicians. Hospital expenditures as a share of total health spending have decreased over the last 30 years, the report noted, and drugs are taking up a bigger share. Compared to other countries, Canada is among the top spenders in the world, the CIHI said. The most recent data from 2004 ranked Canada fifth for per capita spending among 21 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, behind the United States, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Norway.

### **Nursing course sees success attracting aboriginal students (SK)**

(StarPhoenix, December 7, 2006)

Reporter: Lana Haight, StarPhoenix

Paper copy only

Georgina Ballantyne wouldn't be a nurse in her home community in northern Saskatchewan if it wasn't for the help she received while attending the University of Saskatchewan. "It was a huge culture shock," said Ballantyne, who graduated from the university's nursing program in 1999 and is working in Deschambault Lake. Moving to the city, attending university classes and juggling school and parent responsibilities at first overwhelmed Ballantyne, a single mom from a tiny community more than 350 kilometres northeast of Saskatoon. But she got the encouragement she needed to continue her studies through a program designed to recruit and retain aboriginal nursing students...More than providing the academic help, the advisers in the program connected Ballantyne with other aboriginal nursing students. Only one other aboriginal woman was enrolled in the same year as Ballantyne, but she soon met students who were ahead of her in the nursing program. They formed friendships that have continued...Aboriginal people are traditionally under-represented in health-care professions, but the U of S program is working to change that. The growth in the nursing component of the program has been phenomenal, from four aboriginal students in 1996 to 226 First Nations and Metis nursing students this year. More than 18 per cent of nursing students studying in Saskatchewan are aboriginal. The increase in aboriginal nursing graduates stems from the success of previous graduates such as Ballantyne, says Val Arnault-Pelletier, aboriginal student adviser with the Native access program...Freda Campbell feels a sense of responsibility to succeed as a nursing student. Enrolled in her first year, Campbell moved to Saskatoon this fall from Red Pheasant First Nation near Battleford. Her husband and three of their children still live on the reserve...Aboriginal patients also benefit from

the program, as aboriginal nurses work in their home communities as well as in urban hospitals. Knowing the culture because you've grown up in it is different than learning about the culture through books. As the home and community care assessor and nurse at Deschambault Lake, Ballantyne incorporates into her work the cultural expectation that extended families are involved in caring for the sick and elderly. Being of aboriginal descent also gives Ballantyne and Campbell a better understanding of some of the health issues facing First Nations and Metis people. Campbell is especially interested in learning about diabetes and taking home ideas to help those at Red Pheasant manage and, when possible, prevent the disease that is becoming an epidemic among aboriginal people.

### **Sask. patients will go elsewhere**

(Leader-Post, December 8, 2006)

Reporter: Anne Kyle, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Saskatchewan residents say they are willing to go to another province to get health care if the local wait time is too long, according to a new survey. An IBM Canada HealthInsider opinion poll, which surveyed 2,500 Canadians on health wait times, revealed 93 per cent of Saskatchewan residents would seek care elsewhere in Canada. But only 15 per cent of the province's residents would consider getting health care outside the country. From a national perspective, 83 per cent of Canadians said if wait times were considered unacceptably long they would go outside their province for care if the government covered the cost. The survey also noted 92 per cent of Canadians said they would be prepared to go to another facility within their province with shorter wait times. However, 80 per cent of Canadians reported they were satisfied with the amount of time they waited for an appointment to see a family doctor or for a special medical test, such as a CT scan or MRI...In Saskatchewan, 18 per cent of residents reported having to wait more than two months for a special diagnostic test, while in Manitoba that percentage is more than double at 42 per cent. The survey also found 79 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with their most recent wait time for an elective surgical procedure. Slightly more than one in four Canadians (27 per cent) said they felt wait times are longer than five years ago, down considerably from 42 per cent in 2004...The satisfaction levels, however, dropped to 55 per cent when it came to the length of time Canadians had to wait for services in the country's emergency departments. The survey also revealed emergency room wait times increased with the size of the community. Twenty-one per cent of Canadians living in communities of less than 5,000 waited more than two hours in their hospital emergency room, but that percentage increased to 32 per cent of the population in cities under one million in population. The survey also found the vast majority of Canadians believe wait lists should not be managed on a first-come, first-served basis. Ninety-four per cent of survey respondents believe wait lists should be managed according to need and severity.

### **Nurses under the gun (SK/CA)**

(Leader-Post, December 12, 2006)

Reporter: Pamela Cowan, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Job stress is taking a physical and mental toll on nurses -- especially in Saskatchewan. A new Statistics Canada study has linked psychological factors such as work stress to health problems among Canada's nurses. Released on Monday, the study surveyed nearly 19,000 nurses between October 2005 and January 2006. It

found that 22 per cent of Saskatchewan nurses were more likely to say their mental health had made it difficult to handle their workload in the month before the survey compared with the national figure of 18 per cent. Rosalee Longmoore, president of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, attributes the psychological distress to prolonged job strain. The researchers said work stress occurred when job responsibilities outpaced a worker's ability to decide how to perform the tasks required of them. In Saskatchewan, 37 per cent of nurses were classified as experiencing high job strain - compared with 31 per cent nationally. The study, conducted in concert with Health Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information, pegs the number of Saskatchewan nurses in 2005 as about 11,400, four per cent of the national total. It found that about 45 per cent of Saskatchewan's nurses worked more than 40 hours per week, compared with the national average of 37 per cent, and Saskatchewan nurses also reported the highest number of physical assaults by patients in the country -- nearly 32 per cent. The proportion nationally was 29 per cent. When Saskatchewan nurses were asked about the quality of care they provided, about six per cent acknowledged they had delivered only fair or poor care. The percentage for Canadian nurses overall was four per cent. Stress and strain is taking its toll on nurses. The report found that seven in 10 Saskatchewan nurses (71 per cent) had taken off time because of a health problem in the 12 months before the survey. This proportion was higher than for nurses elsewhere. Among all nurses in Canada, 61 per cent had been away for health-related reasons. More than one quarter (27 per cent) of the province's nurses reported they had experienced pain serious enough to affect their ability to do their job in the six months before the survey. The Canadian average was 24 per cent...

### **B.C. hospitals to refund fees paid to jump waiting-list queue**

(Globe and Mail, December 14, 2006)

Reporter: Patrick Brethour, Globe and Mail

Paper copy only

The provincial government is forcing two Vancouver hospitals that sold access to MRIs and other diagnostic services to issue refunds to more than 1,100 patients, with a Health Ministry report saying the two facilities broke the Canada Health Act by allowing patients to pay to jump the queue. Providence Health Care will have to pay back half a million dollars collected over four years from people who paid up to \$1,400 each to reduce their waiting times by several months at St. Paul's and Mount St. Joseph hospitals. That specific practice was the target of a two-month investigation by the British Columbia Health Ministry, which has concluded that the two hospitals breached the Canada Health Act but that there is no proof they broke the law deliberately...The head of one of Vancouver's most active medical brokers said he is not concerned about a crackdown. "This is just a small speed bump on the road to two-tier health care." said Richard Baker of Timely Medical Alternatives Inc., adding that there is no difference between the kinds of cases he is referring to private diagnostic clinics and those he sent to St. Paul's. It was a complaint about just such a referral that triggered the investigation of St. Paul's and Mount St. Joseph hospitals in late September, when reports first surfaced that individuals willing to pay were able to receive MRIs within days. The report issued yesterday said all those who paid were already on public waiting lists for diagnostic services, and classified as Priority 3 patients -- meaning they would have had to wait three to six months...Once they paid their fee, they received diagnostic services in two to three days. That is not as fast as Priority 1 patients, who are considered emergency cases and are seen within hours. But it is generally faster than Priority 2 patients, who have severe health conditions

and receive diagnostic services within a few days, according to the report. The Health Ministry, and the report, said there is no evidence that any emergency or urgent patient was bumped to make way for a paying customer. Gavin Wilson, a spokesman for Providence Health Centre, said private bookings were made either at times when diagnostic equipment would not have been otherwise used, or when a scheduled appointment was cancelled....

### **Project courts aboriginal health workers**

(StarPhoenix, December 18, 2006)

Reporter: Janet French, StarPhoenix

Paper copy only

Aboriginal high school grads interested in health care will be able to get their foot in the door with some free training through a new pilot project. Step Into Health Careers is a new 18-week training program for prospective employees to learn skills like sterile processing, safe food handling, and job-finding skills like resume writing and problem solving. As the aboriginal population in Saskatchewan expands, and a wave of retiring baby boomers is expected to leave job vacancies, the health region is attempting to find more First Nations workers. In fact, senior managers aim to double the number of aboriginal workers in the health region during the next three years to have a more representative workforce. Now the region is looking for 18 people with a high school diploma, or equivalent education, to take the health career preparation course, which begins Feb. 5. An \$80,000 grant from the province's Department of Advanced Education and Employment will pay for each participant to take a six-week certificate training program in hospital skills, said Vicki Towriss, human resources manager for the health region. The course, which is worth more than \$1,000 per student, teaches safe food handling, first aid, basic computer skills, customer service skills and sterile processing techniques for equipment. Each student will also be matched with a mentor who has a career in the health field. Two aboriginal job coaches and trainers will show students what opportunities exist for careers in health care, what the educational requirements are, and how to prepare job applications. When the students are done, they'll be ready to work as operating room attendants, administrative assistants, sterile processing workers or in food services, among others, Towriss said. Towriss hopes this introductory program is the beginning of a larger program. In the future, she hopes to have similar courses to train special care aides and home care aides...

## **Education**

### **Gov't funding \$1.6 million (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 1, 2006)

Reporter: Neil Petrich, CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

Despite a small blizzard slowing him down, Saskatchewan Premiere Lorne Calvert received a warm welcome at the FSIN's Special Legislative Assembly on Thursday. Calvert met with members of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to announce that \$1.6 million will be going to First Nations training opportunities, \$1 million of which will go directly to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies...Of the \$1.6 million, \$330,000 will go to creating 80 adult basic education opportunities, and \$260,000 will go to creating 35 skills training

opportunities. Calvert also announced that the province will be putting \$2.8 million toward purchasing two "state-of-the-art" mobile training labs. These will be in addition to the lab operating in northern Saskatchewan, and one of them will be dedicated to delivering training opportunities to aboriginal students on- and off-reserve. The funding is part of a \$52.6-million training investment announced by the province in Regina on Nov. 15, and marks the first time the province has provided funding to create training opportunities on reserves...

### **Sask. injects funds into training spaces**

(Leader-Post, December 5, 2006)

Reporter: [Darren Bernhardt, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service](#)  
Paper copy only

Saskatchewan is facing a severe shortage of skilled labour, prompting the provincial government to go on a training binge. But the urgency to fill the jobs in a booming economy and those left vacant by retiring boomers will remain high for at least a few years, Pat Atkinson, minister of advanced education and employment, said at a press conference Monday...Starting in September 2007, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology will have 694 additional basic education spaces in a variety of programs across its four campuses in the province. Some will begin in the new year and others in the fall of 2007. For the SIAST Kelsey campus in Saskatoon, that means a brand new, two-year licensed practical nursing (LPN) program will annually graduate 35 LPNs. The LPN program is also being started up in Biggar while the existing programs in Yorkton and Watrous will be expanded...Kelsey campus will also offer 24 new electrician training spaces next year, 12 welding pre-employment seats in January and the immediate replacement and upgrading of aged equipment "to ensure students have the competitive advantage of being trained on the up-to-date equipment . . . in modern industry," Atkinson said. In all, the campus will receive \$3.41 million of a \$52.6 million funding injection announced by the provincial government in mid-November. It includes \$13.3 million to create 2,584 training opportunities in the areas of basic education, trades and health education, and \$30.3 million in post-secondary education capital. Total spending for SIAST, including Kelsey campus, is \$6.9 million. The Wascana campus in Regina is getting just over \$1 million for a health simulation lab, enabling students to practice real-life situations in a controlled environment. Training for the diamond sector will soon be added to SIAST's programming along with indentured apprenticeships in the oil industry and possibly construction...Enrollment at SIAST's four institutions has increased 5.8 per cent over last year and is expected to go up again with the additional programs and openings. Problem is, space is at a premium...Some training will take place at high schools and other existing buildings or on the job, Atkinson said. New initiatives such as mobile training labs and using other regional colleges will also help. Government funding is also going to the Dumont Technical Institute and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies to prepare the growing aboriginal population. The province is also planning to enhance literacy and education opportunities for adults requiring a Grade 12 diploma. It will fund tuition-free academic upgrading courses in the evenings at SIAST...

## **Six years in Manitoba buys a free education (MB)**

(Globe and Mail, December 6, 2006)

Reporter: [Joe Friesen, Globe and Mail](#)

Paper copy only

University tuition in Manitoba will be virtually free for students willing to stay in the province under a policy initiative designed to stem the loss of young graduates. A sketch of the plan was announced last month by the provincial government. It proposed tax rebates equivalent to 60 per cent of total tuition fees for graduates who spend six years in Manitoba after finishing university. Combined with existing federal and provincial tax credits, a typical Manitoba student would now receive more in tax benefits than he or she ever paid in tuition. Under the new plan, a graduate of a four-year science program who paid \$13,258 in tuition would get \$7,955 back over a period of six years. That same student would also have received \$3,498 in tuition tax credits and \$3,379 in education tax credits during the four years of study, for a total of \$14,832 in possible earned-income credits...The province has not yet said whether the benefits will apply to graduates who move to Manitoba from other provinces. Nor can they say how many local graduates are leaving the province, how many might stay as a result of this incentive or how much the project will cost. They say those details will be available at some point, but not now...Manitoba's tuition fees, frozen at 1999 levels for six years, are already the third-lowest in the country at an average of \$3,806. Quebec has for many years offered the country's lowest tuition fees to its own residents, but charged Canadians from outside the province substantially more. Newfoundland, with an average tuition fee of \$3,056, is next lowest. Manitoba's initiative will likely make it the cheapest place to study in Canada...The Canadian Federation of Students said it opposes Manitoba's initiative because it fails to address the issue of accessibility at the front end. Students still have to pay tuition fees every year, they say, and the large initial payments discourage people from disadvantaged backgrounds from attending university. University of Manitoba president Eموke Szathmary said she believes the barriers to a university education are more cultural than financial...Ms. Szathmary said she would like to see 10 per cent of the student body drawn from the most disadvantaged sections of society, as is the goal at certain Ivy League universities. The current figure at the University of Manitoba is 6.9 per cent. Ms. McGifford said she, too, would like to see the children of blue-collar workers and aboriginal people attend university in greater numbers. The province has undertaken several initiatives to address that issue, she said, but it could be years before the results are visible...

## **Only the best & brightest (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 7, 2006)

Reporter: [Dave Deibert, Saskatchewan News Network](#)

Paper copy only

In response to concerns over out-of-control admissions waiting lists, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) announced Wednesday that it was implementing a competitive-entry policy starting July 1, 2008. Under the previous entry guidelines, SIAST would accept any applicant who met the prerequisites and admit the qualifiers in the order in which they applied. This created huge wait lists in high-demand programs, in some cases potentially as long as 17 years. While the admission policy will remain the same for most programs, SIAST will now implement additional selection criteria for six high-demand programs: applied photography; cytotechnology; medical laboratory technology; combined laboratory and x-ray technician; dental hygiene; and medical radiologic technology. The new

process is similar to what is used at such Alberta schools as Mount Royal College, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). The SIAST committee put together to develop the new admissions policy used those schools, and four others, as comparisons...Under the new policy, all potential students will be required to apply annually. Those who apply to programs which have not been designated high-demand will continue to be admitted based on the date they first qualified. Applicants currently on a waitlist for high-demand programs will automatically be considered under the new criteria for the 2008-09 school year. If they are not admitted then, they will have to reapply. Applicants currently waitlisted for non high-demand programs will be grandfathered, and their applications will remain active until they are offered a spot in their program. Brittany Holderness, president of the Kelsey Students' Association, said her organization has supported the new policy from the start...Corey Miller, director of medical imaging services with the Saskatoon Health Region (SHR), was also pleased with the changes. The SHR works with SIAST students completing their clinical practicum, and also hires many graduates....

### **National targets needed for higher education (CA)**

(StarPhoenix, December 8, 2006)

Reporter: Sarah Schmidt , CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

It's difficult to know whether Canada's \$29-billion post-secondary education system provides value for money because the country does such a poor job tracking the sector's performance, a government-funded agency says. The blunt assessment in the first national review of Canada's post-secondary education, released Thursday by the Canadian Council on Learning, was also accompanied by a warning about the consequences if national objectives and targets for the sector are not established. Canada's international competitors "will eat our lunch. It's as stark as that," council president Paul Cappon said as he unveiled the report. Other federations such as Australia and the United States and the European Union have been able to work through jurisdictional matters to come up with national benchmarks and a common higher education framework, according to the report. Cappon said it's time Canada's post-secondary education players harness the political will to move beyond jurisdictional squabbles and do the same. For example, the report notes there is no national body in Canada with a mandate to assess quality and oversee the accreditation of post-secondary education institutions. And without any process of quality review at the national level or a regionally based institutional accreditation system such as the U.S. model, "there is a strong risk that Canadian institutions, anxious to attract and retain students, especially from abroad, will turn to American accrediting agencies," the report states...The report acknowledges Canada's positive record despite the absence of national targets and benchmarks: 44 per cent of Canadians possess some form of post-secondary education credentials, the second-highest rate in the world. But up to 70 per cent of today's new and replacement jobs require higher-education credentials. And 42 per cent of adults -- or nine million Canadians -- have literacy rates below the minimum considered necessary for success in today's society and economy. Meanwhile, "with the exception of research and development, Canada has not identified a single target related to post-secondary or has given itself the means to evaluate the achievements of the sector -- basic steps that would demonstrate the post-secondary education is, in fact, a national priority," said Cappon. The Council of the Federation, created in December 2003 to facilitate intergovernmental relations, lists post-secondary education and skills training

as one of its top priorities. But its strategy document, released last July, emphasizes the provinces have exclusive jurisdiction over the design, planning and delivery of higher education and skills training. And the council's primary demand lies in more federal financial support -- specifically fixing the fiscal imbalance -- to meet the identified priorities of improving access, enhancing quality, increasing skills training and expanding research and development.

## Crowns

### **WCB freezes 2007 premium rates**

(StarPhoenix, December 6, 2006)

[CanWest News Service; Leader-Post](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

The Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) will hold premium rates for 2007 at 2006 levels, with the average rate remaining at \$1.84 per \$100 of payroll, the WCB said this week. Approximately 65 per cent of the WCB's nearly 34,000 registered employers will be assessed lower premiums or see premiums frozen for 2007, said a WCB press release. Another 25 per cent of employers will see modest increases averaging 4.4 per cent, while the remaining 10 per cent will see more significant increases, averaging 14.9 per cent. The 2007 rates contain allocations to help replenish the injury fund and the economic stabilization reserve, which were drawn down as a result of operating shortfalls from 2001 to 2003. For the first time, premium rates also include an allocation to build the disaster and occupational disease reserve to a level recommended by a recent actuarial review. While injury rates are moving lower, everyone in the workplace must remain focused on workplace safety and injury prevention, said WCB CEO Peter Federko. The WCB concluded its annual consultations on rates in mid-October and notices of premium rates are being mailed to employers to take effect Jan. 1.

## Retail Regulatory

### **LCBO employees can wear anti-privatization buttons at work (ON)**

(NUPGE, December 14, 2006)

[http://www.nupge.ca/news\\_2006/n14de06a.htm](http://www.nupge.ca/news_2006/n14de06a.htm)

The Liquor Board Employees Division of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/NUPGE) is urging all members to wear their Our LCBO: Let's keep it public buttons at work. The buttons support the union's campaign against privately-run liquor outlets known as "agency stores" and the more general threat of privatization that hangs over the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. The LCBO is the largest public alcohol retailer in the world and also most profitable for taxpayers. "At the union-management meeting held Nov. 28, the LCBO stated clearly that OPSEU members will not be disciplined in any way for wearing our buttons," says Jo Ann Fisher, acting chair of the Divisional Executive. "Unfortunately the message doesn't seem to have gotten through to some managers." The issue came up following the union's Day of Action on agency stores on Nov. 24. Members leafleted at 25 locations across the province, collecting more than 1,000 signed postcards. Members also leafleted in Orangeville on Nov. 29. When members wore the buttons in the workplace, some managers ordered the OPSEU members to take them off. "At the union-management

meeting the employer told us that while members will not be disciplined for wearing the buttons, some managers may still ask staff to remove them," said Fisher. "We do not have to agree. If your manager asks you to take off your button, says thanks, but you'd rather keep it on. If your manager insists, tell him or her to phone Human Resources. If the problem persists, contact your OPSEU steward or local president and file a grievance. Our collective agreement says quite clearly that members have the right to participate in union activities."...

## Community Services

### **Sask. Literacy Network struggling to stay afloat**

(Leader-Post, December 19, 2006)

Reporter: Kerry Benjoe, Leader-Post

Paper copy only

Since the federal government announced its literacy cuts in September, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) has been working hard to stay afloat. With the massive cuts, the organization faced imminent closure, but SLN executive director Debbie Griffith still remains hopeful things will work out for the organization. In addition to the funding cuts, the organization was told that all of its literacy proposals would not be considered for federal funding...The organization has made major changes by downsizing its operations. Griffith said it's currently operating on reserve funding and estimates that funding will last until the summer...Late last month, the Saskatoon based organization SLN moved from its downtown location to the north end of the city. Part of the reason for the move was due to the uncertainty of its funding and the fact that it could only enter into a one-year lease...The staff has gone from eight full-time staff to the equivalent of four full-time staff members. The board has been scaled back from 11 members to eight, which Griffith called unfortunate because part of the organization's strength was that it had representation from different communities and different sectors. Although it has had to make changes to the way it operates, the SLN is still doing literacy work. "We're still doing some work in the area of family literacy and we're also working with and supporting communities that are developing community literacy plans," Griffith said. In addition, Griffith and the rest of the organization have been very active in "trying to find alternative funding sources or to get the current pots of funding flowing again." Despite the current state of the organization, Griffith said, the need for literacy services has not diminished.

## Occupational Health and Safety

### **Miners taking Cameco to task (SK)**

(Leader-Post, December 1, 2006)

Reporter: Jason Warick, Saskatchewan News Network; CanWest News Service

Paper copy only

An overloaded elevator, communication breakdowns and a design flaw in the main bulkhead door are a few of the problems that occurred during last month's severe flooding at the multibillion-dollar Cigar Lake uranium mine. These and other insights are contained in documents filed recently with federal regulators by uranium giant Cameco Corp., which operates the Cigar Lake mine. Some of the last miners to surface during the flood say their lives were at risk, and they are angered by

Cameco's account of the evacuation as orderly and safe. "Cameco's taking credit for doing all of this in a safe way, (but) it was not done properly at all. It was not safe," said miner Michael Paquette, who worked in the mine for a company contracted by Cameco. "People have to know what happened." In a conference call with media the afternoon of Oct. 23 -- the day the company evacuated the mine -- Cameco CEO Jerry Grandey gave a different account. "Everybody did their job in a very professional way," Grandey said. "There was no panic. The evacuation of the mine was orderly and it was done using the equipment that allowed it to be done expeditiously. Safety of the personnel was foremost in our mind... All of the workers that had been underground working on the problem were evacuated in an orderly fashion. So everybody is safe with 'no lost time injuries,' so all of that is well in order."...Just after 1 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 22, a wall hundreds of metres below the surface began to deteriorate and water began to leak through it. According to a Cameco report filed to provincial and federal regulators this month, the water was soon rushing into the mine at a rate of 1,500 cubic metres per hour. That exceeded the company's ability to pump out the water. Miners interviewed say they told Cameco officials at that point to close the main bulkhead doors to keep workers safe and keep part of the mine dry. A decision was eventually made to shut the two main doors. The first closed without any problems, but the second door would not close. After two unsuccessful attempts, and with the water level rising, it was decided to try and seal the second door once more. Three miners, including Paquette, were equipped with breathing masks and tanks and sent down on Monday morning, Oct. 23. Other workers were still underground in drier areas of the mine doing various jobs. The seal on the large round door had torn, and the three miners were told to repair it. When they got to the door, Paquette stepped into a machine equipped with a boom. They were told the door would have to be opened a few feet so they could retrieve the damaged gasket seal from the other side. Paquette's two co-workers stood beside the door, ready to reach inside and pull out the damaged seal. When Paquette pushed the door open with the boom, he said a torrent of water mixed with lunch boxes, tools and other debris swept one man under the water before he was able to climb up into an elevated side tunnel. The water was contaminated, although a federal regulator said it was likely not polluted enough to cause any harm. The other man grabbed onto the machine and walked up the side of the wall to avoid the deluge. The man said he suffered injuries to his jaw and ribs when hit by debris, although he didn't file an official report. Paquette said the water continued to rise, coming across his lap in the machine. The other two men had to reach across and drag him through the water to safety...When they made it to the elevator -- or "lift" -- to take them to the surface, it was already packed with 21 miners who were panicked and waiting to get to the surface. The lift operator had raised the lift several feet as the water level rose, so Paquette and his two colleagues had to use a ladder to get in. But the lift was now two people over its maximum capacity. Paquette and others say they worried the computerized lift would malfunction and leave them stranded, but it held...A Cameco spokesperson said the company appreciates the efforts of the miners during that difficult period, and it's conducting a full review...Two days after the flood, Paquette and others attended a debriefing with company officials. A worker noted the door's seal had been tested in early October. According to Paquette and another miner present, who spoke on the condition his name was not used, the man revealed the test failed. But Cameco says the man told the meeting the seal passed the test. The written minutes of a meeting that afternoon are ambiguous, stating only "the gasket on the bulkhead was checked on Oct. 6, 2006." The rest of those meeting minutes, submitted by Cameco to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, reveal

other problems in the mine during the flood. The wrong type of seal was on the door, which required an O-ring rather than a gasket. Communication broke down on several fronts. It was hard to reach the switchboard, command centre and other areas. When miners were forced to flee to a refuge station underground during the flood, the dampness caused communication problems. When a worker at the meeting asked why there was no emergency radio channel, the response in the minutes reads: "Intentions are to have an emergency channel, but just haven't got it yet." There was also no emergency lift operating in case the main one malfunctioned. The response was that it "was difficult to find an opportune time to do the work." Krahn said the company was "surprised" to hear some workers may have been injured, as no injury reports were filed...Kevin Scissons, director of the Saskatoon office for the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, was also surprised to hear some of the accounts by the miners. He said his agency has interviewed some of the workers, but will be conducting a more thorough investigation in the coming months. A provincial Labour Department spokesperson said a company is only obligated to report injuries that require at least 72 hours of hospitalization, and none have been reported as a result of the Cigar Lake mine flood. This is the third flood at a Cameco mine in the past few years, and the second at Cigar Lake this year. Most of the documents were supplied by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission. The Labour Department was also asked to supply documents to Saskatchewan News Network more than a week ago. However, Labour Department officials claimed a formal written request had to be made, and a response could take as long as a month. At press time Wednesday, the Labour Department had yet to provide any documentation...

## First Nations Issues

### **Proposed bill could result in flood of aboriginal human rights complaints**

(CA)

(Leader-Post, December 14, 2006)

[Canadian Press](#)

[Paper copy only](#)

A wave of native discrimination complaints is expected if a bill introduced Wednesday by the Conservatives is passed. Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice wants to repeal a 30-year-old section of the Human Rights Act that has blocked complaints against Ottawa and band councils acting under the archaic Indian Act...National native leaders rejected the bill, however, saying they can't support what they called a rushed and unilateral move that would sow dissent and tension on reserves. Already cash-strapped band councils could be peppered with claims. Allegations of unfair treatment would likely range from housing disputes to fights over how higher education funds are shared. Ottawa is also expected to be targeted for various despised policies. Those include Indian Act rules governing status. For years, the Indian Act stripped thousands of native women of their Indian status along with its rights and benefits when they married non-native men. Remedial legislation, Bill C-31, restored status to those women in 1985. But it did so with a catch: a new Indian Act section stipulated that their children could only pass on Indian status if they married another status Indian...The Native Women's Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations issued a rare joint press release denouncing the bill. Both groups stress that human rights must be protected, but they dispute the extent to which Prentice sought the input of First Nations people...If passed, the bill provides for a six-month grace

period before it applies to band councils to help First Nations get ready. The Canadian Human Rights Commission is to work with native people and groups during that time. Grand Chief Stan Beardy of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a political group representing 49 First Nations across Ontario, hopes the bill may ultimately bring relief to people living in the kind of squalor most Canadians can only imagine. His communities include Pikangikum, 250 kilometres north of Kenora, where most homes have no running water...