

# BC Workers Vote

## NDP Responses

May 2013

### Labour

**1. Statistics Canada reports that on average, unionized workers enjoy 29% higher wages than non-unionized workers in the same line of work, as well as stronger pensions, superior health and safety standards, longer paid vacation time, better health and drug benefits, and more rights in the workplace. Does your party believe that unions play a positive role in our economy? If so, what policies will your party implement to create a climate that is easier for unions to organize?**

The right of British Columbians to join unions is enshrined in the Constitution. Unions play a positive role in building a competitive economy and a thriving middle class. But work needs to be done to ensure that the rules around union certification are fair, and to remove barriers for workers who wish to exercise their legal rights.

A BC NDP government will support union members and unionized workplaces. We will:

- Form a special panel, under the Labour Code, to recommend changes to ensure workers can freely exercise their right to join a union. Within 90 days, the panel will consult interested parties and recommend possible changes regarding certification options, including the card check model, and ways to help employers and unions arrive at first contract settlements through mediation.
- Invest new resources to make the BC Labour Relations Board more efficient and effective in helping employers and unions to solve disputes.
- Repeal Bills 27, 28 and 29, the infamous legislation that tore up legal contracts, and restore free collective bargaining in the health and education sectors.

**2. Over the past decade in British Columbia, an average of 150 workers die on the job each year, and 17 workers in the province are permanently disabled from workplace accidents every day. What will your party do to guarantee better health and safety conditions to reduce workplace injuries and fatalities?**

Every worker deserves to be treated with respect in his or her workplace, and to work in safe conditions.

Every year, far too many workers are injured or killed on the job. More must be done to improve safety at work, and to give seriously injured workers the support they need to return to work. The NDP will emphasize accident prevention and enforcement of health and safety rules to reduce workplace injuries and deaths.

An NDP government will promote safer workplaces. We will:

- Emphasize accident prevention and health and safety enforcement to reduce workplace injuries and deaths.
- Encourage more investment in vocational rehabilitation programs for workers who have been injured on the job, and restore heart disease among firefighters as a recognized presumptive disease.
- Establish a more effective governance system for the Workers' Compensation Board to give employers and unions a greater role in decision making.

**3. While corporate profits, productivity and GDP have all increased consistently during the past thirty years, Statistics Canada reports that both real hourly wages and median family income have been stagnant since 1980. Why do you think this has happened, and what does your party propose to change the situation?**

There has been an unfounded belief in the trickle-down theory of economics. There has been a massive tax shift that takes the burden off big business, and puts it squarely on the backs of working people.

The BC NDP's priority is to create opportunities for British Columbians to succeed in a fast-changing and competitive economy.

Our platform outlines the practical and affordable steps we can take to get us there – from expanding skills training, to reducing poverty and inequality, improving health care, protecting our environment and fighting climate change.

The changes we are proposing are designed to open up new opportunities for British Columbians to make the most of their own lives, and to build strong communities in a thriving, productive and green economy.

Details about how we can create jobs, build a prosperous and sustainable economy, and give our young people the skills they need to get the jobs of tomorrow are in our platform, *Change for the Better: Practical Steps*, which you can access at: [www.bcndp.ca/plan](http://www.bcndp.ca/plan).

## **The Economy**

**4. British Columbia has become a deeply unequal province. According to Statistics Canada, the top 20% of income earners enjoy 44.8% of after-tax income, the highest in the country, while the poorest earn only 5%. How will your party reverse this trend and reduce the growing levels of economic inequality in British Columbia?**

The BC NDP agrees with your position that British Columbia has become a deeply unequal province. The income gap is the largest in the country.

We believe that in a province as rich as ours, with an abundance of resources and hard-working people, this continuing long-term increase in inequality is simply not acceptable. We know from

the research that societies with less poverty are healthier, safer, more productive and economically more dynamic than societies with high rates of poverty.

To build the province that we want for ourselves and for our children, an NDP government will take practical steps to reduce inequality in BC and thereby contribute to the long-term economic well-being of every British Columbian. We will:

- Provide economic stability and certainty
- Increase the number of skilled workers
- Significantly reduce child poverty
- Improve income assistance
- Protect and respect vulnerable people
- Strengthen access to justice and improve community safety
- Enhance women's equality
- Work with First Nations people, Metis and Aboriginal groups towards a better future.

For more details on the NDP's plan to build a prosperous and sustainable economy, create new jobs, and reduce poverty and inequality, please read our platform, *Change for the Better: Practical Steps*, which you can access at: [www.bcndp.ca/plan](http://www.bcndp.ca/plan).

**5. A recent Environics Research poll showed that 90% of British Columbians think there should be income tax increases for the wealthiest income earners, and 67% believe that major corporations pay less tax than they should. During the past decade, the wealthiest citizens and businesses have enjoyed tax breaks, supposedly to "create jobs." Does your party believe that those who benefit the most should pay their fair share of taxes?**

A BC NDP government will focus on the fundamentals – fundamentals like a stable and fair tax system.

We will:

- Increase the corporate income tax rate from 11 to 12 per cent.
- Reinstate the corporation capital tax on financial institutions.
- Increase high income earners' personal income tax. Effective January 1, 2014, the top two per cent of high income earners in BC will see an increase to 19 per cent on taxable individual income above \$150,000.
- Extend the carbon tax base to vented emissions from oil and gas operations starting on April 1, 2014.

## **Health Care**

**6. Our publicly administered, universal health care system is cherished throughout British Columbia. More of these services, however, are being de-funded and**

**privatized. What policies will your party implement to ensure that health care in the province remains under public control and is accessible to everyone?**

Public health care is at the heart of a healthy and more equal society.

A BC NDP government will:

1. Improve home support and community care.
2. Strengthen primary and community health services to relieve pressure on acute care, especially in rural areas.
3. Develop a Rural Acute Care Initiative to improve acute care and emergency services in hospitals across BC.
4. Improve quality and reduce costs.

These practical steps to increase efficiencies, improve accountability and improve care will help ensure that public health care is not just preserved but improved for future generations.

**7. There are thousands of people in the province on waiting lists for surgery, home care, and finding a family doctor. What will your party do to fund more doctors, nursing positions and hospital beds throughout the province, and ensure that our health care system is there for us when we need it?**

A BC NDP government will take practical and affordable steps to increase efficiencies, improve accountability, and provide better care.

Emphasizing a better use of health dollars, we will invest in prevention, and in additional health supports such as nurse practitioners, midwives and rehabilitation professionals. We will work to reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

The BC NDP will invest in innovation, incorporate cost-saving technologies, and learn from best practices in Canada and around the world. We will build partnerships to leverage the opportunities that come from BC being home to a vital and growing life sciences and health research sector.

These steps will help control costs and improve care to you and your family. By strengthening alternative levels of care, they will help take the pressure off acute care ERs and reduce waitlists. They support quality public health care, one of the strongest expressions of British Columbians' shared commitment to a fair and compassionate society.

Those steps include improving care for seniors, people with disabilities and people with chronic conditions, improvements in front-line mental health care, particularly for children, and increasing access to primary care services, particularly in rural areas.

**Education**

**8. One of the most important policies for creating a better education system is reducing class sizes. What specific policies will your party implement to hire more teachers and reduce class sizes in primary and secondary schools in British Columbia?**

A strong public education system is the most powerful tool we have to ensure that our province provides equal opportunity and the best possible start in life for every child.

A BC NDP government will start by directing new resources to the classroom as an important step towards improving outcomes for students. Over three years, our investment will mean an additional \$265 million going to make improvements in learning conditions for our children. This will help provide students with the classroom support they need, and resources to hire new teachers, education assistants, librarians and counsellors. It will allow for an additional focus to be put on students with special needs, Aboriginal students and ESL students.

**9. As a result of cutbacks to post-secondary education over the past two decades, average tuition fees in the province increased four-fold between 1990 and 2010, adding to the already-record levels of student debt. What will your party do to lower tuition fees and reduce student debt in the province?**

The NDP understands that the average BC student debt on graduation is \$27,000. We also know that, by 2020, 77.3 per cent of jobs will require post-secondary education.

A BC NDP government will make key investments in skills training and student grants. We will:

- Establish a \$100 million needs-based, non-repayable student grant program, and improve access and affordability of post-secondary education and skills training – up to \$1,500 per student per year.
- Improve BC's skills training and apprenticeship system for students and employers by creating more spaces, improving completion rates and times, and investing in modern training equipment.
- Develop new, targeted programs to increase the participation of Northern residents, First Nations people and women in trades training.
- Create a new scholarship fund for post-secondary and skills training students through a one-time investment of \$20 million and invite private sector and community-based partners to match this funding.

These steps to make post-secondary education more affordable will help British Columbians obtain the skills needed to succeed in today's economy.

## **The Environment and Resources**

**10. Each year, tens of thousands of raw logs and other natural resources are shipped to value-added industries in other countries. What specific plans does your party have to**

## **prevent this and instead create high-value added jobs in the resource industry in British Columbia?**

British Columbia was built on its resource wealth.

The BC NDP will make significant new investments to help grow a competitive and profitable forest industry and to improve the health of BC forests. We will support industry-led efforts to expand global markets. We will work to restrict the export of raw logs, limiting export to that which is surplus to the needs of BC manufacturing and communities. Updating the forest inventory – critical for sustainable management decisions – will be a key priority because much of the current inventory is 25 years out of date. We will work with forest communities in a coordinated and effective way in times of economic crisis.

A BC NDP government will:

- Implement a \$310 million, five-year strategic and operational plan for forest resources to:
  - Double seedlings planted by government on Crown land to 50 million a year and update resource inventories.
  - Enhance Ministry of Forests research capacity, as well as local and regional engagement on land use planning.
- Address the critical shortage of skilled workers in the resource industries.
- Work with industry and provide tangible support for industry-led efforts to identify new global markets and increase forest product exports.
- Use BC logs to create BC jobs. We will work with stakeholders to reduce raw log exports and create more value-added forestry jobs in British Columbia.

## **11. British Columbians care deeply about our environment and believe that climate change is a major issue. What will your party do to reduce our carbon footprint and help lower greenhouse gas emissions?**

The BC NDP takes climate change seriously.

A BC NDP government will fight climate change. We will:

- Renew BC's Climate Action Plan to meet BC's legislated greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, and lead the call for a national energy and climate strategy.
- Invest a portion of carbon tax revenues to enhance and expand transit service and options, build and rehabilitate green infrastructure, and support climate solutions in communities across BC.
- Gradually expand the carbon tax to include "venting" emissions from oil and gas operations.
- Expand energy efficiency retrofit programs for residential and commercial buildings, and dissolve the Pacific Carbon Trust to direct tens of millions of levies paid by hospitals,

Crown corporations and post-secondary schools back to those public sector institutions to fund energy-efficiency upgrades.

## Democracy

**12. British Columbia continues to use a Plurality voting system (“First past the post”) for its elections. This has allowed parties with a minority of the vote to form majority governments, and has relegated such parties like the Greens, who won over 130,000 votes in the last BC election, to having no representation in the Legislative Assembly. Where does your party stand on reforming British Columbia’s electoral system to one based on proportional representation?**

Moving to a proportional representation electoral system is not part of our platform.

However, a key priority for the BC NDP is to restore faith in our political process. At its best, politics is about people coming together to solve common problems, collectively and democratically. We will work to increase our ability to work together to solve common problems, to advance the larger public interest, and to create a better future in British Columbia.

A BC NDP government will enhance our democracy and restore openness and accountability by:

- Banning taxpayer-funded partisan advertising, and pass legislation to ensure all government advertising is reviewed and approved by the Auditor General.
- Increasing youth voter turnout by lowering the voter registration age to 16.
- Ending corporate and union donations to political parties, and refer related issues to an all-party committee, including parties which are not represented in the Legislature.
- Moving the next provincial election to the fall of 2017 so voters will have complete and accurate information about provincial finances.
- Strengthening Freedom of Information laws and empower legislative committees to undertake meaningful consultation with British Columbians.

If the NDP forms the next government, we would look forward to meeting with you to discuss important issues related to our electoral system.

To view our complete 2013 platform, *Change for the Better: Practical Steps*, please go to: [www.bcndp.ca/plan](http://www.bcndp.ca/plan).