

Chris Pasloske, a Board Member of SRA, wrote a letter to the Editor of the Leader-Post titled "Pensioners Deserve Better Treatment". This letter was published in the Leader-Post on Saturday, April 8, Section B8. For your information, it is "reproduced" below:

Pensioners deserve better treatment

For the past 30 years, the Saskatchewan Retirees Association has been attempting to negotiate with the provincial government additional pension benefits, currently available to many public service retirees.

We are seeking these benefits based on our contributions to our pension plan during the years of our employment. The government of Premier Lorne Calvert has continually refused to seriously listen to our concerns, let alone negotiate a solution to this problem.

I recently came across the federal NDP's Web site and noticed a most interesting proposition put forth by the federal NDP. Apparently, it is its intention to introduce a proposal called "The Seniors Charter of Canada" in Parliament. I was immediately drawn to several statements in this proposed charter, specifically the following: "Seniors have the right to a fulfilling life with dignity, respect and security."

The charter goes on to say that all citizens have the right to:

- ! Income that is indexed and provides a high state of economic welfare.
- ! Accessible, comprehensive, universal, portable, publicly administered medicare for primary care, palliative and geriatric care, preventative care and drug needs.

After I read this, I wondered whether the provincial NDP and the federal NDP were similar in name only. I say this because of the way this government has treated many now retired Saskatchewan public servants.

This government has continued to reject indexing of our pensions and refuses to provide any help with our medical and dental costs. In fact, it costs our members well over \$200 per month to belong to a medical and dental plan. This government once implied it would assist with it, but it later reneged on its commitment.

Sure, it provides us with occasional pension increases, but these are generally below the Consumer Price Index and are only provided whenever it feels like doing so. In fact, in the last 11 or so years, it has provided zero increases for five of those years.

We former public servants have been totally frustrated and stonewalled by this government in our attempt to resolve this issue. In fact, Calvert has continually refused to meet with us. This total disregard for our concerns finally forced us to take this matter to the courts to seek its intervention. As the premier now knows, Justice Catherine Dawson rendered her decision recently, awarding us certification to proceed as a "class action" against this government.

The government's response, through its lawyer, Don McKillop (as noted in the Leader-Post), said "the decision to allow the lawsuit to move ahead as a class action is 'a blow' to the government's prospects in the case, though it's too soon to know exactly what will happen now."

Why is it a blow to the government when it now has the opportunity to make a wrong right?

What we hope will happen here is that the government will meet with us and resolve this long-standing issue rather than drag it through the courts. Dragging this through the courts will simply take away money from those who can ill afford to pay the continually increasing costs of services such as gas and power.

We would hope it would resolve this now, rather than wait us out in the belief that, as we keep aging and dying off, the issue will be settled once and for all.

That might very well be the case as many of our members are getting older and continually decreasing in numbers. In the past several years, we have lost hundreds of members and will continue to do so in the years to come.

Yes, the premier may very well win in the end, but at what expense to the senior citizens of this province?

What is most important to note is that we are not asking for anything for which we have not paid over the years of our employment. In fact, we contributed many millions of dollars to the government's coffers without so much as one cent being invested in a special fund for our retirement. The governments of the day chose to use this money as part of their day-to-day operating budgets. We are absolutely convinced that had this money been appropriately invested for our future needs, we would not be in the position we are today, begging for assistance to right a wrong that has been done to us.

I am sure if the premier reviewed our work records, he would find we were very faithful and hard-working civil servants during our years of employment.

So why is he doing this to us?

Why won't he meet with us? We have previously brought to his attention that all governments in Canada, provincial and federal, now have pension indexing and almost all have some form of medical and dental plans for retired public servants.

Sadly, I note this government has now provided these same benefits to many Crown corporation retirees, yet continually refuses to provide us with the same benefits. Why does he want to continue to fight us when we could better be spending our time doing more beneficial work for Saskatchewan's other needy citizens?

I hope the premier and his party members will visit the federal NDP's Web site and review its proposed charter. After they do so, maybe then they will be willing to explain to us why they are at odds with the federal NDP and us.

Maybe — and I emphasize *maybe* — the premier will then consider meeting with us to resolve our concerns.

The federal NDP Web site is www.ndp.ca/seniorscharter.

I hope he checks it out.

CHRIS PASLOSKE

Pasloske is a retired public servant.

Regina