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Jeff Traeger:

Good evening, everyone. My name is Jeff Traeger. I'm the President of your union, UFCW Local 832. I want to welcome you all to the May telephone town hall general membership meeting for members of the local, which is now called to order.

Before we formally start tonight's meeting, I want to repeat what I've been repeating at every town hall meeting since March of last year. And that's just how big of the thank you Manitobans owe to all of you. Throughout this crazy rollercoaster ride called COVID that won't let us get off no matter how sick we are, you continue to go to work on the front lines each and every day of the pandemic doing your part to keeping our communities going. Like many of you, many of us thought that this was going to be a short term inconvenience to our lives, but it's turned out to be much, much more than that.

And through it all, you have continued to go to work, putting yourselves and your loved ones at risk and helped the rest of us to get through this so far. I have always, always known the value that UFCW members bring to the fabric of our society. The only difference is that all Manitobans and indeed all Canadians now know it as well. And for that, I want to simply say thank you.

While I'm on the theme of repeating important information that needs to be remembered, I also want to let you know that all of us here at UFCW were working extra hard during the pandemic, do everything we can to ensure our members are safe at work and we continue to be here whenever you need us, as we always have been.

Our offices are under the same restrictions and protocols that many businesses are under, but our union reps are specialists and leadership will continue to work on behalf of all of our members as we have throughout the pandemic. Each of you deserve no less.

Tonight is our spring meeting. We normally have four of these town halls per year with each one happening near the end of the season. I say normally, because we have to break it up this year by having our next GMM in the heat of the summer, scheduled for July 21st.

On that day, we will be using this town hall forum to take nominations for the recorder position and the 18 vice president positions on our executive board. The elections will be conducted later in the year, and the four-year term of office will begin on January 1, 2022.

With me tonight in studio is our interim Secretary-Treasurer and Director of Operations, Marie Buchan, who will be sharing the MC duties with me to see evening. As you may know, our Secretary-Treasurer Bea Bruske is on a leave of absence while she campaigns to become the next president of the Canadian Labour Congress. So Marie is covering for Bea on top of all the other duties she has at the local as our director of operations.

Also with us in studio and at the controls are our communications coordinators, Chris Noto and Crystal Klippenstein. Crystal is brand new to the 832 team. She just started with us about a month ago and Marie will be interviewing her later in the call, so you'll get a chance to hear more about her and maybe even ask a few questions.

We also have two special guests joining us on the line tonight. The first is Kevin Rebeck, President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour, who has agreed to take time out of his busy schedule to come on the call and speak to us for a few minutes about some of the absolutely terrible legislation that's making its way through the legislature right now, and what effect that will have on workers' rights in the years ahead.

A little later on, Marie will be interviewing our newest servicing rep, whose name will likely be familiar to those of you living and working in the Westmont area, and that's John Anderson. John also

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has been with us for about a month now and is replacing our Westman rep assigned to Carberry and Neepawa, Wendy Lundy, who retired at the end of April.

So as you can see, we have a full agenda tonight, so let's get started.

The first order of business required by our bylaws is that we vote to approve three reports at this meeting and they are:

- The minutes of the previous meeting held on February 16, 2021.
- The interim secretary treasurer's report on the current finances.
- The president's report.

We will not be reading these reports, which will give us more time for our guests and for you to ask any questions that you might have. All three of these documents have been previously posted on our website at ufcw832.com for you to review and they'll stay there in our archives so you can see all of the documents from all of our telephone town hall general membership meetings at any time you like.

Just a reminder, if you have any question that you'd like to ask, please press the star key followed by the number three, and you'll be placed in the queue to ask your question. We ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or ask questions about matters that affect all local 832 members.

So if you have a specific question about a grievance or an issue that affects your workplace alone, I would ask that you contact your full-time union representative, whose name and contact information is available on the UFCW bulletin board in your workplace or on our website at uscw832.com.

So we now will need a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which took place on February 16, 2021.

Marie Buchan:

So moved.

Kevin Rebeck:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded here in the studio. So please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad or vote no, by pressing the number two on your keypad. Once again, to get in the lineup to ask a question, simply press the star key followed by the number three, and you'll be placed in the queue.

That's the introductory business done. I'd like to welcome our first guest tonight, who is the President of the Manitoba Federation of Labour, Kevin Rebeck. Many of you will know that I'm the Secretary Treasurer of the Federation of Labour, so Kevin's my boss. So we've all got to behave. Good evening, Kevin, and thanks for joining us tonight.

Kevin Rebeck:

Thanks so much for the invitation, Jeff, and we all know treasures keep presidents in line. So thanks for doing that for me as well. Thanks for the invite and thanks for doing this. Not every union does town

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halls to create opportunities for their members to engage directly with their leadership. So I really admire that you've done this and I appreciate the invite this evening.

Jeff Traeger:

So we'd like to hear a little bit, I know there's like four bills that are pretty crazy and then another one that came out yesterday. But I think the one that we'd really like to talk about, that's going to have the greatest impact on UFCW members, is Bill 16, the Amendments to the Labour Relations Act.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, Bill 16 is the latest and greatest attack that Pallister has launched against Manitoba's labour movement. It's the bill no one asked for. The Pallister government got this idea in their head that they should rewrite a bunch of our labour laws.

So typically, when they're looking at making changes to employment standards or the Labour Relations Act, they send their ideas to the Labour Management Review Committee, which Jeff serves with me and other labour leaders on as well as some business counterparts.

They sent these ideas to us and we had a good chance to discuss them one by one. I think we spent two or three evenings together, going through them all, talking about the pros and cons on them. And it was a consensus recommendation from business and labour together that many of these recommendations should not be acted on; that they would worsen the labour environment in Manitoba if they move forward on them.

The biggest one, and we were surprised to see management agree with us because they've always kind of been a bit opposed to it, but it's the path right now that exists to get to binding arbitration. In Manitoba, we have a Meet in Manitoba solution, but if a strike or lockup goes for 60 days or more, either side without the other can go to the Labour Board and say, "Look, we're just not getting a result here. We're stuck, and we need someone to come in and sort this out and tell us what's fair. And both sides live with the result of a neutral, respected third party that people have agreed to.

It's worked really well in Manitoba. In fact, it works so well, it hasn't been used all that much. What it really does is create a huge incentive and rather than have a third party come and tell us what the deal will be, that we get back to the table and we sort out an answer that works for us.

UFCW has been the greatest user of it with stubborn employers, I think five times now. I think it's been used a total of seven or eight times. So it hasn't seen a ton of use in the last decade. Jeff would be our expert on it in the province and that's with UFCW taking a good stand. Usually, I think in all cases, those agreements have come much more weighted in favor of workers than the stubborn stance that employers have taken.

But Pallister, after feeling his wage freeze legislation and seeing now that public sectors and others are going to get to binding arbitration where arbitrators give a fair deal, has decided that he wants to rip up that path and eliminate the ability to get to binding arbitration.

So he's going to remove that from the Labour Relation Act, which means strikes and lockouts can go on indefinitely. As long as an employer wants to keep people locked out or out on strike, they can do so. This combined with no ban on replacement workers and other things makes our province ripe for a lot more labour unrest, that will be of longer duration and harder on everyone. That's not good for our economy. That's not good for workers and even employers agree with us, it's not good for employers. We asked government not to do this, but they're moving ahead.

On top of that, [crosstalk 00:10:25] I sorry... Go ahead.

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Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. I was just going to say that's a critical point, Kevin, because we worked hard as a Labour Management Review Committee to get all of management to agree, to maintain ADR and binding arbitration in the act and the government went ahead and pulled it out anyway.

So even employers don't want this. So you were bang on at the beginning when you said it's an act that nobody wanted because labour doesn't want it, business doesn't want it, I think. Not even sure there's a lot of people in [Rodway 00:10:58] that want it. I think that Brian Pallister wants it.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yes. He really wants to shut down a paths for fairness and that's become evident in every action he takes relating to the labour movement in our province. And it does more. It is more than just deal with our costs of binding arbitration, any public sector union, which includes UFCW by the way, the fact that you represent some public sector unions means you're a public sector union by the law that they're looking at. And it gives you a bunch of new red tape that you have to deal with for financial reporting.

There's laws already that half of our members want financial information. They request it from us and we're obliged to give it to them. And we do. There's no complaints or issues to the Labour Board that that's not happening.

But he's making a new, special law just for public sector unions that they have to send audited statements to every single member, whether they ask for or not every year; that they have to send financial information about their staff every single year to every member.

It's a make-work project that is unique for public sector unions. It doesn't apply to a business that gets tax breaks are direct to government grants. Unions that receive no public money whatsoever will have these new onerous burdens for reporting that are unnecessary and aren't solving any kind of problem whatsoever. [crosstalk 00:12:21]. Yeah, go ahead, Jeff.

Jeff Traeger:

Go ahead, Kevin, go ahead. I was just going to say that the Critical Infrastructure Protection Act, even if we do go on strike, a lot of cases, we may find ourselves faced with a court order that says that we can't.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, absolutely. Bill 57 is the Critical Infrastructure Act. We've done some legal homework on that, and a lot of what that does is gives employers a faster track than an injunction would take at cheaper costs for employers that could provide higher fines to unions and other demonstrating groups for anything that they deem critical infrastructure, which could include grocery stores, food distribution centers, [inaudible 00:13:07]. Anything that is deemed essential these days could be deemed critical infrastructure. So it really impacts our ability to demonstrate and gives employers a lot more ways to cause problems and can make it harder to demonstrate.

Jeff Traeger:

I derailed you there a little bit. I don't think you were finished talking about Bill 16 yet.

Kevin Rebeck:

No, Bill 16, they want to make it easier to fire striking workers. So right now, the test is if someone breaks the law on a picket line, they can be fired. And that's a good test. It's really an impartial test that

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doesn't have a lot of leeway or interpretation to it. And employers agreed with us, even though they wouldn't mind seeing that language change. They're like, "Ah, that's pretty fair. It's not a problem. We're not fixing anything."

But government wants to rip up that test, which means it becomes a lot more nebulous. So if an employer doesn't like you, doesn't like that you're a picket captain, they could fire you. And the union can go through a grievance process and maybe an arbitration process. And you know, in six weeks they could win you your job back and whatnot. But after a strike that's gone on for Lord knows how long, now an employer has another tool that they could be punitive with.

So it's really unnecessary and unwanted and unfair. And he stacked that with eliminating notice for workers when technological change is going to cause mass layoffs. Right now, employers who are going to bring in new technology that result in job loss have to give 90 days' notice.

The reality is all of those things are huge budgetary decisions that have probably been planned out for a year. So to give 90 days' notice is a really easy thing to do and it's a fair thing to do. Either we can find new ways for those workers to continue to work, or they can know they need to save up and that they need to brush up their resume because they're going to be out of work soon.

Pallister doesn't like that 90 days, so he's going to eliminate it. You get two weeks, that's all employment standards allows; that's all workers deserve in his mind, which is particularly offensive to implement that during the pandemic.

Jeff Traeger:

Then on top of everything else, he's also attacking our friends at The Manitoba Teachers' Society with Bill 34 on the Advanced Education Administration Act, and Bill 64 of the Education Modernization Act as well.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, he's eliminating school trustees and eliminating school boards across the province because he thinks that a provincial body under his direct supervision will do things better. And part of him doing that will mean bargaining gets paused for all of those folks for years.

If you are a worker in the school division while this transfer is going over and until they establish a new system, it'll cause a huge interruption in the bargaining process. And it may cause runoff votes between unions like we saw in healthcare because we will have an amalgamated employer, so there there's been very little thought or discussion on how that will all work, which I'm sure is by design so that they can further delay and continue to give public sector workers zero merely by creating new processes that delay the ability to get to a bargaining table.

Jeff Traeger:

That's a heck of a lot of bad news and we're not even talking about COVID. So what can we do, Kevin? We got a whole bunch of members online here. What could they do to stand up and be heard against some of this terrible legislation?

Kevin Rebeck:

The number one thing is to learn what's going on. So you're doing that by being on this call, which is great. Learn about some of these bills and actions and make sure that we're letting our friends and family and others know of these actions.

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We need to throw this government out, but we have to wait until 2023 to do so. So there's actions we can take between now and then. If you visit mfl.ca, we have a whole activist guide on Bill 16, which is the Labour Relation Amendment Act piece we've been speaking about. We're asking people to register, to speak at committee and we'll give a workshop on how to do that.

We're going to hold a workshop that your president, Jeff, has agreed to speak on June 23rd, educate people about the alternative dispute resolution or binding arbitration. And we'll hold a workshop in December of what it's like to go present at committee. I think it's really fun.

Marie Buchan:

You get 10 minutes to say whatever you want to this government, and a couple more minutes for some back and forth with them. And the more of us that do that, the longer it takes for them to move this legislation through, so we want to drag things out that way. And we think if we get lots registered, we'll get op-eds and other media opportunities to tell our story to the broader public.

So those are some concrete actions we can take. There are always some demos or honk-a-thons or activities that come up from time to time. And your union's good at sharing the word, spreading the word about when and where those are. So tune into that or visit our website as well. And those are a couple of concrete steps people can take.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. And if you're more familiar with the UFCW website, you can link directly to the MFL website that way. So thanks, Kevin. Really appreciate you giving us your time tonight.

Kevin Rebeck:

You bet. It was a pleasure to join you and thanks for hosting this town hall and letting me be a part of it. Take care.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. I see that the motion to approve the previous minutes has passed and that we have a few questions on the line. So we're going to start by going to Han Kung from Sobeys 4859. Go ahead, Han.

Wilton:

Hi. This is Wilton. How are you, Jeff?

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, not too bad. How are you? You didn't come up as Wilton. So sorry about that.

Wilton:

No worries. Nice to hear from you, by the way.

Jeff Traeger:

Yes. And nice to be talking to you. You got a question for us tonight?

Wilton:

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I don't really have a question. I just wanted to basically say because you know what? I just wanted to put out the good word to Kim Ferris, the union rep at UFCW 832 along with Ron Allard also at the UFCW 832 for such a wonderful job that they have helped me. I just wanted you to put out a big, big thanks to them. That's all.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, that's excellent. That's great to hear. I'm sure those I'm sure that Ron and Kim would tell you that a lot of the times, the hard work that they do on behalf of our members is not recognized in a such a public way. So thank you very much for doing that, Wilton, and appreciate the kind words.

We're going to move on to [Shaveli 00:19:54] Patel from Superstore 1515. And I think that's Brandon, isn't it?

Hey, Shaveli. How you doing? Are you there?

(silence)

Apparently not. So we've got Rico on the line from Naleway Foods here in Winnipeg. Go ahead, Rico.

(silence)

We're just going to keep moving through the list. If you're having some kind of technical issues, please try calling back and getting into the queue. We will start now with [Harjik Canda 00:20:32] from Impact Winnipeg. Go ahead, Harjik.

Harjik:

Hi. I have a couple of questions. One is thing I have not very good health benefits, only \$1,100 for my whole family for a year. \$1,100 and I paid \$550. Does this depend from company to company or any law from the government as far health benefits that are in place from the company.

Jeff Traeger:

Go ahead, Marie. I think Marie wants to take your question.

Marie Buchan:

Yep. So Harjik, first off, we will have your union rep Sandy Forcier call you back so he can give you some more details. We don't have your collective agreement right here in front of us. Pardon me.

But all collective agreements do have healthcare benefits that are negotiated. Those are above and beyond any of the basic benefits that you're provided through Manitoba Health. But we will have Sandy Forcier give you a call and he can walk through those benefits with you.

Harjik:

The second question is on that site I am working at, that is the building that people living with the homeless people, but mostly people not using the masks. I am feeling uncomfortable because of COVID.

A couple of times, I reported to the management company. They also sent a note to those people that are not wearing masks, but they have not ordered that one. Well, what I should do now? I did not complain to my company. Only I report to the management of that place.

Jeff Traeger:

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All right, Harjik, there's a couple of things you can do there. We have some information that we've sent out to everyone, and I'm sure this is available on our website. If there's folks that are violating the public health orders, you can call the public health hotline and actually report that so that a COVID inspector would come around and deal with the situation.

The other thing that you could do is you could find out in your workplace who your Health & Safety Committee member is and make a report to your Health & Safety committee so that they can do an investigation on your site.

When Sandy calls you on the first question that Marie was talking about, we'll make sure that he provides you with the information about who you can contact on your Health & Safety Committee. Got a theme here, sticking with impact. We're going to go to Thompson now, Kevin [Roncourt 00:23:10]. Go ahead.

Kevin Rancourt:

Hi. So I'll get right to it. First question is this thing that you were motioning about in the beginning, the minutes from the last meeting. Could you explain that in layman's terms?

Jeff Traeger:

Sure. So whenever we do these meetings, we take minutes down. We like to basically just take notes of everything that was said at the meeting and who was in attendance and we put them on our website. So if you go to our website and find the spot where the GMMs are, you can click on the minutes and in about, I don't know, probably a few weeks' time, you'll probably be able to read the minutes of this meeting as well.

And then the second vote that we're taking right now is the secretary treasurer's report. So on that same spot on the website, you'll be able to find a report from Marie Buchan that will outline what the current financial status of the union is. And then you'll also see a report for me, which will outline the various things that the union has been dealing with and doing since our last meeting.

Kevin Rancourt:

So the minutes are votes or topics?

Jeff Traeger:

The minutes are topics, but they're voted on because according to the bylaws and the constitution of UFCW, those have to be approved at a general membership meeting by the membership. So if there was a mistake, for example, in the minutes or something that was said that wasn't captured, you could vote no. And if everybody voted no, we would have to find out what the issue was and fix it.

Kevin Rancourt:

Okay. And the other question is all this stuff that Brian Pallister is trying to push to that nobody asks for and nobody wants, how do we prevent it from becoming law?

Jeff Traeger:

Do you want the quick answer, Kevin? Kick this government to the curb first chance we get. They have a majority. So unfortunately, all of the legislation that you heard Kevin Rebeck talking about in his

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presentation, every single piece of that legislation will eventually become law in Manitoba because Manitobans elected Brian Pallister with the majority government.

So for now, we have to fight it and we have to elect a party that's going to get into power and repeal a lot of that legislation. Some of the pieces of legislation that are there now were there by Gary Filmon... Were put in by Gary Filmon in the '90s, and when Gary took over in the early 2000s, he repealed that legislation. That's the same kind of thing that we need going forward to make sure that Manitoba has fair labour legislation and not unbalanced.

So we're going to go to Darlene Dolinsky next. Darlene, go ahead.

Darlene Dolinsky:

Hey, good evening, everyone. Regarding this legislation of Pallister's that he's trying to push through, if employers don't want it and workers don't want it and unions don't want it, who wants it and what's it going to benefit them by having this legislation?

Jeff Traeger:

Well, Brian Pallister wants it because he wants to keep all the unions busy doing all kinds of red tape and paperwork. And he wants businesses not to have to do things like retrain people during tech change. He doesn't want us to be able to get to arbitration, especially since, Darlene, they're arguing with the teachers right now, they're arguing with the nurses, they're arguing with healthcare workers.

He doesn't want a system where they can use a strike or a lockout, even though essential services would mean a lot of those people would have to go to work and teachers actually can't strike at all. But at the end of that, you get to binding arbitration.

And what's been happening in Manitoba ever since the wage freezes for the public sector were announced in the PSSA, is that arbitrators have been ruling that to be unconstitutional in providing wage increases for people. He wants to stop healthcare workers, civil servants, teachers, and nurses from getting a wage increase in the next round of bargaining. So that's why he's doing it.

Darlene Dolinsky:

And wouldn't that, in essence, backdoor help the corporations and the employers in the long run?

Jeff Traeger:

Absolutely. And those are the people that got Mr. Pallister elected. So those are the people he's catering to today.

Darlene Dolinsky:

Exactly. Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Thank you, Darlene.

We're going to get back... We're running a little bit long now. So we've got about three people that are waiting. So if you can just hang tight and I'm going to turn it over to Marie to introduce an interview our next guest. Go ahead, Marie.

Marie Buchan:

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Thanks, Jeff. As just said previously, John Anderson is our newest hire joining the local in his role as the full-time union representative for the Neepawa Carberry area. John was hired to replace Wendy Lundy, who retired from the local on April 30th, 2021. John, however, is not a stranger to UFCW. So thanks for joining us, John.

John, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your previous involvement in the labour movement in Manitoba?

John Anderson:

So first of all, I just recently retired McCain Foods. I worked there 40 years as a wastewater treatment operator. Also, I was a paramedic with Prairie Mountain Health, and 15 years of that was unionized. I spent 20 years as a shop steward at McCain's and 16 of those were as chief steward. I've got 15 years on our advisory board for UFCW and at least six rounds of bargaining, as well as I've done relief work for about 10 years. So I'm a fairly versed in the labour movement.

Marie Buchan:

Perfect. So what excites you the most about your new role, John?

John Anderson:

Well, just the opportunity to be an advocate and be of service to others is something that really excites me. I come from a troubled past and there was no one around to help me. And I just want to make sure that that never happens to anybody else and giving people a hand up. It just feels good.

Marie Buchan:

Great. And what do you think will be your biggest challenge in this role, John?

John Anderson:

My biggest challenge is that I'm a bit of an introvert and I need to be an extrovert. So I'm working on it. I've been working on it for years. It's getting better all the time and the more I do this job, the better I get at it. So that's my biggest challenge.

Marie Buchan:

And your dry sense of humor as people will get to know you, it's also something that doesn't matter whether you're an introvert or extrovert. That's a strong, positive. From a servicing [crosstalk 00:30:05]... Go ahead. Sorry, John.

John Anderson:

I said I just can't help that. It just comes out.

Marie Buchan:

From a servicing standpoint. What do you see as the union's biggest strength and our biggest challenge at present.

John Anderson:

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So as the biggest strength, I've been a member of, I believe, four different unions through my times and the level of service and the communication in this unit is phenomenal. It's more than any other union I've ever been in. The amount of service and representation we give the members is amazing to me.

The biggest challenge, well, that's a pretty easy one... That's COVID-19. So it's a challenge not to go into the workplace and talk to people face-to-face, so you don't find the problems. So people have to really let me know.

Marie Buchan:

Great. I think that leads into my last question for you. What can the members of UFCW Local 832 do to help you in your role?

John Anderson:

They can be vigilant and be my eyes and ears in the workplace because I can't go. And they need to report the problems, not just the CBA. Any issues, human rights, health and safety, any issue, actually... Any issue at all, I need to know about it so I can deal with it quickly before it gets out of control. So that's just how they can help me.

Marie Buchan:

Excellent. Well, John, I want to thank you very much for taking some time out of your evening. I know you're doing some training at the negotiations table today, so thank you very much for speaking with us tonight, and I'm sure the members of your territory and the rest of the members of the local are looking forward to working with you in the future.

John Anderson:

I am looking forward to working with them.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Thank you very much for that, Marie. And thank you, John. And John, welcome to Local 832. I know you're going to be a great representative of those members in Western Manitoba.

I see on the screen here that the vote to approve the secretary treasurer's report has been passed. So it's time to make a motion to approve the president's report, which is the final document we have to prove at tonight's meeting.

Marie Buchan:

Moved.

Kevin Rebeck:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

Seconded twice and moved. So please press the number one on your keypad to vote yes, and the number two on your keypad to vote no. If you have a question about the president's report or anything else at all, please press star three and we will gladly take your question.

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And speaking of that, we've got three people on the line. We've got no name on this, but it's an inbound caller from a Brandon area phone number. So please go ahead.

Russell:

Hello, Jeff. It's me, Russell from Brandon. How are you tonight?

Jeff Traeger:

Hey Russell, how are you?

Russell:

Good, good. You know me, AKA Bobby Benefits here. So I'm going to ask you a question that I wanted to follow up from February 16th. You had made mention that PBAS was possibly going to start maybe doing direct deposit. And I just wanted to follow up with you since you sit on that board and find out some more information on that for the benefit of the members that are on the phone tonight.

Jeff Traeger:

Sure, Bobby Benefits. I can do that for you. Not a problem.

We have actually taken some time to have a bit of a look at what the costs would be through PBAS to do this. And we've also just kind of had a look around to see what the other plans, not that we're planning on moving from PBAS or anything like that, but we wanted to get a ballpark idea of what costs were for other benefit plans.

We've got all that data to be reviewed by the full Board of Trustees, I think it's next week or the week after. Marie, do you have the date for the Safeway trust? It's coming up really soon. It's in May. And the reason that we do it in May is because we review the audited financial statements. So our annual meeting is always in May. The audit's usually done in April and Marie is about to say-

Marie Buchan:

The 25th.

Jeff Traeger:

We're meeting on the 25th. So Russell, what I can do is I can do two things. One, I can contact you directly after that meeting on the 25th to let you know what the results of that discussion is because we're going to get a presentation from the consultants on what the overall increase in costs would be. And then at the next general membership meeting, I can make sure that I report back to everyone else. And obviously if it's good news, we'll get it up on the website and probably do a communication to all of our Sobeys members working at Safeway.

Russell:

All right. Sounds good. You have my email address. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jeff Traeger:

I do, Russell. You take care of yourself, okay?

Russell:

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Okay, goodnight.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Goodnight. Sounds like he's off to bed there.

Jamal now from G4S Security. Go ahead, Jamal.

Jamal:

Hi, Jeff. Thank you for taking the call.

Jeff Traeger:

You're very welcome.

Jamal:

First of all, thank you for all this open communications that you guys do. I really commend this union. I just work part-time with G4S and I have another job that's non-union.

But having said that, just my question is with the COVID vaccine, as security guards, we have worked with essential workers in hospitals, for example; they have done great job, our nurses and doctors, and we always commend them.

But then again, we were between the public and the healthcare workers. And we were not prioritized to get the vaccine, not first, second or third, we were just taking it with the public, based on our age and our health and all that. So what could our union have done to push this and get us forward in hindsight? I'm just thinking.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, you know what? You don't even have to go in hindsight, Jamal, because when we first heard of vaccines in January, I personally wrote two people; the premier of the province and Dr. Rusen, who we all know on a pretty much first name basis now.

I said that there were groups of workers under UFCW that needed to be considered for the vaccine. My argument was not just for security guards. It was for people working in retail grocery, people working... Well, security was my next one and food production. The people working in food production plants, like the Maple Leaf and HyLife plant and the Granny's Poultry plant in Blumenort. For the people working in the assisted living sector who were going into homes to work with their clients on a daily basis; for people working in food distribution.

There's a whole bunch of UFCW members that face the public that put themselves at risk every day. And security guards, even though they immediately prioritized people in healthcare, they didn't prioritize security guards when you had to walk past the security guard to get into the hospital or into the clinic or into any healthcare institution.

The same is true going into a lot of grocery stores or a lot of other retail locations. And even now, in the big packing houses in Winnipeg and in Brandon, they wouldn't prioritize people. You have to walk past a security guard.

So in hindsight, if I had perfect hindsight, you go back two years, you elect a different government and they listen to people about the workers. I was not the only one. The Teachers Society, Mr. Bedford, was in the media also saying, "You need to vaccinate these workers." You know they're not

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going to shut down the bus system, right? Well, they're not going to shut down the bus system, but they're not vaccinating bus drivers either. And the president of ATU was there as well.

So I think in hindsight, I look back and I think we did everything we could. I've probably had 20 media interviews about this, where I've spoken about the importance of getting, not just security guards, but all public-facing frontline essential workers to get vaccinated. And this government just simply did not listen.

Although I do believe there may have been some response that would have been different from public health, if they were given the ability to speak freely; I don't think that Mr. Pallister allows them the ability to speak freely. He's always said, "They make recommendations to government and we make the decisions."

So, I don't know, and we will never know what those recommendations were behind the scenes, but I can tell you that your union fought as hard as we could to get you on the vaccination list. And unfortunately, government simply didn't listen.

Jamal:

Thanks so much.

Jeff Traeger:

You're very welcome, Jamal. We've got, Ashabhan Patel, and I'm sorry if I didn't pronounce your name properly, from Maple Leaf. [crosstalk 00:39:47] There you are.

Ashabhai Patel:

Yeah. I have three questions. So my first question is about the personal day. Now while working in Maple Leaf. So yeah. When I get a personal day, so my supervisor, every time, wants proof of that. So [inaudible 00:40:09] that one or not?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, well, that is a specific question. We're going to take down your number and have your union rep, Brenda Brown, give you a call tomorrow to talk to you about personal days. We're trying to keep the town hall... We've got people from a lot of different places other than Maple Leaf Brandon. So we're trying to keep it to a kind of bigger picture issues for this call. Not that your question's not important, because it is, and we will get you an answer. Okay?

Ashabhai Patel:

Yeah. And also I have questions about the COVID vaccine. I just had the COVID vaccine on 18th of May. So if I have a fever or some illness, so am I getting any compensation pay with that or not?

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, you're getting... Actually today, and Kevin Rebeck and I didn't talk about it, but today, the government actually put three hours of paid vaccination leave. So if you have to take time off work to get vaccinated, then you get three hours paid time. That doesn't mean you just get three hours' time. You get as much time as you need, but three of it has to be paid.

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And then your employer, if you have to take a significant amount of time off for any reason due to COVID, including if you have a reaction to the vaccine, you can go on your disability plan, which pays 65% of your wages. And the employer will top that off to 75% when you return to work.

We still have two callers on the line, but if you guys could just hang on one second, we are running a little bit tight on time. Again, we will have time to take your questions, the two of you that are on the line now, but I'm going to ask Marie...

Oh, hang on a sec. I see the vote to approve the president's report has been passed. And that means it's time for our last guest of the night. So I am going to turn it back to Marie to introduce our new Communications Coordinator.

Marie Buchan:

Great. Thanks again, Jeff. So Crystal Klippenstein joined UFCW Local 832 Communications Department in April of 2021; as Jeff had said, our second Communications Coordinator.

So welcome, Crystal. Welcome to your first GMM and thank you for joining us. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved in communications?

Crystal Klippenstein:

You bet. Thanks so much, Marie. It's really great to be here. Prior to this, I was working at the Canola Council of Canada, which is based here in Winnipeg. Like UFCW, it's a member-based organization that places a big priority on keeping members informed and bringing people together. So there's definitely parallels between that work and what we do here.

I've worked in communications for just about 15 years and the reason it interested me back in 2005 when I was in university is the reason I still like it today. Every day is different. Every individual we communicate with is different and there's new tools and channels to facilitate these conversations launching almost every day.

Marie Buchan:

Perfect. And can you tell us what excites you the most about your new role?

Crystal Klippenstein:

You bet. It's definitely got to be the opportunity I have here to help others. There's this Mister Rogers' quote about how, when he was a child, he'd be watching the news and he'd see overwhelming or scary things. And his mother would say, "Look for the helpers. There are always people who are helping." And that quote seems to have followed me throughout this pandemic.

I think I see it in some way, shape or form almost every week. And it's become a big focus for me over the last year to look for all the helpers during this chaotic time and to really consider and appreciate the work they're doing.

Now in the rare times that I'm out of my house and grabbing essentials, I look for helpers and I see our members and I'm just really excited to be a part of a team that celebrates them and works to make their lives better.

Marie Buchan:

That's fantastic. And I know we're equally as excited about having you in this new role. What do you think will be your biggest challenge in your role?

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Crystal Klippenstein:

Initially I thought it would be my lack of union experience. When you look at the UFCW 832 staff, the really impressive staff that we have here, it's clear that there is no shortage of lived union experience here.

But as I settle into my role and met the coworkers here and learned more about all the work that we do, I've had countless opportunities to ask questions and be able to use my skillset to hit the ground running and help out. [crosstalk 00:44:37].

Marie Buchan:

Sorry, go ahead.

Crystal Klippenstein:

Oh, no problem. I was just going to say, I represent a lot of young workers at the local and people that are new to our union. And so I'm hoping that as I learn more, I'm able to translate that into meaningful communication that helps others take advantage of all the opportunities that you get as a UFCW member.

Marie Buchan:

Excellent. And from a communication standpoint, what do you see as the union's biggest strengths and our biggest challenges currently?

Crystal Klippenstein:

I realize I sound a bit like a broken record here, but I think our biggest strength is our members to see this really impressive list of people, so many of whom are frontline workers and have experienced how public opinion and media attention have changed for a lot of you over this last year.

People like support workers and grocery store workers, for example, it's just wild. I really hope that one of the positives to come out of this pandemic is a new level of appreciation for all of the impressive humans who worked in the front line.

I guess that leaves me to our challenges. I think that here at UFCW 832, the challenge will be to sustain a level of appreciation and support for our members that translates into value for them, whether that's through improved benefits or wages the next time they're bargaining, or just through a more positive work atmosphere in general.

Marie Buchan:

What can members of UFCW Local 832 do to help you in your role, Crystal?

Crystal Klippenstein:

That is a great question. I think it's more of a question for me around what I can do to make their lives easier or better. So our communications team doubled when I was hired and I'm very excited that Chris Noto and I can build a strategy that's meaningful and helpful to our members. So with that, I'd say members can help me by providing feedback, sharing their experiences and stories so that we can all learn from each other.

Marie Buchan:

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Thank you, Crystal. I know the members of the Local are really looking forward to all of the new, exciting opportunities and resources in the Communications Department with your hiring at the Local and a big shout out to Chris for being our lone soldier during the majority of COVID that we experienced and having you as part of our team, I think, will be a huge asset to the Local. So thank you.

Crystal Klippenstein:

Thanks.

Jeff Traeger:

Right. Thank you for that, Marie. And welcome to you, too, Crystal. It's a UFCW first... We have a quote from Mister Rogers on the general membership meeting. So that's something new that you brought to the table already.

But in all seriousness, we're very, very happy to have you with us. And Chris, we're very happy to have you with us, too, for the record.

Just time for another question or two before we wrap up for the night. So we got four of them actually, and the first one is a very familiar name. We have Gurjinder Singh from the Winnipeg School Division Bus Drivers. How are you tonight, sir?

Gurjinder Singh:

Hi, good evening. And good evening, everyone, the UFCW members. So I just say thanks to everyone, UFCW team, Jeff, Bea, Mike, Rowan and Phil for the contract, and they done very well and we had lots of good things in that contract. So thank you everyone, and stay safe. Stay healthy. Thanks again.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you very much. And yeah, we were very happy to see the new contract that we got from the Manitoba Labour Board after the dispute, and thanks to you and all of your members for standing strong with us for the entire duration of the picket line at a very difficult time, right in the middle of a pandemic.

You guys are awesome. You're an amazing group of UFCW members and unfortunately our contract expires at the end of August, so we're right back at it again, as I'm sure you're aware.

Next one up, we've got Han Kung from Sobeys 4859. That's Wilton again, isn't it.

Wilton:

Yes, yes. Hi.

Jeff Traeger:

Ah, yeah, I remembered this time.

Wilton:

Aw, see, aha, see? I feel so important now, it's like all of a sudden I'm like, "Ah, it's like Han Kong again. It's Wilton again."

Jeff Traeger:

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Got it. Got it.

Wilton:

Anyhoo, anyhoo. I just have a quick question. I'm not sure if this would kind of fall in or maybe I'm not 100% percent sure. I'm not sure if he could answer it, but I hope he can give me kind of a sort of precise answer. Maybe a little bit of a good answer.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay.

Wilton:

The question I wanted to ask was, when is the contract up for me working within Safeway?

Jeff Traeger:

I believe it's March 21st. It's definitely the last week of March, but I'm pretty sure it's March 21st of 2022. So it'll be up before you know it.

Wilton:

March 21st, did you say?

Jeff Traeger:

Yes, of 2022.

Wilton:

2022. Okay.

Jeff Traeger:

Next March. Yeah.

Wilton:

Okay.

Jeff Traeger:

So, what we're doing Wilton, so that you're aware is that starting late summer, early fall, we'll be going through the process of selecting a bargaining committee. We'll be doing proposals and I've actually already secured a couple of days for the employer to set aside. We were all extremely busy, so we set aside a couple of days in early December to start early.

Normally with a date like that, we wouldn't start until the end of December; but we're going to get started early with an exchange and then take a break for the holiday season. Hopefully we'll be able to have and enjoy a holiday season this year and then we'll get in and then we'll get into serious bargaining in January, right up until the deadline, March 21st.

Wilton:

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Right? Okay. So once the contract is up, was you said March 21st of 2022? What would that mean? That would mean the store is going to be changing over or what?

Jeff Traeger:

No, it means we'll get you a new contract. You're a Safeway store right now. They don't have any scheduled conversions to FreshCo stores for any of the Safeway locations, but we will be bargaining the FreshCo deal together with the Sobeys deal because it's an appendix to the collective agreement we have with Safeway.

So as we've always done in the past, we'll get to midnight on that day and we'll either have a new agreement to bring to you to vote on, or we will have a problem and the problem will be Safeway's problem.

We're going to go back up to Thompson now, back to Kevin again. How are you tonight, Kevin?

Kevin Rancourt:

I'm enjoying a busy day.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay.

Kevin Rancourt:

So I got two quick questions. Regarding the COVID situation with people taking time off work and still getting paid for it, did that also apply for anything else? Like say if someone gets a common cold or something, would they have to quarantine for a week or two?

Jeff Traeger:

If you get the common cold and you know it's not COVID, then no. And I believe what was announced today is specific to getting vaccinated. So it's a three hour paid leave to get your vaccinations. So if you were scheduled a 12-hour shift and you had to get a vaccination, you could take up to three hours.

You could take all the time you needed off, but the first three hours would be paid and that's legislated. So that impacts everybody, not just you UFCW members. I see I've got... Your union rep just popped in on the call as well. So maybe when you finish your last question, Kevin, I'll go directly to Sandy Forcier because I think he's wanting to make a couple of comments about this, but what was your other question?

Kevin Rancourt:

My other question was how would someone become part of a union, like a union representative or something like that?

Jeff Traeger:

Well, there's a whole variety of ways. We often advertise when we've got an opening and we've done that through various ways, through an agency, but the best way that you could do that is become active in the union, either as a shop steward or on your Health & Safety Committee, take as many courses that we offer as you can and speak to your union rep about the fact that you're interested.

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Another way you could do it if you want to take the academic approach is you could study Labour Studies at the University of Manitoba and then ask to do an internship with us over the summertime.

Those are basically kind of the main ways. Marie, was there something else? Oh, I think Mike is your rep, but hang on a second, Kevin. We'll go to Sandy Forcier directly and see if he's got any comments that he wants to make on this. Sandy?

Sandy Forcier:

Good evening, everyone. Can everyone hear me?

Jeff Traeger:

We can. How are you tonight?

Sandy Forcier:

Good. I'm good. So, I've been listening to the comments here about COVID-19 and benefits and stuff. And I wanted folks to know that this union has communicated to all the employers to join us in trying to get our frontline workers to the front lines of the vaccination program. That's including security guards. I know I personally have spoken to all the employers to try to get them on board and some of them have, but again, this government fails and doesn't listen. So I wanted folks to be aware of that.

Jeff Traeger:

Sandy, just before you go on to your second point. So I heard that they're down to age 24 today, and then they're going to age 18 tomorrow. So the argument about getting in line to be first to get your vaccine now becomes who should be in line to get their second dose, I think next, is more the argument.

Sandy Forcier:

Sure.

Jeff Traeger:

But yeah, so appreciate that input and you're right. And it wasn't just security employers. It was all employers and many of you on the line here tonight have had your employer work with the union to join us in the call at the government to get people moved up the priority list, and even that didn't help. Sandy?

Sandy Forcier:

The second point that I wanted to make was regarding benefits and pay if you're off work due to COVID, whether you're self-isolating or let's forbid that someone does contract the virus.

But if you do not have disability plans, you can use your paid sick days, if you have them in your sick credit bank. And also you can apply for the Canadian Sickness Response benefit. And if folks need any help with that, they should be contacting their union reps and we can try to provide them as much assistance as we possibly can to help them walk through that process. So I just wanted folks to be aware of those options.

One of the last things that I wanted to plug is we have a Facebook Live event tomorrow for security guards at 6:30. So if folks can, they should join that.

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And for Kevin, Mike Howden is your rep in the north. I am here in Winnipeg in the security sector. So if you're interested in becoming a shop steward or a Health & Safety Committee member, please talk to one of us and we'll explain that process to you. And we're always looking for stewards and Health & Safety Committee members. So you'd be very welcome.

Jeff Traeger:

Excellent. Thank you very much, Sandy. Yes, Marie had already flashed me the note that Mike was actually the rep. So I apologize for that. Marie, you had a comment you wanted to make?

Marie Buchan:

Just to follow up on what Sandy had said. I think it's really important. The information that we give at these general membership meetings are very vague because every single one of our members has the opportunity to call in. Each of your collective agreements have different information and different articles. So it's really important that you follow up with your individual union rep, your servicing rep, so that you can get all the information that pertains to your workplace.

I don't want anyone taking some information that they heard on this call and pertaining it to their workplace because it may not actually be in effect. This is general meeting.

The other thing that's really important that Sandy talked about is the amount of different benefits that are available to people, whether it's paid sick leave through your collective agreement or something the federal government has offered. So it's really important to make sure that you're following up so your union reps can help you out and don't be afraid to give us a call.

Jeff Traeger:

Excellent. Thanks. Great advice, Marie. Thank you very much. All right. We're going to go to Adriana now from Epic Opportunities. Go ahead, Adriana.

Adriana:

Good evening, everyone. Hi. I first want to say thank you so much to the union for representing us to the government and helping us to get COVID money last year. I really appreciate it. I know without you guys fighting for us, I don't think we would have got it. So I want to say thank you first.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, you're very welcome. You're welcome.

Adriana:

The question that I have is it happened to me last year and this is in no way as a reflection in a negative way for my company. I have great managers and I'm very grateful for the [inaudible 00:58:00] that we do have. But my question is about, and I wonder if I could have maybe, it might even be like more specific than on this call. I just want to get some input or some ideas.

But what's happened to me, what happened last year, I was in a home where it was suspected negative for COVID, but people still were afraid to come into work and I ended up having to cover double shifts because I could leave my position.

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And it was an inconvenience for me because I had plans for my day. I didn't want to be there for double shift. I would end up 9:00 AM and I couldn't leave until 10:00 PM. And we don't typically work 12 hours in our job. We work eight hours.

So I was unprepared but not only that, but because he was suspected positive, I had to refrain from eating and drinking because the individual was following me around. And I couldn't really... I couldn't barricade myself so to speak. I needed to be on my toes all the time and I didn't eat and I didn't drink and I was feeling really faint.

Eventually, I realized that I had to stay there a lot longer than I had planned. I did have to find a way to feed myself. But the question that I have is, I was very surprised that no one called me to say, "We cannot find staff to replace you. Would you be willing to stay?"

That is what I was not happy about. I would have liked to have a say in whether I could stay or not. I would have liked to have been... It was like I was mandated to stay so I could not leave.

Jeff Traeger:

Right, yeah. I think Marie just had a comment that she wanted to make about this Adriana, because I think there's a grievance outstanding on this issue, isn't there?

Marie Buchan:

I'm not sure if there's a grievance or not. Some of this information sounds familiar. So what I think is best to do, because this a specific situation for you and for your workplace, it's best that we get JP to give you a call back. And then the two of you can discuss this one-on-one and come up with some solutions and walk through the various different issues and see how this can be resolved and ways that we can make sure this doesn't happen again going forward.

Adriana:

Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. So there are a couple of people in the queue, but I see on the clock, it is eight o'clock, which means we have to end the town hall now. Just a reminder, if you were waiting for your question to be answered, we will have your full-time union representative contact you soon to answer your question.

I want to thank all of you for joining us on our May telephone town hall GMM. We'll be conducting our next meeting by telephone town hall as well. As I said earlier on Wednesday, July the 21st, 2021 beginning at 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM.

Be safe out there, everyone. Stay well. Thank you again for all you do, and we're now adjourned.