

UFCW 832 Access Live
February 12, 2020

Jeff Traeger:

Good evening everyone. My name is Jeff Traeger. I'm the president of your union, UFCW Local 832. And I want to welcome you all to the February 11th, 2020, telephone town hall general membership meeting for members of UFCW, which is now called to order.

Jeff Traeger:

I also hear that I need to apologize a little bit that our music hold had an old audio file on it. We were advertising the 1919 events. We liked them so much, we want to do them all again in 2020.

Jeff Traeger:

With me in the studio tonight is our communications coordinator, Chris Noto. Bea Bruske and Marie Buchanan were not able to be with us this evening. But we do have a very, very special guest joining us tonight and that's Michelle Gawronsky, president of the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union. Michelle is here to talk to us about retail crime, and about how the many changes the Pallister government is making affect her members, as well as UFCW members.

Jeff Traeger:

Now, as those of you that have been on the call before are aware, we have a couple of things that we need to do. Our bylaws require that we vote to approve three reports at this meeting. And they are the minutes of the last meeting, which was held back on November 12th last year. The secretary treasurer's report on the current finances and the president's report.

Jeff Traeger:

I will not be reading the first two reports, which will give us more time for our interview with our guest, and more time to ask questions you may have. But all three of these documents are posted on our website at ufcw832.com for you to review. They will stay posted there in our archives, so you can see all the documents from all of our telephone town hall meetings anytime you'd like.

Jeff Traeger:

And if any of you would like to ask a question at any time, you just need to press the star key, followed by the number three. And you will be placed in the queue to ask your question.

Jeff Traeger:

I would ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or 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 online at ufcw832.com.

Jeff Traeger:

So tonight is the first quarterly town hall meeting of 2020. Since there seems to be so much going on at the local, I'm going to review the report I gave our executive board back on January 24th, so you can all see and hear firsthand the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for your local in the coming year.

Jeff Traeger:

So let's get started by making a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which took place on November 12th, 2019.

Male Speaker:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded, so please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad. Or, no by pressing the number two on your keypad.

Jeff Traeger:

One more time, before we get to our guest, if you want to ask Michelle Gawronsky a question, or if you have any question about anything at all, simply press the star key followed by the number three, and you will be placed in the queue. Right after Michelle's interview, I will be opening the phone to any questions that you may have. Please get in the queue now.

Jeff Traeger:

So, Michelle, thank you so much for being here. I really do appreciate you taking time out of your very busy schedule to come here with us tonight.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Thank you very, very much, Jeff. It's a great honor to be a part of this, and to be able to talk to your members about what our members are facing every day. I'm curious to hear what your members are facing too. I think in the labor movement in Manitoba, we've all got our struggles. And working together and informing each other of where we are, is going to be the way forward for us. So I really appreciate the invite. I'm very honored to be here.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, well, thank you, thank you. We're honored to have you. Just so that the folks out there know, maybe tell us a little bit about MGU, who you represent, and what things that you're busy with these days.

Michelle Gawronsky:

All right. We have 33,000 members from across the province. We've got eight offices. Thompson, The Pas, Brandon, Dauphin, Portage la Prairie, Selkirk, Steinbach, and of course, in Winnipeg. We represent folks from the civil service, so the provincial government workers across the province.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We also represent crown corporations. MPI, Analytica workers across the province, as well as some healthcare workers. We've got university and colleges from across the province as well, along with social service agencies such as AFM, Manitoba Youth Center, MacDonald Youth Center, Main Street Project, all of those areas.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We bargain for them, we represent them and we try to ensure that the government and their managers definitely are meeting up their end of the bargain of the collective agreement.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We're a piece of.

Jeff Traeger:

You mentioned government employees. Is that the majority of your members?

Michelle Gawronsky:

We've got almost 13,000 civil service workers. So anyone that's the corrections, legal sheriffs, fire commissioner's office, water testing, any of those that work for the provincial government in a direct relation, we represent all of those, as well as some of the others. Yes.

Jeff Traeger:

A lot of time bargaining with government then.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We would love to, if we could ever get to the table. But unfortunately, this premier doesn't feel he has a need to recognize or respect any of our members that are out there.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. Familiar with that one. Yeah.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Yeah.

Jeff Traeger:

Do the majority of your members actually work... I know you're spread out, you're all over the province of your 33,000. Are most of them here in the city?

Michelle Gawronsky:

We've got a fair chunk in Winnipeg, just simply because the government now, in the '90s, they devolved everybody out of the city of Winnipeg and now they are changing that and bringing everybody into the city. So we have lost a number of members within the civil service. The government has just been quietly been hacking away at some of the jobs. So over 2,000 jobs are gone already.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Those that are left, most of them, they're merging them in together and a lot of them have come into Winnipeg. So a fair chunk of our members is in Winnipeg.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. All right, so when I was driving around last week, I heard your voice on, I'm pretty sure it was CJOB, and you were in Dauphin, and you were screaming about Brian Pallister. So what was going on in Dauphin?

Michelle Gawronsky:

Well, this scream, this time, was the premier and his government made an announcement, well, it's almost two Fridays ago now, that they're not going to build the Dauphin jail that was promised since 2013. Not only are they not going to build a new jail and the healing center that was promised to that community and to the public of Manitoba, they are going to close the present jail that is up there.

Jeff Traeger:

[crosstalk 00:07:13].

Michelle Gawronsky:

80 jobs gone.

Jeff Traeger:

The 2013 promise was to replace it and build a new jail.

Michelle Gawronsky:

There was supposed a 180 bed new jail, and it wasn't just to house inmates in, it's also a healing center. It was all set up to be a healing center. So there was beds there to deal with mental health, as well as addiction.

Michelle Gawronsky:

And with the mass crisis that we have in Manitoba right now, you'd think this would have just made common sense to build that, and have it there. But they've turned that down.

Michelle Gawronsky:

The Mayor of Dauphin and the reeve of Dauphin contacted me the same day that this announcement was made, they're devastated up there. It's not just 80 jobs, but it's jobs, so that could be 160 jobs, people gone. It's 80 houses going onto the market in one day in Dauphin. May the 29th, that facility is going to close and people will not have jobs.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So the store owners, everyone up there, the restaurant owners, everyone is just in a panic on what's going to happen. They've already lost a number of other businesses through government, so this was just another kick in the face to them.

Michelle Gawronsky:

And for this, reeve and council and the mayor, they have put thousands and thousands of taxpayers' dollars into the sites, because of the promise and the sod turning that went on. They actually donated the 90,000 of prime farmland that this structure was going to be built on.

Michelle Gawronsky:

They have brought all the sewer lines into it. So they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars bringing the sewer in and reeve, the council, had approved and has already done the revamp of all of the lagoons to be able to accommodate this and they built the road into it. And the government came in, in one fell swoop, and the day that they thought they were going to be told of the date that it was going to start, they were told it's going to close. So it's devastating for the community.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Places like St. Rose Hospital, three of the correction officers have wives that work at the hospital at St. Rose. St. Rose Hospital is a small community, small hospital, losing three nurses is going to close the doors to that acute hospital. And the way this premier is going into second phase of healthcare, we're pretty sure that that's going to end St. Rose Hospital as an acute hospital. And his tentacles are going out and he's going to be attacking all of the rural areas as well.

Michelle Gawronsky:

There's fear out there and there should be, and it's unfortunate the premier that got elected to represent us.

Jeff Traeger:

Wow, in Dauphin, when you drive into town from, I guess it's the five that you come into town on-

Michelle Gawronsky:

Yeah, 5 or 10, yeah.

Jeff Traeger:

I think it's 10 actually. So you come into town and the first thing you see is the mall there and there's a Safeway store, that's UFCW members and if you keep driving a little bit into town, there's the new No Frills store, which is UFCW members. And then if you go around the corner, there's a co-op, which is a brand new store that was opened a couple of years ago, our entire executive board was up there for that. And that co-op also owns the hardware store, the gas bar at the beginning of town, the gas bar at the end of town and the store in Sainte Rose du Lac as well, all under one collective agreement with us.

Jeff Traeger:

So the impact you're talking about on the community, this gets to one of the reasons we asked you to come here, because a lot of your plight in Dauphin are the plights of our members and the people that work in that community with 80 good paying jobs out of that community. It's going to have an impact on our members in the hours they get in those grocery stores as well.

Jeff Traeger:

So it's all interconnected, isn't it?

Michelle Gawronsky:

It is, it totally is. The community, the mayor did a town hall that I attended, and there was over 600 people that attended the town hall. The MLA that was there that day actually got up and had the

audacity to say to the constituents that elected him that he's okay with this. The government had some tough choices to make, but he was okay with it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

I was surprised he actually made it out of there in one piece. The next day, we did a rally, a march and a rally we had well over 300 people that marched, there was 400 that attended our rally. I know some of your members were there and I do want to say a big thank you for them to being out there. We're going to be coming back up there.

Michelle Gawronsky:

I haven't given up on this. The old jail maybe, but I certainly haven't given up on this new one. The land is there, everything is ready to go. The people of Dauphin deserve this. We've got inmates and their families from the north, they stay, they are sentencing and they're serving their sentence in Dauphin.

Michelle Gawronsky:

I had a mum from Nelson House say to me, how am I going to go see my son? Where are they going to put my son? How are we going to do this? We don't have the money to be traveling anywhere else.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So there's been no thought to the actual people that are going to be affected by this. We have a premier again that spends hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars, actually a few millions of our tax dollars now on private consultants, but not once has he ever talked to any of us Manitobans that actually pay the bill and pay his salary. And that irritates the bejeebies out of me. No swearing online, right?

Jeff Traeger:

We'll lose our license. Yeah, I was actually watching the five premiers down in Washington that were lobbying on the free trade. And I noticed that they said Pallister didn't make it, because he chose to spend time with his family and I was wondering, he's throwing snowballs at the park with his family or maybe they're building sandcastles somewhere else? But we'll leave that one alone.

Jeff Traeger:

So both of us, UFCW and MGU recently went through the rationalization votes in healthcare. Now, you talked about rural changes to healthcare coming, and I agree with you completely. I think that's on the track.

Jeff Traeger:

But are there other sectors that you can think of that he would do the same type of thing with? Education comes to mind for me.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Absolutely. Yeah. And I agree with you, taking a look at what they're doing and when they start talking about going to one school board for the province, the smaller communities are going to lose on that one. How do you get a representative? I know from the health rationalization and what they've done,

my small town of has absolutely nothing and I know what it's done to our community to lose our hospital, our ER services.

Michelle Gawronsky:

There's only part-time doctors there. In fact, we're going to be down to two, we're going to have next to nothing. I think education is one as well.

Michelle Gawronsky:

I think what the plan is with this premier, and I don't think, I know it, he said unfinished business of the '90s. So when you look at what he was doing in the '90s, he was privatizing everything he could, he sold off MTF. He's got his hooks on hydro. He's looking at MPI, we know that the home care in Manitoba, he's desecrating home care, the whole program.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We used to have the best program in the country. I used to very proudly go across Canada and talk about our program. We don't have that. And I think are they going to go down to one regional health authority and we're going to end up in a vote again that way?

Michelle Gawronsky:

His whole goal I think is to weaken and to hurt the unions and to hurt the voice of labor by having them busy somewhere else, and not letting us do our job in making sure that we're representing our members.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, yeah, I'm very concerned about that, too. We represent a few members in school divisions cross province, but MGU probably represents significant...

Michelle Gawronsky:

We've got a few. We've got a few school divisions, and like I say, the colleges and universities, depending on what he's going to do, is he throwing everybody in the mix or only a certain part of it? And he changes the laws with the stroke of a pen. And he's able to do that.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So as long as he can get three readings in the house, he can do what he wants with the province. And when he said to me, Madam President, four years, 40 seats, I can do what I want, he is doing what he wants.

Jeff Traeger:

So let's switch gears for a little bit here and just talk about retail crime, because it's a big issue with our members. And it's an issue that I've been approached by media quite a bit on, and I know you have, primarily because of what we've all seen happening in liquor stores, mostly in Winnipeg.

Jeff Traeger:

We, our members see a lot of the same type of thing going on in retail grocery, where people come in and fill a cart full of very expensive items, whether it's diapers or formula or meat. Or, in the stores or super stores that sell electronics, they'll be taking TVs, whatever it is, and just walk out the door. Similar to the way people walked out the door with a backpack full of liquor.

Jeff Traeger:

And so they had that retail crime conference back on the 31st. Labor was supposed to be there. I think it was you and me.

Michelle Gawronsky:

We are labor. We were lucky to be in the room, 106 corporate businesses.

Jeff Traeger:

So what were your takeaways from that meeting like?

Michelle Gawronsky:

Well, it was interesting, because one of the first questions I had to the retail folks, how did they end up with the responsibility of providing the safety for Manitobans? I said when I go shopping, I feel your role is to make sure I've got a product that I want to buy. We pay taxes to make sure that we are safe in our shopping when we're going there, that's the government's role.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So I asked them how they ended up being responsible for that. And most of them hadn't thought about that. It was an interesting one, but I feel that they recognized that we need to... the premier says he's tough on crime and then is closing jails, our jails right now, we're over capacity everywhere. There's nowhere to put anybody.

Michelle Gawronsky:

And when I talked, and I'm sure you're finding the same, when I'm talking to the security folks out there, the Winnipeg police, the RCMP, the criminals are, they're either letting them go without even charging them or when they're charged, I know the police have said to me, they've not done the paperwork when the perpetrators are walking out the front door, because there's just no place to put them.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So we need to have a place to be able to fix this, and it's the responsibility of the government to make sure that we are doing everything we can to keep Manitobans safe and I believe everyone in that room said it as well. I think almost every one of them came up to me and said make sure you fight for the Dauphin jail. We need a place to put criminals, to keep our workers and our staff safe and to make sure that the shoppers are safe.

Jeff Traeger:

So what do you think of the new entranceways? I was at the Arlington MLCC and I walked in and had to scan a piece of photo ID before I would be let into the store. And as matter of fact, the customer in front of me didn't have any. And the security told her to go home and get it and she said, well, I don't have

any at all. And he said, well, you can't shop at this location. And then waited until she left the vestibule before he took my ID and at first I just showed it to him and he said, no, I need to scan it. I had to hand it to him to do it, and he was a good solid guard, a UFCW member. So we had a chat about that as well.

Jeff Traeger:

Do you think that's a good solution to the problem?

Michelle Gawronsky:

I know I've talked to our members in both of the stores that they're in and they've been working and the crime has stopped, hasn't slowed down, it has stopped. So to me, they're working and I've been appealing to the government last Saturday, a week ago Saturday, a 67 year old gentleman got hit over the side of the head with a bottle of whiskey and got knocked out from the steps that are going on.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So we know that they need to be doing something. My concern, that'll be an immediate fix and I don't know... I'm curious, how did you find you going in, how did you find that encounter with having to do that? Was it cumbersome and awkward or was it-

Jeff Traeger:

I was very interested by it. That's why I went. I went there specifically to see the process, because someone had told me that these new things were up. I think it would be absolutely fine on normal day. I worry about when they get that New Year's Eve rush, have you ever been in a store close to New Year's and the line goes all the way around and they're only letting so many people in the store because there's too many in there already? I wonder is there going to be a line out the door to get your ID scanned?

Jeff Traeger:

Which wouldn't bother me so much if I'm in a mall. But if I'm standing outside and it's 30 below, that might bother me a little bit. It's a small price to pay though for the safety of the people that are working in there, and the safety of the customers that are shopping in there.

Michelle Gawronsky:

The two entrances were done for Christmas. So they were up and they were using them and no complaints. I heard nothing back, other than positive feedback from the clerks, from the shoppers as well. I went to a couple of them and talked to people and they said, no, I feel safe, I can come back in here. It is definitely a positive.

Michelle Gawronsky:

The concern we have, if this government doesn't get a grip on the crime and what is going on, it's just going to push the crime into other areas. And that's where your members now, in all of your stores, who would have thought we'd have to worry about meat being stolen at a Safeway? I'm just floored.

Jeff Traeger:

So you know what the problem is though, is I'm hearing that there are some unscrupulous bar owners and restaurant owners in Winnipeg that out the back door, are buying the liquor that's been stolen from

the MLCC and buying the meat that's been stolen from Sobeys and they're paying half price for it, and able to turn even more profit for their business that way, which is horrible, if any of that's true.

Jeff Traeger:

But when I see a cart leaving the store and it's literally full of prime cuts of beef, overflowing, and they're walking out with it, and the value of that is \$700, \$800, I can't think they're eating it or freezing it, they're probably selling it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Yeah, and they are and we do know that there is an underground circuit that's happening, trying to be on top of that, it's a challenge for the police as well. One of the best ways though to stop it is to try and make sure that there's no way they can get out of the store with it. And make sure that the folks, again, if these are people that are in a meth situation, if they're a meth addict, if they've got mental health issues, often jail would have been the place to be able to deal with some of these as well while they're serving their sentence.

Michelle Gawronsky:

But we have a government who's closing their mind to making sure that Manitobans are safe, providing services that we need and they feel that saving \$1, well, it's our tax dollars, let us make that decision, premier. It's not yours to make. It's not your bank account. It's not up to you to figure out how we should be spending it. You got elected to protect us, you got elected to make sure services are there for us for the best dollar we can get.

Michelle Gawronsky:

When I have to worry about going shopping in a Safeway store, because of security and safety of the provinces isn't there, we've got bigger issues.

Jeff Traeger:

Absolutely. I agree. And for me, I know that when they had police officers in some of our superstores, the ones that have liquor stores in them, our are members felt a lot safer. I didn't hear that crime stopped altogether, but it certainly slowed down. And apparently customers were much more polite at the tills with our cashiers.

Michelle Gawronsky:

A double bonus.

Jeff Traeger:

I still think that the problem won't be solved until you deal with the root causes. You got to deal with this meth crisis and addiction generally, you have to deal with mental health issues, and the combination of poverty and homelessness. Until you can actually start addressing some of those issues, which none of them are short term solutions. And a lot of them are going to take resources and effort from a government that we don't have right now.

Jeff Traeger:

Then I think you'll continue having a problem, because even what we heard about the police in the superstore is, so the thief comes there, sees that there's a police officer in the store, leaves and heads down the street to the next one. There isn't police at every one, then someone's going...

Michelle Gawronsky:

And if the police are in the store and stopping the robbery, that's great. Who's going to protect the customer once they're out in the parking lot? That has to be addressed.

Michelle Gawronsky:

The meth crisis, like I say, AFM they're not putting money into the AFM, they're not putting money into those services. In fact, this government is actually cutting. We know for the housing, Manitoba housing, they have drastically cut and they have hurt the folks that are living in them, they're hurting the jobs that are available there. So they're cutting our social services that are needed. They're making sure...

Michelle Gawronsky:

They're not filling open positions, we don't have staff there to be able to make sure that the people are being looked after in a way that is stopping the crowding and making sure that they're accountable as well, or making sure that their needs are being met.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So if you stop all of the social services, you haven't got the protection on the street. We don't want a police state and we can't afford a police state. Then what are we going to have except for chaos and theft everywhere we go?

Jeff Traeger:

So for those of you out there that work in the retail sector, I'd love to hear your opinion on this. If any of you would like to give a call in, just press the star key followed by the number three and get in the queue. We only have one person on the line waiting for a call now, but I'd love to hear your perspective on retail crime and what long term solutions or even short term solutions to the problems are. Or if you've just got a story to tell us.

Jeff Traeger:

I got one more question for you though, Michelle. I noticed that you have several campaigns on the go. I did my homework, I went on your website. The two that popped out to me were the keep us together campaign and the keep liquor public. So what can you tell us about those?

Michelle Gawronsky:

The keeping liquor public again is any of the crown corporations, MPI are liquor. The sale from liquor is what funds all of the services we have out there. And the fear we have is that again, unfinished business of the '90s. One of the things that the PC government was looking at then was privatizing liquor. So we are keeping an eye on that. We want to make sure that this stays public, so that the funds that are made from them, go back into the services of protecting Manitobans in the services we rely on.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Keeping us together is basically about our civil service workers. Like I say, we are down over 2,000 jobs already, they're just not filling empty positions, but they don't just leave it empty, they actually delete the jobs. So now we don't even have a job available for our youth to be able to apply for. We've got some real concerns with highways, are they looking at privatizing highways? Are they looking at privatizing...

Michelle Gawronsky:

Like I say, the AFM, any of the areas that we have out there that a private business can come in for and get rich off of the taxes that we put aside to make sure the services are there for us. So there, we started the campaigns up again, we had them put away in the can for a bit, and now with this government and what it looks like, we are starting to pull it out and be out there and make sure that we're trying to tell Manitobans what's at risk if this government continues on the path that they're going on.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, perfect. Thank you for that. And thank you so much for being here. I really do appreciate it. I know how busy I am. I assume that you're twice as busy as I am. And so I really do appreciate. We do have, looks like my call out got us at least two retail people. We're going to those ones first. We're going to start with Don who works at the Safeway store on Ellis. Is that right, Don?

Callers:

At Sergeant.

Jeff Traeger:

Sergeant. I was so close. I know the store very well and the perfect person to call in for crime issues in the store. So, go ahead if you have a question for Michelle, or a comment you want to make.

Callers:

Well, I guess mine's more of a comment. I guess I'm just thinking like, where is this next leading to? Are we going to have them trying to pass security legislation for security guards where they have to be armed or they have to be trained in such a way as to be almost like law enforcement when the theft isn't being deterred? It's marginally being deterred by a security guard in a store. Basically, all a security guard is in the store is a person who says, hi, goodbye, and keeps an eye on potential thieves, right?

Callers:

But they don't have any authority to make arrests or to get the merchandise back. So, the only way we can figure out a way to do is to kill them with kindness, by offering customer servicing, but they keep cutting ours and so we don't have people on the floor to offer that customer servicing. How do you deter these thieves? There's always issue of violence that comes with it.

Jeff Traeger:

Don, that's just a whole bunch of stuff that I can talk about for a very long time. You probably know that we represent about 2,400 security guards, we have five or six different companies here in Winnipeg and across the province. Right now, there just simply is not training for security guards to do what you are suggesting they do.

Jeff Traeger:

And really, the other issue is that to provide them with weapons or to ask them to restrain or take down somebody is just going to escalate the situation, and turn a retail theft into violence. I think you've seen that in your story. You've told me, Don was on our bargaining committee last time. He's told me stories of things that have happened to people in the store that tried to get involved and stop a shoplifter.

Jeff Traeger:

I know that MGU has a position on security guards, and I know it differs slightly from the UFCW position.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Not too much though.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, yeah, right. I know not too much. But one of the things that we're really pushing hard for right now is to improve the training. We lobbied government for years to get just any training at all for guards to get their license, 40 hour minimum training. We don't think that's nearly enough. We think that they need extra training in how to deal with people who have mental health issues, how to deal with people who have addictions or under the influence of drugs and alcohol. How to use non-violent crisis intervention and new strategies to actually deescalate the situation, rather than to escalate a situation.

Jeff Traeger:

The problem, Don, is that we're not there right now. We are lobbying government and there is people in government, believe it or not, that are in the Justice Department that have an open ear to this, that it's time to revamp the training, because that program is 20 years old, and it hasn't been significantly modified. We know that, because we provide that training at our training center.

Callers:

Can I add another comment?

Jeff Traeger:

Sure.

Callers:

And also, the compensation, in the face of the competition that the guards get could be improved too. It's a dangerous job.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, if you remember, we had security guard minimum wage legislation that was a big UFCW lobby, that provided for a \$2.25 differential between what a guard would get at minimum wage and what the general minimum wage for the population would be. And the first thing the Pallister government did when that came up, was kick it to the curb and say we're not doing that.

Jeff Traeger:

So now, security guards who got the first two increases, 75 cents for that, are now going to have to wait until minimum wage catches up to them, which could take 10, 15 years at the small incremental increases that will come about. I just think that you're absolutely right. And we are going to push hard. I just don't see this government doing it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

I agree with you, Jeff. And I agree 00% on the training. We're lobbying as well for training. And it's not just the officers, the guards that are doing the work. They need to be given the ability to do their job, get the training, make sure that they can recognize it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So you pick up someone that's got a meth problem, you recognize it, the police pick them up, they arrest them, there's no place to put them. And the government is taking away every place that we need and we have presently to be able to deal with any of this.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So again, we need to be lobbying our MLAs, we need to say to them, yes, the crime is bad, but let's take a look at why the crime is bad. Where are we at? We could become a police state, but is that honestly the way Manitobans want to live? I don't think so.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So let's give the training where we can, let's make sure that we've got enough police officers where they need to be. And that they have the place to be able to put the perpetrators or the addicts, wherever they are and let's get Manitoba cleaned up. And my favorite saying right now is we need to give Manitoba back to Manitobans, and that's the road we need to be going down.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Well, thank you, Don. We're going to move on to Tammy from 4829. That's Sophie's store numbers for Safeway. Go ahead, Tammy.

Callers:

I find back in the day... Hello?

Jeff Traeger:

Hello. Hi, I we didn't have you on air until just now. I apologize for that glitch. So can you start your question or your comment again, please?

Callers:

Yes. I had an interesting observation. I've been with Safeway many years, and back in the day, we always had a floor walker, a security. And this is back in the day when people would hide stuff in their coat and walk out with one, two items. And now people are walking out as you mentioned, with like \$800, \$900 worth of meat cuts, that the common person can't even afford, but they're loading up on it. And we don't have security now.

Callers:

And I just find that interesting that now, when the stealing is at its absolute worst, we have nobody, but back in the day, we always had like a floor walker. And that's when people were just taking one, two items in their jacket. And they don't even try and hide it now, they just walk out with a cart.

Jeff Traeger:

It's pretty brazen, isn't it?

Callers:

It is. Yeah.

Jeff Traeger:

Some of the videos I saw coming out of the other liquor stores were just ridiculous.

Michelle Gawronsky:

There's no consequence. There's no consequence whatsoever right now.

Callers:

Yeah. And if we could get like a security or even like police cadets, I know Winnipeg has police cadets. Maybe that would help. Just having the presence of somebody might make a difference. But right now, they know we can't do anything, they walk in, they help themselves, out they go. And we're told not to do anything.

Jeff Traeger:

Do you honestly think that having a floor walker again or security again, would make a difference?

Callers:

Well, this day and age, it would have to be somebody in a uniform. Years ago, they were in plain clothes. So they could catch them. But nowadays, they're walking out just with car loads, without even trying to hide it. So it would almost have to be somebody in a uniform, that would maybe make them think twice.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Well, that's a good comment, Tammy. Absolutely. And thank you for calling in to share. We're going to go to Harjinder from G4S security parking authority. Hello, Harjinder. How are you? I guess we lost Harjinder. So we're going to go to our next caller who is Diane from Safeway, 4849. Hi, Diane, how are you?

Callers:

I'm doing very well, Jeff. How about yourself?

Jeff Traeger:

I'm doing well for a Tuesday night. Perfect place to be. I am taping the Jets game, so nobody tell me what the score is please.

Callers:

My husband's watching it.

Jeff Traeger:

So if you have a question for Michelle or a comment or...

Callers:

Actually, it's a comment in regards to the criminals, like just hearing from what Don and Tammy had to say. Both of them, I totally strongly agree with. I am a person in charge at Tuxedo, Safeway. A lot of the times, I'm having to be observant while I'm on the floor, watching these thieves load up and everything. And some of us that are trained to actually be able to try to do a potential stop, we try to do the best we can to try to get them to drop the load somewhere within the aisles.

Callers:

But the one thing I am finding is that I don't know about other stores, but for our store, for example, our security guards are only there till 10 p.m. Why are they not there till 11 p.m.? I'm probably speaking for other stores as well.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, yeah. And Diane, I just wanted you to explain what a PIC or a person in charge is for Michelle's sake and for others who aren't familiar with the term from the grocery industry. That's be good, please.

Callers:

Oh, yeah, for sure. So a person in charge is the bottom end of management, person in charge is the one that runs the store in the evening, while the store manager, first assistant manager and the second assistant manager are not in the store. So any manager decisions are on the person in charge.

Callers:

So our store manager and our first and our second, they can make stops as the person in charge can as well, knowing that we are 100% confident that they concealed something, first off. And second off, we're making sure that we're not putting ourselves in harm's way, on top of that. So that's what a person in charge is. It's the bottom end of management.

Jeff Traeger:

It used to be called a key holder back in the day, if I remember correctly. But the other thing that is interesting, and I had a discussion with someone else in our store about this, if you look at the amount of sales between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. when the store closes, versus the amount of theft between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. that occurs, it's probably not worth it for the stores to stay open for that last hour. And if they only have a security guard there until 10:00, why not just close the store at 10 o'clock?

Callers:

Yeah, our stores open until 11 p.m. and we find that, because I'm a huge observer. I can sense... It's so weird how I can sense certain people and just looking at their carts, I can see something's not right. And

generally, I'm seeing people will wander around the store, just observe and then they'll notice that security guards are gone at 10 o'clock.

Callers:

They'll wait until they sign out and they're gone. And then they'll try to bucket it out with either a cart or reusable bags full of product, or a basket.

Jeff Traeger:

It's absolutely happening. Michelle is going wow in here, Diane. I'm telling you that it happens in grocery stores, as well as it happens in liquor marts. Well, thank you very much for calling in, Diane. Appreciate that.

Jeff Traeger:

I missed an item of business. I see on the screen that the vote to approve the minutes of the last meeting has been passed. And before moving on to our last question in the line right now, I'll need to make a motion to approve the secretary treasury's report for the 11 month period, ending November 30th, 2019.

Male Speaker:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded, so please press number one on your keypad to vote yes. Number two to vote no. If you have any questions about secretary treasurer's report or anything else at all, press star three and we will gladly take your question.

Jeff Traeger:

Now, we're going to move on to Wendy from store 4823. Go ahead, Wendy.

Callers:

Good evening. I have something I wanted to ask Michelle. The retail meeting that you had attended, there was some discussion about getting information out in between businesses about repeat offenders. I don't know if that was mentioned or not.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Yes, actually, there was a piece and thank you, Wendy, for the question. I know that we're going to... Jeff and I both, at least we're supposed to, I think we're going to get included. We are labor after all. But we're going to be getting a report from that and in that report, there should be a part of that discussion that took place.

Michelle Gawronsky:

And I know it was one of the recommendations, that being able to recognize the perpetrator before they come into the store might be helpful for everybody. And at least if nothing else, it makes sure that we've got the safety of the shoppers as well as the staff, front and center.

Michelle Gawronsky:

But yeah, that is a piece that is being looked at, and we will be in discussions with government on how we're going to move some of that forward.

Callers:

Because I know that I live in the neighborhood where I work. I work at the Sergeant Safeway, so I recognize the same faces from work going into other businesses. I've also had customers come and tell me where the stolen product is being sold and who's buying it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

You can go on Facebook and follow it. I've actually met, the very first group that we had, there was a group of 15 young girls that went in and did a mob theft. Two of the mothers contacted me and I met with the girls, two of the girls, one was 14, one was 16. And it was quite interesting, it was part of a gang initiation to get in. And so we know that the gang piece of it.

Michelle Gawronsky:

What they've done since then, one of the girls said that each gang member has to pay their dues to the gang every month. So they are sent out they are no longer allowed to break the liquor bottles, they're supposed to bring them back in one piece with the label intact, so that they can be resold underground. And one of the girls said, and I said, yeah, but there's got to be another way to pay your dues. And she said, look, she said, no offense, but if I don't do that, I'm turning tricks on the corner.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So we also need to figure out where the gangs are coming from, how much control are they having on our youth out there and making sure our youth are safe. Parents, pay attention, where are your kids? What's going on? Are they safe and are they secure? The people that they're being around. So that is also a piece of all of this crime that's going on.

Michelle Gawronsky:

It's only going to get worse unless this government takes the responsibility to make it better. And it's up to this government to provide that. We can all work with this government, but it is their responsibility, and this is what we pay taxes for.

Callers:

Absolutely.

Jeff Traeger:

There you go, Wendy. All right. Thank you very much for your call and your comment. I see that the motion to accept secretary treasurer's report has passed. So we've got one more caller in the queue that's just going to hold on for a couple of minutes, because we're getting a little bit late in the hour. I want to make sure I get the president's report in. So I'll start with Maple Leaf Brandon Bargaining.

Jeff Traeger:

Back on December 2nd last year, UFCW local 832 members, working at the Maple Leaf Brandon voted 65% to reject a tentative agreement reached between the company and the union's bargaining committee. So in an effort to prevent a large labor dispute with the 1,800 members that work at that plant, almost 1,900, the company and the union met on January 10th, to address the concerns raised by our members. The parties were able to reach a modified tentative agreement that was ratified on January 12th by 89% of the members at the meeting.

Jeff Traeger:

That new contract includes language improvements for the health unit, really important for our folks in Brandon. And expansion of the respectful workplace policy, as well as solid wage increases, getting close to twice the cost of living. \$1.14 million in pension conversion payments, which actually were paid out on February 8th, I believe it was. And half a million dollars in job reclassifications, as well as improvements to food allowances and premiums. And that contract will expire now on December 31st, 2024.

Jeff Traeger:

Up from Brandon, 45 minutes up the road to Neepawa where HiLife bargaining is going on, we have 1,400 members working at the HiLife foods plant at Freezer Co in Neepawa. Bargaining there is coming down to the crunch. Secretary, treasurer, Bea Bruske, Blake Cruthers from our negotiations department and the bargaining committee are all in the final stages of bargaining.

Jeff Traeger:

Committees meet for what should be the final four days from February the 18th to the 21st at our UFCW office in Brandon. Hoping to have a good news update for you there at our next town hall. Winnipeg Labor Council, last fall, your executive board voted unanimously to support Melissa Dvorak and her bid to become the new president of the Winnipeg Labor Council. And at the November council meeting, Melissa was elected to the president position for a three year term, ending December 31st, 2022.

Jeff Traeger:

We had a very, very tough round of bargaining out in SunGrow. That included getting a strong strike vote from our members working both in Elma and Ramsey. A tentative agreement was reached between the parties on January the 30th, 2020. Final documentation is in the process of being proofed and signed and a ratification vote will be scheduled once that's done.

Jeff Traeger:

I think that round of bargaining is proof that when you set up trailers as strike headquarters, it has an impact at the bargaining table. It certainly did in that case.

Jeff Traeger:

As we were talking about earlier, the retail crime conference is in my report, besides labor and business being there, there were government, police, security companies, indigenous groups and retail councils from both Manitoba and Canada. And the report that Michelle was talking about earlier, once it's released to the public, we're going to make sure that we communicate that to all of our members widely.

Jeff Traeger:

An issue that has come up recently is Unifor action against co-ops. I'm sure many of you are aware that there is a lockout that's taking place in Regina right now, but back it up to Saskatoon last winter, there was a six month strike at the Saskatoon co-op. Last winter, a federated co-op and their subsidiary where Unifor members work and co-op locked those workers out for almost three months now, in an apparent effort to get them to agree to have their pension plan gutted.

Jeff Traeger:

Local action to support these workers has included picketing fuel distribution centers, leafletting Red River co-op parking lots. While the strike action is affecting some UFCW local 832 members, especially those working at the co-op gas bar in St. Vital, their contract is up this year along with Red River co-op retail store contract. And if this company continues their ongoing fight with unions, then these negotiations could prove to be extremely difficult.

Jeff Traeger:

So it's important that we support Unifor on the picket line, it's important that we challenge employers that are trying to take away things from workers. Because if we don't do that, if we don't stand together, then we're going to be next. So we're all in this together and that's why we're on that picket line. I know there are some co-op members that may not agree with that, but that's definitely the reason we're doing it.

Jeff Traeger:

I tell you what, if we have a problem with co-op when you're around a bargaining comes up, Unifor members will be marching with us on that line as well and MGU members.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Absolutely.

Jeff Traeger:

We have UFCW's youth internship program, we're hosting that this year at our training center from July 20th to 25th. If you're under 30, if you're a UFCW local 832 member and you're interested in learning more and becoming more active in your union, please contact Jeff Bergen at 204-786-5055 or at email address jeff.bergen@ufcw832.com. All that you can find on our website.

Jeff Traeger:

Also, wanted to announce that we have a new executive board member, on January 24th, 2020, Charlene Desjarlais was elected to fill one of the vacant positions on our executive board. We have 17 spots on the board, but four of them were left vacant after the healthcare votes in 2019.

Jeff Traeger:

Charlene is a very active member at the Vista Park Lodge who has facilitated courses at our training center in Winnipeg and is currently on the bargaining committee in her workplace, where they just reached a tentative agreement at Vista Park Lodge. And our executive board will be reviewing the other vacancies at our next meeting in March.

Jeff Traeger:

After more than four years, it's actually four years one month and one day, the trial for Heather Grant-Jury ended on January the 30th 2020, where she was sentenced to 15 months in jail for fraud over \$5,000. I'm not going to say any more than I've already had to say about that for the last four years. I'm going to say the UFCW can now put this very unfortunate matter behind us, and get on with the business of fighting for working Manitobans, which we do so well.

Jeff Traeger:

Didn't want to end with that one. So I saved a good news one for the end. And that is for those of you that don't already know, our secretary treasurer Beatrice Bruske has put her name forward to run for the position of president of the Canadian labor congress. There will be a convention held in Vancouver the first week of May, and while we will miss her, not if, but when she wins, we all wish Bea the very best in her new role representing workers all across Canada. And it will be an absolute benefit for workers, UFCW, and all union workers in Manitoba, and all union workers in Canada to have the Bea Bruske in that role.

Jeff Traeger:

So that is my report. I would ask for a motion to approve that report.

Male Speaker:

Seconded.

Jeff Traeger:

It has been moved and seconded, so please press the number one on your keypad to vote yes. Number two to vote no. And if you have a question, you know what to do, it's star three and get in line for the question. So we're going to move, we only have one person on the line left with a question. So we're going to go to Richard from Maple Leaf Brandon. Richard, how are you doing tonight?

Callers:

I've got a question, how old is Dauphin jail? How many years old?

Jeff Traeger:

That, I will give to Michelle. Richard, actually, just saw him at the pension check distribution a week ago, but he lives in the area. So he's probably is curious about that.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Thank you, Richard. It is a good point, the Dolphin jail I think is about 106 years old. It definitely needs to be replaced. And that is why there was a commitment made by government and there was a sod turning ceremony on why the RM and the city of Dauphin have all contributed and put into it, to build a new jail. That was there since 2013.

Michelle Gawronsky:

It's extremely disappointing that we are now in 2020, seven years later, and they haven't even started to do anything to it. Definitely needs to be replaced, the government has put money into maintaining it to keep it alive until the new one could be built.

Michelle Gawronsky:

What this government plans on doing is taking \$11 million and turning that jail into another courthouse, which again, we're trying to figure this out. So why are you taking \$11 million wasting it into a 100 year old building if you don't think it's feasible to keep? And you're going to have a courthouse that's going to find people guilty, and then do what with those people? There's no rehabilitation, there's no place to put them to get over any of their addictions, any of their mental health issues, and that would have been what the new facility would have addressed.

Michelle Gawronsky:

So yes, it's an old building. But yes, it definitely needs to be replaced, not just shut down.

Callers:

I was just going to comment, I remember thinking on order of about 30 years ago, a place I worked here in Brandon back then, and the jail looked about 100 years old back then.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Coming from a lady, I have to say that looks are deceiving. It doesn't mean that it's not worth using.

Callers:

[inaudible 00:53:32] at least to me it looked that way. It looked 100 years old back in 1990. That's why I was asking the question.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Definitely needs to be replaced, absolutely needs to be replaced.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you very much, Richard, thank you very much for your comments. I'm going to leave Michelle's last comment completely alone, because I've been married for 20 years, so I know better.

Jeff Traeger:

Now, I see that the vote to approve president's report has been passed. I also see that we answered all your questions. There's nobody in line for a question. I want to thank all of you. First of all, I want to thank you again for coming. Thank you, Michelle.

Michelle Gawronsky:

Thank you, Jeff, so much. It means the world to be here and this has been a really enlightening evening now. It's exciting to see and I congratulate UFCW on this move forward. This is an awesome way to be in touch with your members. Congratulations.

Jeff Traeger:

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Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, we like it, it certainly works for us. So thank you everyone else for joining us on our winter telephone town hall. We will be conducting our next general membership meeting on Tuesday, May the 12th, 2020 by telephone town hall as well, beginning at 7 p.m. So for those of you taping the Jets game, go Jets go. And we are now adjourned.