

UFCW 832 Access Live
September 20th, 2022

Jeff Traeger:

Good evening everyone and sorry for the delay. My name is Jeff Traeger and I am the president of your union UFCW Local 832. I want to welcome you all to the September 2022 Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting for members of the local, which is now called to order. As long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows, UFCW Local 832 acknowledges that we are gathered and work each day on ancestral lands, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. Our offices are located on Treaty 1 and 2 Territory and our work extends into Treaties 3, 4 and 5. We recognize the injustices done to the indigenous peoples of this land and are committed to supporting and collaborating with indigenous communities in a spirit of truth and reconciliation.

Jeff Traeger:

So before we get tonight's meeting rolling, I want to say thank you to the staff of the local and the executive board members and all of the UFCW members and union members of all colors who came out to the Winnipeg Labor Council and the Brandon and District Labor Council Labor Day events in, of course, Winnipeg and Brandon. We hosted actually the Brandon event on Richmond Avenue at our union office out there and had a great turnout at both events and we're very happy to be able to once again supply the food, the hot dogs, chips, the drinks, to the many, many union members in attendance.

Jeff Traeger:

Also, want to say a wider thank you to all 832 members for the work they have done and continue to do as we move through some of the most difficult times in our history, with COVID still hanging on the war in Ukraine and the rocketing cost of living caused by both of those events. The value that all of you bring to our society continues to make me proud that I get to work with and for such an amazing and dedicated group of people. So I want to say thank you for that. Also wanted to let you know that all of us here at UFCW are working hard to 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. More than ever before, your union has your back.

Jeff Traeger:

Tonight is our 2022 fall meeting. Even though summer is technically around for another day, and after tonight we will only have a short break and be back in a few weeks for our final general membership meeting on October the 11th. We're meeting again so quickly because we have our international convention coming up in April of next year and we will have to deal with nominations for delegates at that October meeting. We will be running elections for those delegate positions by mail-in ballot this fall. So check our website at wfcw832.com or the September-October magazine for all the details.

Jeff Traeger:

So with me in the studio tonight is my executive advisor, Ron Allard, our director of IT Facilities and Privacy, and our office manager Max Patches and our communications coordinator, Chris Noto, who is at the controls for tonight's meeting. Our secretary treasurer Marie Buchan is on the call, but she's driving out to our Brandon office. She's going to be servicing with one of our West Man reps tomorrow, so she's driving out there this evening. So safe travels Marie and I will take any questions that anybody has that Marie would normally answer.

Jeff Traeger:

We also have a very special guest with us in the studio this evening and that's Kevin Rebeck, the president of the Manitoba Federation of Labor. We've asked Kevin to join us tonight, not for a formal presentation, but for more of a conversation about a number of topics including minimum wage, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and a couple of elections coming to your city or your province in the near future. As we normally do, we will take breaks in between our conversation to answer any questions you may have for Kevin or for myself or anybody else in the studio or about anything relevant to UFCW members at all. Remember that 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 are available on the UFCW Bulletin board in your workplace or online at ufcw832.com. So let's get started.

Jeff Traeger:

First order of business required by our bylaws is that we vote to approve the three reports at this meeting and they are the minutes of the previous full membership meeting, which was held on May the 17th, the Secretary Treasurer's report on the current finances and my report, the president's report. We will not be reading these reports, which will give us more time for our guest and more time for you to ask any questions you might have. All three of these documents have been previously posted on our website for you to review and they will stay posted 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.

Jeff Traeger:

Just a reminder, if any of you would like to ask a question, please press the star key followed by the number three and you will be placed in a queue to ask your question. I would once again ask that you please remember that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues or ask questions about matters that affect all locally 832 members, and that if you do have a specific question to your workplace or a grievance or what's happening at the bargaining table that you contact your full-time union representative. So we will now need a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which took place on May the 17th, 2022.

speaker 2:

So moved.

Speaker 3:

Second.

Jeff Traeger:

So it has been moved and seconded, so please vote yes by pressing the number one on your keypad or vote no by pressing the number two on your keypad. And once again, to get in the lineup to ask a question, simply press that star key followed by the number three and you'll be put in line.

Jeff Traeger:

So now I'm going to introduce our special guest, Kevin Rebeck, President of the Manitoba Federation of Labor. Hello Kevin, how are you?

Kevin Rebeck:

Doing great. Thanks for having me.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Yeah, no problem. Glad that you could actually make it tonight. And I think the first section that I want to talk about and as I said to our members this is more of a conversation. Neither one of us has a script in front of us. But I wanted to talk about legislation and there are really four pieces of legislation, but I think the one that's affecting most of our members right now, whether they work in retail, grocery, security, assisted living and even in some other areas, is minimum wage. So recently government made an announcement that minimum wage would be going up to 13.50 on October the first of this year, then again up to 14.15 on April 1, 2023. And then there's the formula that will still be used to do yet another increase on October 1, 2023. And if cost of living stays roughly where it is, we should be somewhere around \$15. So what did you think about that when you heard that announcement?

Kevin Rebeck:

Well, I think it's sad that it took shaming the government to know that we were going to be the second worst minimum wage in the country for them to introduce some increases above what was normally scheduled. And after a lot of hard thinking and some consultation, they've made announcements of changes that will still have us as the second worst minimum wage in the country. I think there's a lot more to be done so the people who work full time make a living wage. But I'm glad to see that some increases are coming, workers work hard for it and prices are going up at the pumps and grocery stores so this will make a difference in people's lives.

Jeff Traeger:

So you're president of the Federation of Labor, and we've all seen you do a really good job in the media pushing government and lobbying for minimum wage increases. If the MFL got to set the minimum wage, if it was someone from government pulled out a pen and a piece of paper and said, "Kevin, what am I going to say minimum wage is at?" What would you tell him?

Kevin Rebeck:

Oh boy, I wish that would happen. I think minimum wage should be set at a living wage level. We should figure out what are the basic number that we should pay people who work full time so that they don't live in poverty, they can meet a good basic standard of living. I think nowadays that probably puts them around the \$18 and change rate. I think by the time we need to do an increase again, it'll be closer to 20 and I think we should probably, if I had my ways add last year's inflation rate to that so that we're not always a year behind. Because all too often when we do negotiate or when we give advice on minimum wage, we're really using numbers that are at least a year out of date. So it should be a living wage plus a year's CPI, in my opinion.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, I don't know what year it was, but I remember meeting with a group that was doing a fight for 15. And that was probably, I don't know if that was 2015, 2016 that we met with them, but when you look at the inflation from that to today, it's really not a fight for 15 anymore. It's a fight for a living wage. And you mentioned that specifically living wage. The CCPA is an organization that's Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, for those of you that don't know, but they're an organization that does a calculation every few years on living wages and they do it regionally as like for the City of Winnipeg versus

somebody that lives rural or somebody that works in the second largest city, which is Brandon. So do we know what that number is right now?

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah. So it's not a perfect comparator to look at living wage to minimum wage because they do base it regionally. Like you say, they have one for Thompson and Brandon and Winnipeg and they also do it based on your family unit. So they have a calculation for someone who lives alone. They have a calculation for two people with two children both working 35 hours a week at minimum wage. And that's the number we look to go with. We know that's not a perfect fit, but that would be \$18.34 in last year's dollars before this huge inflationary increase that we're all facing. The other number it's much higher if you live alone because it takes your average rental costs, your average food costs and all of these things. So we think we're taking a reasonable approach to that to say if people are making around 18.34, they would meet all their basic needs as of last year. So it's a year behind.

Jeff Traeger:

So when government talks about consulting with business and labor, both you and I sit on something called the Labor Management Review Committee and we've been very good on that committee when labor legislation is proposed to us to find a way to do the tough kind of negotiations or arguing between labor folks and employers or business folks or management folks to get to a consensus. But it seems like every time we talk about minimum wage, we can't reach consensus. And when the government asked us to look at what kind of increase there should be in October 1st of this year, again we weren't able to reach consensus. Why do you think that is?

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, so the Labor Management Review Committee is this body that gives advice when we have a minister of labor, which I'm glad we have once more because for six years we didn't have one. But it's a body made up of business and labor with a chair appointed by government who's usually well respected from both sides. [inaudible 00:12:06] Michael Wier, who's a well-respected lawyer, arbitrator plays that role right now. And then there's six labor representatives and six employer representatives. And like most cases, when government gets out of the way, we're usually able to find a solution and find some common ground that everyone can live with.

Kevin Rebeck:

The one sticking point and one area that we haven't ever built success on is agreeing on minimum wage and what it should be. And I think that's because business, it's very nature is to keep wages as low as possible. They typically say the minimum wage should be in the ballpark around the average of what it is elsewhere, which if everyone takes that approach, it would never change. And then when we do fall behind, they're like, "Oh well yeah, we should get back to the middle, but slowly. You don't want to shock business much less what the impact is on workers."

Kevin Rebeck:

Whereas labor I think takes a very principled approach saying the world tells us that a job's a path out of poverty. That should be true. And if we do the math on that, minimum wage doesn't meet that test. So we think when you work full time, you shouldn't have to live in poverty, you should meet all those living wage thresholds. And that's the position we take and advocate for. So the underpinnings of what we're

trying to achieve are just so far apart. They want to keep wages low, we want to give people a fair shake and getting to a middle ground we can agree on just hasn't happened.

Jeff Traeger:

And yeah, government I think leaned a little bit towards their argument because we were the second lowest minimum wage when we started having discussions with the LMRC, and where are we going to be after October 1st?

Kevin Rebeck:

Second lowest. So we're going nowhere.

Jeff Traeger:

One of the other things just before we move on to talk a little bit about National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, one of the things that we're seeing is the pressure that this is putting on our negotiations department, because in many cases, retail grocery for example, there's a six or \$7 gap between what people start at and what people make when they're working at the top rate. And we're seeing that gap get compressed from the bottom up. And I think there is at least an expectation that when we get back to the bargaining table, we're going to bargain increases of the equal amount at the top end of the scales to maintain the gap. Employers on the other hand are saying, "Wow, it's costing us gazillions more to run these companies because of the minimum wage increases. Now you're coming after us and saying we've got to provide this to everybody."

Jeff Traeger:

It's a real challenge. I completely understand where those people are coming from because they had to work long hours for many years to get to that top rate and now people are starting closer and having to work shorter to get to that rate. So it is just a concern that is probably a little bit specific to local 832 with retail grocery workers and security guards that are in that pay range where it's directly affected.

Kevin Rebeck:

Sure, I agree. There's a number of workers that are kind of close to minimum wage and they're going to see minimum wage leap ahead. I mean the Pallister Stefanson government came into power six years ago and they artificially have kept minimum wage low, which has dropped us from, what used to be above the middle of the pack and we've dropped now to the second worst because they've given this gift to employers in low wages for so long.

Kevin Rebeck:

I think we really need to keep our eye on who the enemy here is and we want to raise wages up, we want to raise the floor and our ability to negotiate or bargain or say that people who have experience or who have skills and training deserve more than minimum wage is hurt when minimum wage doesn't move. It moving up, ideally employers would still recognize and value people and move their wages up and keep those gaps and differences, but the reality is that's not how it works and there's a time lag between everyone moving the floor up and people who were close to that, having the ability to try and negotiate and bargain and raise their wages to respect their skill sets and their experience.

Kevin Rebeck:

It is a challenge. I understand your union in particular would be pressed and challenged on trying to live up to those expectations, but we really need to push employers to recruit and retain people. And I think in some sectors where you represent members, that is a problem employers are facing. And we need to try and leverage that as best we can to recognize that experience, that seniority and that training and skill sets that come with those jobs.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. And that's also one of the things I've told employers that it may help, having minimum wage go up may help with recruitment, but if you don't deal with the people that have been with you a long time, retention's going to be your next problem and you're going to lose that experience you're talking about.

Jeff Traeger:

Speaking of that group that reviews labor legislation, the Labor Management Review Committee, we were also asked earlier this spring to give government a recommendation on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. And in that case we were able to come up with a joint recommendation to government to create a holiday. Why do you think government didn't follow the joint recommendation? I mean, was it timing? Was it just pure politics? Was it too much of a burden on small business, which I think they still see as their base? What do you think it was?

Kevin Rebeck:

Well, I'm continually unimpressed with this government and how slow they move on anything that makes a difference for workers. And I think there was a discussion, I think they dragged their feet even the first year. This should have been dealt with last year, not consulting us this year, but they were slow to act last year on it and did something for their direct employees but not for other workers. They then consulted with business and labor and we said, "Look, this day is a solemn day. It's to recognize the harms that residential schools continue to have in our society today. That there does need to be the establishment of some new traditions or ways to honor and recognize this day. And we thought what should be done is we should look at this the same way we used to look at Remembrance Day. It used to be when Remembrance Day came, everything closed. You could get milk and bread, but that was pretty much it. And we think that's what we should do with the TRC day so that we could figure out what those traditions will be."

Kevin Rebeck:

Over time, remembrance Day has changed and there are some allowances for other things to be open, but there are certain blocks of time where we know there are traditions and educational opportunities for people to honor lives that were lost in the past. So we think not only that should be done, but I was pleased to hear business side with us to say, in addition to that we should look out for people in the gig economy or people who work part-time and we should also take a do-no-harm effect that if people only work four shifts a week, this shouldn't allow the employer to then only schedule them for three and people lose a day's pay. That there should be some extra protections for workers that everyone could participate in whatever new traditions might allow us to honor that memory and that learnings that we can do better and that they should consult with the indigenous community and have things in place for us to do that this year. I'm disappointed it hasn't happened and I'm hopeful that's where we'll land.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. Well we obviously think it's incredibly important to recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation for a whole variety of reasons. I was really happy to be a part of that committee and see us get consensus with the management group, but I don't know, maybe this government is saving it for the spring budget announcement during an election year or something like that. But I do know that we gave them our recommendation a long time ago and they came out in September and said they haven't had enough time to consult, which was tough to swallow.

Jeff Traeger:

But just while we're on legislation and before we take a short break, Bill 64 and Bill 16 are some good news stories over the last little while, but I've heard governments say when they were talking about education that Bill 64, even though it was repealed, that they will still have to deal with education reform. What do you think that looks like or what are they thinking about?

Kevin Rebeck:

I'm worried what that might mean, but I'm hopeful that the community Response and union's response and everyone stepping up and rejecting the ideas that this government, we're putting forward on education reform, not only beat back that bill, but I hope with an election coming next year has put it far enough on the back burner that we won't see anything major, major disruption between now and the next election. And I'm equally hopeful that the next election, when they take multiple years to act on TRC recommendations, that people can take that long to decide if they're voting for them. They could exercise their vote in a much different way and get action as a result. So I'm hopeful we can make a difference when the election comes next year.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. And Bill 16 was the act as we now know it, to basically gut the Labor Relations Act and take a whole bunch of rights away from workers and the people who represent them. What do you think the worst part of that bill was?

Kevin Rebeck:

In Manitoba we have a unique law that says that if there's a strike or a lockout that goes beyond 60 days that either side, not both, can go to the Labor board and we can have a grown up come in the room and help solve the differences. If one side or the other is being difficult, I can tell you who 99.9% of the time what side is being difficult, but that someone else can come in and give us a neutral, educated, productive path forward that will be imposed upon both parties and move things. And this government was looking at ripping that out and throwing it away even though business and labor together want this legislation to stay in place, think it does a good job and helps get deals.

Jeff Traeger:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I guess we can say it got defeated, well I guess by being delayed. First by the NDP, it was one of the bills they held back that went to the fall session and by the time the fall session came along, Mr. Pallister had permanently moved to Costa Rica and I guess the government that was left behind didn't have a stomach for it. Is that how you would characterize it?

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, I think... Oh, sorry. Yeah, I think there's was a big push from business and labor together saying we didn't want this bill to move forward, that it did a lot of things that we were giving advice against. I don't

think that alone would've done it, but with Pallister's departure, which I celebrate daily, the new government really saw that the amount of pushback they received from Bill 64 from Bill 16 and others in the community response was something they didn't want to get back into and they lost their appetite for implementing these radical changes that no one wanted.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, well, and I'm glad they did because it was a nasty piece of legislation and I certainly do not want to see any portions of that re-tabled if the Tories happen to form government again, because I think they will. We're going to take just a quick break from the interview now before we switch topics as I see that the motion to approve the previous minutes has passed and that we have a few questions on the line. So Chris will go to the inbound caller without the name from Brandon. I've got names on the other two, but not sure who the inbound caller is from Brandon, but go ahead.

Russell:

Hey Jeff, it's me, Russell here from Brandon. How are you?

Jeff Traeger:

Hey Russell, how are you doing sir?

Russell:

Good. I'm doing well. I'm just following up again. I'm still beating the dead horse here and this is for all the Safeway members, but I just wanted to check on the progress and see how the trustees have come along with the RX card for Safeway workers.

Jeff Traeger:

So it's probably mutated into a little bit more of that. We're actually going to be having a meeting around, I think it's on October 5th that we're meeting with all the trustees from all the plans. And we are going to get some presentations from some groups that actually provide direct deposit, that provide member portals, that provide a variety of other technological improvements that will help to bring not just the Safeway plan, which is the one that you are in, but all of our plans into a more modern kind of way. And then we've got our meetings in November for all of our trusts. So I'm very, very hopeful that... And Russell, I guarantee you, I'll give you a call directly on this when it happens, but I'm very, very confident that by the end of this year or at the latest early in the new year, that we'll be able to report some really good news on that front for all of our members at Safeway.

Russell:

Okay, that sounds awesome. Thanks for taking the time for the question.

Jeff Traeger:

Not a problem, Russell. Always a pleasure to talk to you every three months or so I think. Okay. Yeah. All right. Thanks, Russell. We'll go to Adriana now from Epic Opportunities. Adriana, how are you?

Adriana:

Hi, I'm good. How, Thank you for opening the floor for questions. You pretty much sort of answered my question, but I guess just for clarity sake, I have been with Epic for almost eight years coming up next

month. And you've mentioned the gap between when I started and where I'm at now and the new minimum wage coming in, it's shrinking every year. So I came 11:45 eight years ago, and now I'm at the top of the scale obviously, and I'm just in shock how we are lagging behind with the increases for the senior staff.

Adriana:

And I agree with you. Even in our own building, we've had a huge amount of loss in terms of seniority. We really lost a good chunk, at least half of our senior staff because of the wage issue. And it sounds like the government is not interested in rewarding long term staff, but they're willing to negotiate the minimum wage, which is a little bit sad and it sounds like it falls on the union to negotiate those reason, which it's much more intense and it's a lot harder. So it's a little bit discouraging to hear that, that there is no other leverage that we have.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah. And no, absolutely. The reason why I raised that when Kevin and I were speaking about that particular point is because that's one of the most common things that we've heard from our members is that brand new employees are now making a lot more than they did when they started. They've got a much shorter path to get to that top rate. And senior people are feeling as though they're being left behind in all of this. I think one of the messages that we in our negotiations department are giving to employers is exactly what I said. You want to retain senior people that have the skill and the seniority and the experience. The only way to do that is to make sure that that gap that was appropriate before the minimum wage came in is appropriate after.

Jeff Traeger:

Unfortunately, we wouldn't want government to step in and decide what the top rate of any workplaces. I think that would be dangerous. And the only time that happens is when minimum wage goes up so high that it impacts everybody on the scales. But it is certainly a challenge in our negotiations department. It's one that UFCW's up to and I think the people have seen out there in the world, the value of workers and the value of workers with experience. And employers can't afford to lose anybody in most cases right now, much less the people that really know what they're doing. So thank you so much for your call, Adriana, and certainly the next time your collective agreement is up, we're going to do our best to put some of that gap back in place and we will take one more call. We'll go to Richard from Maple Leaf Brandon. Hello Richard, how are you doing?

Richard:

Doing okay. Yeah, so I got a question I guess for your guest right now. Do you ever have any complaints from workers where employers, wouldn't be fair to point to finger because at least I've had this past experience, a place I used to work, where seemed like what they paid you, it was almost like they expected you to work like you're paid double what you're getting.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, so I think Kevin, the question is, have you ever had complaints from workers at their workload is too heavy? Is that basically it, Richard, that heavy workload?

Richard:

Yeah, or basically, I guess what I'm trying to say is at least my experience in one workplace, I did work at, it almost like let's say back then when \$14 an hour, let's say 30 years ago would've been reasonable or whatever, I was getting paid about a little less than half, but the employer at the time almost expected me to work like I was paid twice as what I was getting. I was just wondering if your guest had any complaints that way.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, for sure. We get a lot of workers who have employers who expect a lot more of them who underpay their staff, who don't recognize them the way that they should and expect them to work twice as hard and would rather not hire more staff to get the work done that needs doing. I think that's a pretty common problem that many workers face and that certainly through the pandemic and other things we see more and more employers are putting more on their existing staff without staffing up and paying people the wages that they deserve.

Jeff Traeger:

All right, well thank you for that Kevin, appreciate it. And before we get back to talk a little bit about politics and elections, I will need a motion to approve the secretary treasurer's report.

speaker 2:

So moved.

Speaker 3:

Second.

Jeff Traeger:

So 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. And if you have a question at all about the Secretary of Treasurer's report or anything else at all, please press star three and we will gladly take your question.

Jeff Traeger:

All right, so switching topics a little bit. We have a Winnipeg civic election set for October the 26th, which includes our mayor, our counselors, and I think school trustees as well, right? So why is it important for labor to be involved in a civic election?

Kevin Rebeck:

Well, I know I'm kind of nerdy, but I'm excited when elections come around. That gives us a chance to decide who gets to make laws that affect us at the civic level, and whether you live in Winnipeg or Brandon or Thompson or I live just outside the city in St. Clements, we have municipal and school board elections all over the province and it's a chance to pick who gets to make the rules. At the civic level, that determines how often your roads are cleared in your community or what policing level or fire support on your parks in your recreational facilities. And there are huge budgets that provide all sorts of services that we all count on every day that are governed by who we elect at the civic level. Similarly, our school trustees have huge budgets that decide how our education system works and functions and educates young people moving forward.

Kevin Rebeck:

We can decide on electing people who believe in strong public services that make sure that they're there for us when we need them. And we can help other unions who are directly employed by these, by electing their bosses. By electing bosses that aren't going to contract out their work or do private public partnerships, which sound nice, but are really just gifts to private sector employers of public money and elected officials that can respect workers. So there's a chance to make sure you impact the services that you're going to receive as a citizen and there's a chance to step up and help other unions have employers that set a positive example.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, I was going to ask you what impact the election has on the average worker, but I think you've already answered that question. So we've all heard about labor endorsed candidates. So if I was going to be running for mayor, and I'm not for the record even though I know the list is very long, but how would I get endorsed by labor? How would I go about that?

Kevin Rebeck:

That's a great question and if we have any members out there who are interested in getting involved in politics, we encourage that. We encourage you to talk to your labor council. Where labor councils exist, they usually pull together affiliates, so people from different unions who have an interest in civic politics. And they construct a bunch of questions that ask where these candidates might stand on supporting public services, on making sure that we're helping people who need help, on where they stand on treating workers as an employer.

Kevin Rebeck:

And, they put them through an interview process and through that process determine who has kind of labor friendly policies, who believes in us working together in providing quality services and will respect workers, and that's the list that they come up with of labor endorse names that we're asking people to support. Because let's face it, most people don't pay a lot of attention to civic politics. So at least your union could do some homework for you, ask the candidates good questions and give you a recommendation. We still encourage people to look into the candidates themselves, but more often than not you'll find their values line up with yours.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Well one of the reasons why I asked that question, and I'm not sure if they're on the line or not, but we do have one UFCW member who's running for mayor and we also have one UFCW former staff member who's running for mayor. So that's kind of interesting. And so while we're on the election topic, October 26th, this year is a civic election, October 3rd, next year, 2023 is the date that the legislation says the election will be. And I say that tongue in cheek because it was not the date we had the election on last time. So any chance you think it will be called early like it was last time? I think it was a year early last time.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, I think you're being kind. Pallister broke the law. There was set election date that when the last provincial election was supposed to happen and he ignored his own legislation that he had voted in favor of set election dates and called it a whole year early. But I guess when you're in power, the laws are what you make them. So this government today could look at calling the election early. I think it's

unlikely to happen, they're not very popular. People are unlikely to reelect this government and calling it early is usually a strategic advantage when you think you can make that happen. But maybe they think it would give them a slight advantage to their opponents and they could catch them off guard. So there's always a chance that could occur. Ideally, the notion of set election dates are to not politicize when you call it when you're in power, but this government has shown they don't care about those kind of principles. So it's very likely that they could decide to shift the date a little bit if they decide to.

Jeff Traeger:

And provincial election, like you said, following up on your comments of the civic election, Provincial election is one where we are deciding on who's going to be setting right down to the labor laws, employment standards, workplace safety and health Act, all that kind of stuff. So obviously it's incredibly important for a provincial election for labor to be involved. The old expression politics doesn't leave us alone, so we can't leave politics alone, for those of you out there that are wondering why.

Jeff Traeger:

But when we talk about the impacts the election will have potentially on an average worker, maybe I can get you to focus on the difference between public sector and private sector. Because in the public sector, the government is the employer, whereas in the private sector they aren't. So just the differences that governments can make between those two.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, absolutely. So UFCW's members are primarily in the private sector. But you're right, provincial legislation affects us in a lot of different ways. Take being a worker out of the equation entirely for a moment, our healthcare system is decided and managed through the public provincial system. So the provincial government gives a lot of direction to healthcare, to education, to social services. They set the budgets for that, which means they're also responsible when they reduce the staffing levels and provide less services or create cuts.

Kevin Rebeck:

And then as a worker, you touched on a few other key components. Employment standards, what the minimum wage will be or whether they'll change it at all this year. Health and safety legislation that affects us in the workplace and can either raise standards or in this government's case, lower standards. The Labor Relations Act that changes how we bargain. In the public sector, they put a law forward that was wage freeze legislation and while that didn't directly impact the private sector, it sure as hell had an impact on private sector employers who said, "If it's good enough for the public sector, it's good enough for you." So as a private sector worker, you're impacted directly by a lot of decisions made by the provincial government as a public sector. In addition to all of that, again, you have a chance to elect in some cases directly your employer.

Jeff Traeger:

So why does labor support the new Democratic Party of Manitoba?

Kevin Rebeck:

Great question, and I think one that we need to talk more often about. The NDP quite frankly adopt a lot of positions that we put forward on investing in public services, on not contracting out work, but keeping it with the public sector, with ensuring that we provide services that people count on and need

and investing in good public policy that strengthens supports for working families. As opposed to the conservative government, the conservative party who believe in a smaller government, believe there should be very few services, but what provided by government and often cut and reduce public sector, cut and reduce healthcare services so that they could try to further explore privatization. They try to put more and more on the private sector, often at greater and greater costs to individuals.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. Well while we're here, we should do a plug for the NDP convention. It's October 14th to 16th. Where is it, convention center?

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, it's in the Winnipeg Convention Center this year. There's an annual convention of the NDP. I'm an NDP member. I encourage people to be politically involved. You should vote for sure. You should vote for a party that echoes your values. I've done my homework. I encourage you to do yours. I think as a trade unionist you'll see that a lot of your values will align with the NDP. A lot of the debates we have in our union often turn into resolutions that we deal with at our AGMs or at our conventions, and we take those resolutions to the NDP conventions and they're typically passed very strongly by not only union members who are there as members, but other people who are friends of the labor movement. So I encourage people to get involved. If you aren't yet a member, it's only \$10 a year to become a member to the NDP, and I have a membership book, so feel free to contact the MFL. I'd be glad to sign you up.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you for that blatant pitch. Appreciate it. It's time for one more short break. As I see the vote to approve, the Secretary Treasurer's report has been passed. So it's now time to make a motion to approve the president's report, which is the final document we have to approve at tonight's meeting.

speaker 2:

So moved.

Speaker 3:

I second.

Jeff Traeger:

All right. It has been moved and seconded here in studio. 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 at all, please press star three and we'll gladly take your question. And we do have time to take a couple more questions right now. So we're going to go to Akin Yell from Garda. I'm sorry if I didn't pronounce your name properly Akin, but go ahead.

Akan Yell:

Hey. Hello everybody. It's Akin Yell, you are correct, from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Actually, my question, the sister, she asked question to you before, I think, it complete my question. And I just want to give you just little question. Yeah, because I work at the [inaudible 00:41:58] Union at McGregor, not [inaudible 00:42:03] and it's very capitalist. I work there almost for three years now. I seen, I go there, everything's settle. There are no problems. No problem at all. But my question is, we have a problem with working

alone. I have been working there for three years now and no one checks on me. So I'm wondering what should I do?

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, well actually I'm going to let Kevin, you comfortable fielding that question?

Kevin Rebeck:

Sure.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, go ahead.

Kevin Rebeck:

Sure. So there is work alone legislation that needs to be adhered to in the Health and Safety Act. And there's some ability to make sure that there're some checks and balances. That doesn't necessarily mean they're going to assign another worker to work full time with you, but there should be some way that the employer or a coworker is having some contact and check in and that should be established. Your staff rep or your health and safety expert from UFCW should be able to help raise this with the employer to make sure that that's addressed. We take health and safety issues very seriously in the labor movement and making sure that there is some kind of touchstone process for people who are working alone is an important piece, so thanks for raising it.

Jeff Traeger:

So Akin, your rep is Sandy Fortier and Ron is going to make sure that Sandy reaches out to you to get the particulars about the working alone situation. And then we can follow the process that Kevin just outlined. So thank you for calling. Also, with security from Impact, we now have Frank, Go ahead, Frank.

Frank:

Hi. I had a question regarding, I was going to talk with Sandy probably going to anyways, but regarding things that are written as CBAs. I know it's ever changing year to year, but things have been in for a long time like licensing and paying for clothing and things of this nature. I mean, Autopac doesn't have to keep coming to chase you down to get, you know what I mean? For monies and the rest of it for things like that. Why is that? And I have no problem with it, but I mean going after it with the human resources director, who by the way is the wife of the president of the company, conflict of interest. Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad you left. I mean, why is it that things that are written in there? I mean, and for years, why did we have to go keep chasing it? Shouldn't it be an automatic response, automated?

Jeff Traeger:

Well, I think we're going to actually need to take this offline and investigate this a little bit. So I might just get Ron to give you a call. Frank, we've got your phone number and name and the fact that you work at Impact Security up on the screen here. So Ron, can you get to that one tomorrow? What's a good time to call you, Frank?

Frank:

Doesn't really matter. I started the shift, I'm working right now actually, the 4:00 to 11:00, so doesn't really matter, so around noon.

Jeff Traeger:

In the afternoon, early afternoon?

Frank:

Exactly. That's fine.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, perfect. Thanks so much, Frank. Much appreciated.

Frank:

Okay.

Jeff Traeger:

So we'll get back to the last section of our interview. I really just wanted to talk a little bit about the Manitoba Federation of Labor. So a lot of people have heard that title, they've heard you speak here before and in the media, but what exactly does the MFL do and what does an average day for the president of the MFL look like?

Kevin Rebeck:

Well, it's a two part question, one's easier to answer than the other that's for sure. The Federation of Labor is a central labor body. So it's a coordinating body for the unions in Manitoba to come together to create a network to learn from one another and then also to take the lead on often legislative calls for action. Unions do a terrific job bargaining good collective agreements that affect their workers directly and then together through the MFL, we often then say, "Well this would be great if we could have it in legislation as well."

Kevin Rebeck:

So we might launch campaigns that fight for minimum wage or fight for paid domestic violence leave that we achieved or make a difference on things. We have a campaign for paid sick days. We have campaigns on a variety of fronts. We're also a bit of a one stop shop for anyone who wants to talk to labor. Sometimes government says we're going to create a task force to deal with healthcare. And we have two spots for labor. Well there're several unions that have members in that, so through the Fed we would play a coordinating role to help identify two people to fill those roles, but to make sure that no one was left out.

Kevin Rebeck:

What a typical day looks like for the Federation of Labor president? I wish there was such a thing, but my days are filled with a lot of interesting things that come up. Sometimes there're groups that want to be organized, so they contact the Federation of Labor and we work with affiliates to put them in touch with folks who act on that. Sometimes there're questions about employment standards or Labor Relation Act. I do some work on recruiting candidates to run for the NDP executive slate or people who are interested in running for politics and they like to talk about how would I get a labor endorsement.

Kevin Rebeck:

We work on campaigns or we might have requests from government for names for a committee. I send letters to government on a variety of issues. Today I sent one to the Prime Minister on recognizing undocumented workers, and I sent one to the provincial government about mental health issues. So we have a number of areas that we do follow up work, dealing with health and safety, employment standards, Labor Relation Act, and giving advice to unions on their own constitutions or what area they might look at rewriting. So the day really changes and anything is possible when people want to call the Fed and look for a bit of help, we try and give it.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, well thank you for that. I guess a good interesting job is one where there isn't an average day, that they're all different. Now on the health and safety front, you've got a conference coming up the MFL, in February, right? A health and safety conference.

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah. A health and safety conference in February in Winnipeg this year, or next year, I guess in February. It's a chance for people to get together. It's really designed from a worker perspective. So I know people get health and safety training from a variety of places. This is a chance to get together with other union activists and have facilitators that have real life experience who are reps in the labor movement, who can give concrete advice on things they've done and that has worked to make sure that health and safety is respected in the workplace. There's a variety of workshops you can visit our website to take a look and see what they are. And I encourage people to do so. It's a great opportunity to learn not only from the facilitators but from other activists who are trying to make a difference in their workplace.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, and it's interesting this year because it's the year that we were doing the review of the Workplace Safety and Health Act. And I do note when I was creeping your website a little earlier that you gave a D to the Stefanson government for their action on health and safety. Why is that?

Kevin Rebeck:

So the Pallister government had earned a, I think a C minus, or a D plus in previous years and this government has continued to weaken health and safety legislation. They changed a hearing loss standard to an outdated one that was worse than what it is now. They also introduced a new law that says that the health and safety director who works for government, who's supposed to work for all of us, if they get a complaint from a worker, they can decide if it's investigated or not or dismiss it out of hand. If they feel you've complained more than once, they can dismiss it. They say they think that's frivolous rather than looking into things.

Kevin Rebeck:

We think that's terrible. Health and safety issues are serious issues. And just because you made a complaint once that didn't maybe get found in your favor, that shouldn't dismiss future complaints that you might raise. They did introduce some legislation that increased the maximum rate of penalty that they could fine, but that was a lot of fluff work and good for media because they've never applied the maximum rate before they made that increase and they still haven't applied it. So we reduced their grade even worse and think there's a lot of work to be done to improve health and safety in the workplace.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay, thank you for that. We're running a bit tight on time, so I'm just going to get you, I know were former in another life. You were a former director of labor director for United Way Winnipeg. I know the campaign is currently underway now, and I know firsthand the good work that United Way does in our community. But how can someone get involved if they're interested in helping?

Kevin Rebeck:

Yeah, there's many United Way campaigns that happen in a variety of workplaces. Labor cares about the United Way campaigns because United Way actually works with Labor. We have people who serve on the board and on cabinets and in different capacity and volunteer roles. And United Way adopts policies like not getting involved when there's a workplace disruption, if there's a strike or a lockout, they'll step back and they don't take aside and get out of the way. They buy union, they have unionized staff, they do have a lot of good things. And all of their work is centered around capacity building to empower other people to be able to learn skills and develop themselves to become more independent. So when a campaign happens in your workplace, there's always people looking for volunteers to get involved. So if you're willing to do that, that'd be great. And United Way itself has lots of opportunities for speakers to come out and talk about some of the work their agencies do in the community.

Jeff Traeger:

Excellent. Well thank you. Thank you so much for joining us tonight, Kevin, really appreciate it. Great to get your insight on what's out there that's impacting workers these days and what your average day doesn't look like and stuff like that. So thank you so much for coming and being with us. I guess I owe you one now.

Kevin Rebeck:

Thanks. It's a pleasure. And I want to thank you UFCW members. You lend Jeff to our federation. He also serves as the treasurer there, which is the only other elected at large office of our federation and does a tremendous job and gives us a lot of his time and energy that we deeply appreciate. Thank you.

Jeff Traeger:

Thank you. Thank you. All right, well it looks like we have time maybe for one or two more questions, so let's start with Colleen from Red River Co-op. Go ahead, Colleen. I think it's Southdale, right?

Colleen:

Yes. I was just wondering with the health and welfare benefits plan one, when you send in your prescriptions and that, what would be an acceptable estimated time of receiving your check back?

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, there's been a delay, has there? I'm hearing that in your voice right now and if there has been a delay, this is one of the-

Colleen:

Well, you know what, we're going... They said they were mailing it out on Wednesday when I phoned them last Tuesday. We're coming up on week four since I've sent it in.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, that's too long.

Colleen:

Yeah, but-

Jeff Traeger:

There's no question Colleen [inaudible 00:53:41]-

Colleen:

... I'm finding this a lot. I'm lucky if I get it back minimum three weeks.

Jeff Traeger:

Well, you see this is one the things that Russell was talking-

Colleen:

And this is like... Oh sorry. Go ahead.

Jeff Traeger:

... one of the things that Russell was talking about. Russell was one of the first callers that came on tonight, I think he was first caller. And what he was talking about was the lack of modernization in the plan. If that plan, and you're in the same plan as Russell because Red River Co-op inherited that when they purchased-

Colleen:

Yep. We're with the Safeway. Yep.

Jeff Traeger:

... the stores. Then if you had direct deposit, then you wouldn't be waiting for a check to come in the mail and you would've been able not to mail in your claim, but you would've been able to do it directly on a portal online, which is going to cut down a lot of that time. So Ron's got your name and number down and we're going to follow up with PBAS to see what the delay is. He may contact you from work-

Colleen:

Yeah, I'm just wondering, do they only do the claims once a month or what's the deal?

Jeff Traeger:

Oh no. No, no.

Colleen:

Or is it being-

Jeff Traeger:

No, if you talk to the people at PBAS, they're supposed to be turning around those claims weekly. So the longest you should wait, if your claim came in late in the week would be late the following week or maybe over to the week after that. So 10 days or less I would say would be...

Colleen:

Yeah, because-

Jeff Traeger:

... Their target's probably more like seven. But 10 days or less is likely.

Colleen:

... Yeah, because I mailed this in at the end of August and I live in the city. It would've been faster for me to drive down there-

Jeff Traeger:

Actually [inaudible 00:55:20].

Colleen:

... drop it off and pick it up.

Jeff Traeger:

Yeah, no kidding. All right, well thank you for your call Colleen-

Colleen:

And cheaper too, because it wouldn't cost you guys postage. But I'm hoping it's going to be in the mail tomorrow.

Jeff Traeger:

... I'm hoping. Believe me, I'm hoping for the exact same thing too. So we will make sure we follow up to see what's the delay there. Time for one more call. We'll go to Michelle from Lorette Marketplace. Go ahead, Michelle.

Michelle:

Hi. Hello.

Jeff Traeger:

Hi there. How you doing? Hello.

Michelle:

Good. How are you?

Jeff Traeger:

I'm doing well, thank you.

Michelle:

It just came to my attention that anybody who's working overtime doesn't get paid for it.

Jeff Traeger:

At Lorette Marketplace?

Michelle:

Right.

Jeff Traeger:

Oh, okay. So-

Michelle:

Yeah, because sometimes it gets busy-

Jeff Traeger:

... you might have to explain that to us a little bit.

Michelle:

... Well, sometimes it gets busy, and the cleanup is most important at the end of the night to make sure that everything is okay for the people coming in the next morning. And sometimes, like I say, we close at 9:00, sometimes I don't get out of there till 20 after or 9:30. And I was told that I don't get any extra for that. So I decided I guess that you know what, then the job suffers because of it.

Jeff Traeger:

Have you talked to your full-time union representative about this?

Michelle:

No, I haven't. I thought it was common knowledge and I was just wondering why it hadn't been addressed, I don't know.

Jeff Traeger:

Okay. Well I think step one is for you to have a discussion with Kim, I believe is your rep. So we'll make sure that Kim reaches out to you tomorrow-

Michelle:

Oh good.

Jeff Traeger:

... to try to get more information and then we'll start talking to your employer about this. But definitely sounds like something's amok that we need to investigate. And we are one minute away I think from being out of time. So a good timing on here.

Jeff Traeger:

UFCW 832
9/20/22

Just a reminder, there were a couple of you that were still waiting for your question to be answered. We will have your full-time union representative contact you soon to answer your question. I do want to thank all of you for joining us on our September Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting. We will be conducting our next GMM and our file meeting of 2022 on Tuesday, October the 11th. So just three weeks from now by telephone town hall. And because it's for an election, we will be doing two separate times, one at 10:00 AM and one at 7:00 PM. So stay safe everyone, and thank you for everything you do. We are now adjourned.