

# National Association of Federal Retirees / Langley Seniors in Action

## All Candidates Meeting

Langley Arts Council  
Wednesday October 9, 2024

### Introduction of Candidates and Bios (2 Minutes)

- Thank you to the National Association of Federal Retirees for hosting this event and for all the good work you do.
- For those of you who don't know me, my name is Karen Long, and I am running as an Independent.
- As an Independent and a first-time political candidate, I don't have access to party researchers, data, or policies and platform ideas, so I like to do a deep dive into the issues and concerns of my community myself, so you may see me refer to my notes a fair bit tonight.
- During my 25 years as a community leader in Langley and Aldergrove I have held positions in many organizations – Director, Secretary, Treasurer, Executive Director.
- I am Past President of Aldergrove Rotary, the Aldergrove Fair, and the BC Farm Museum.
- I've been involved with the Aldergrove Business Association for many years.
- I founded the Langley Volunteer Bureau in 2016, which today places nearly 10,000 volunteers annually.
- Seniors' issues are something that has been a particular focus for me as a community leader for decades.
- Just prior to stepping back to run in the election, I was a volunteer and staffer with Langley Meals on Wheels, working as the Food Security Coordinator working to ensure seniors and the most vulnerable in our community have access to good quality, nutritional food.
- As your Independent MLA, I will work tirelessly to consult widely and advocate for common-sense solutions, ones that won't have to toe party lines.
- These issues include everything from health care to housing to food security to general affordability.

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- As a society we have a greying population and we must begin to plan better, so that our elders can age with dignity and grace.
- Seniors right now are really struggling.
- I look forward to the conversation this evening, and discussing what sorts of solutions there are to the challenges we're facing.

## Hospice and Long Term Care – Shannon Todd-Booth/Jennifer Podskali – Langley Hospice Society

*(1.5 minutes)*

Seniors in Langley need timely access to health care services, long term care, and hospice and palliative care when and how it is needed.

While our community has been fortunate to see the new Doug and Fran MacDonald Langley Hospice Residence open in 2022, with 15 beds currently funded and consistently hosting a waitlist - only 10 of those beds are funded permanently after March of 2025.

The province's recent announcement of an additional 300 Long-Term Care beds is also an excellent start. However, Fraser Health has a shortage of 8,000 beds, and many more are needed in Langley.

**Question: What are your government's plans to ensure Langley's growing seniors' population have a place to call home when they are no longer able to live independently; and that they have access to quality hospice and palliative care when they need it most?**

- Most of us probably saw the story in the news the past few days about the 95 year old gentleman in Surrey who was evicted from his independent living home after his life savings ran out and he could no longer afford the rent [<https://globalnews.ca/news/10798239/95-year-old-living-bc-er-care-home-eviction/>].
- He's currently living in the emergency department at Peace Arch Hospital.
- This is unacceptable.
- I fully support the NDP's recent commitment to 300 new long-term care beds in Langley.
- It's a start, but the first patient in these beds is targeted for 6 years from now in 2030.
- It's not nearly enough, a shortage of 8,000 beds – in Fraser Health alone – is staggering.

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- As an Independent MLA I will advocate for additional long-term beds to address the ever-growing waitlists, which will free up acute care beds in our hospitals.
- We're fortunate in Langley that we have maybe the best hospice team in the province, with Fraser Health working together with the Langley Hospice Society and their dedicated and caring volunteers who provide wrap-around care to clients and their families.
- We are grateful for the 15 new beds in the Doug and Fran McDonald Langley Hospice.
- I will work hard to advocate for those 15 beds to be permanently funded by Fraser Health.

## Long Term Care Standards – Ian Spence – Federal Retirees

*(1.5 minutes)*

My name is Ian Spence. I am with the National Association of Federal Retirees, Fraser Valley West.

After catastrophic failures in long-term care facilities across the country during the pandemic, I do not think Canadians are confident that enough has been done to prevent a repeat. In January 2023, the Standards Council of Canada and the Canadian Standards Association published standards that provide guidance for delivering long-term care services that are safe, reliable and centred on residents' needs. These standards are not mandatory, compliance with the standards is not linked to federal funding, and in its consultations on a new Safe Long Term Care Act, the federal government is clear that it recognizes provincial jurisdiction and will not attempt to impose mandatory standards on the provinces.

**Question: If your party forms government, how will you work with the federal government and the national standards to ensure that long term care facilities deliver high quality care?**

- The COVID pandemic really did expose some of the weaknesses in Canada's long-term care system. We have a health care crisis in BC generally right now.
- 35 surgeons and anesthesiologists at Langley Memorial Hospital recently sent a letter to the Ministry of Health, raising concerns over the "unparalleled chronic neglect of surgical infrastructure" and zero capital improvements in LMH surgery since the ORs opened 35 years ago.
- Physicians and nurses in the Fraser Valley also recently wrote an open letter expressing concern over the potential for budget cuts and shifts toward privatization under John Rustad and the BC Conservatives.

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- Let's think about that for a moment: the frontline workers in our health care system are saying that the BC NDP is failing our health care system, and that the BC Conservatives can't be trusted.
- I know many BC Conservatives have some interesting views on the pandemic, and the candidate here in Langley-Abbotsford in particular expressed doubt about the effectiveness of vaccines or masks to prevent COVID-19.
- But we all know how tragic the consequences were for LTC residents, who accounted for about 80% of all reported COVID-19 deaths in Canada.
- I think we need to take a much more comprehensive and longer-term view when planning for the types of services and programs we want to have in place in Canada for our rapidly greying population.
- As an Independent candidate, I support these organizations' recommendations for the provincial government to fund a broadly representative Long-term Care Advisory Forum.
- We need to develop a comprehensive action plan to reform the long-term care system in British Columbia to address long-standing systemic issues, weaknesses, and urgent needs.
- I would also like to see the Federal government set nation-wide standards for long-term care.
- In Canada we're moving towards \$10/day child care, funded jointly by provincial and federal governments; maybe we need to look at a similar model when it comes to how we fund long term care.

## Seniors Centres and Programs – Loretta Solomon – Langley Seniors Resources Society

*(1.5 minutes)*

My name is Loretta Solomon, and I am president of the Board of Directors of the Langley Seniors Resources Centre Society.

My question is about securing ongoing, reliable funding for centres like ours. The Seniors Resources Centre plays a vital role in Langley, providing health promotion programs, social services, and recreational activities that enhance the health and well-being of older adults, helping them to remain healthy and to 'age in place' in their homes and to continue to contribute to our community. But in my experience on the board, we spend most of our time trying to secure funding, rather than focusing on developing programs and long-term strategies.

**Question: How will your party work with Seniors Centres in Langley and across the province to ensure adequate, sustainable, reliable funding?**

- Organizations like LSRC – non-profits in general – do an incredible job of supporting many areas of need in our community, and doing a lot of the work that government can't afford to, or should not, do.
- Government is also really slow; non-profits are usually able to respond much more rapidly to changing needs in the community.
- In my decades of volunteering and community service with many non-profits here in Langley I have a lot of experience in applying for funding grants.
- I've probably filled in 100 grants over the last 25 years.
- Having to meet application deadlines, provide mid-term and final reports, providing program data, and evaluation requirements takes up a lot of time.
- Many organizations are not fortunate enough to have someone dedicated to fundraising, and is usually an added responsibility put upon a board member, staff person, or volunteer.
- Stable and sufficient funding is needed to help seniors' centres remain viable and able to support older adults into the future.
- I would strongly support increasing the amount of BC Gaming Funding available for Community Gaming Grants.
- The 2024 Community Gaming Grant funding available is \$140 million – this is a small increase of only \$5 million dollars compared to the 2017 distribution of nearly \$135 million.
- I would support reviewing the current grant process to allow funding agreements for up to 3 years.
- This would produce efficiencies and help provide organizations with greater stability.
- I would also support reviewing contracted organizations that receive and manage provincial funding, and how some of this funding could be allocated to multi-year funding.

**Question 4 – Housing / SAFER – Kate Ludlum – Langley Seniors Resources Centre**

*(1.5 minutes)*

My name is Kate Ludlum, and I am executive director of the Langley Seniors Resources Centre.

Seniors who are renters are often only one or two pension cheques away from being homeless. It's impossible for the private sector to build accommodation for low-income households – often older women living alone – with truly affordable rents without significant public investment. The recent increases in the SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) rent ceilings to \$931 remain far below the market rents of \$1558 in October 2023 for a one-bedroom apartment in British Columbia. The Seniors Advocate recommends redesigning the SAFER Program "to ensure seniors pay 30% or less of their income for rent and that the rent ceilings are indexed to inflation and adjusted to reflect the current reality of the rental market."

**Question: What steps will you and your party take to improve housing affordability including improvements to the BC SAFER Grant, to ensure no senior ends up homeless due to the cost or unavailability of appropriate housing?**

- About 45% of seniors make less than the minimum wage, which the BC government regularly increases to inflation.
- Current SAFER subsidies are clearly inadequate to make housing affordable for seniors.
- As an Independent MLA I would strongly advocate for redesigning the SAFER program to ensure low-income seniors pay 30% or less of their income for rent.
- We also need to make sure rent ceilings are indexed to inflation, and adjusted to reflect what's going on in the rental market.

## Food Security – Shannon Woykin – Langley Meals on Wheels

*(1.5 minutes)*

Langley Meals on Wheels not only provides nutritious, affordable meals to vulnerable populations but our volunteers also plays a crucial role in addressing social isolation by offering wellness checks and social connections. As food costs rise and the demand for volunteer-based wellness services increases, our organization faces significant challenges in sustaining these programs.

According to Statistics Canada, the cost of food increased by 6.5% in 2023, putting further strain on organizations like ours, which already operate on tight budgets to keep meal prices affordable. like Langley Meals on Wheels.

**Questions: What steps will you and your party take to ensure that non-profit organizations like Langley Meals on Wheels, can continue to meet growing community needs while keeping costs affordable?**

**Will you advocate for increased public investment in programs that address not only food security but also the social well-being of vulnerable populations?**

- Langley Meals on Wheels is obviously near and dear to my heart, having been a volunteer and food security coordinator there for several years.
- Food security is all about having access to safe, culturally appropriate, and nutritious foods, that meet individual dietary needs and food preferences.
- In my years of experience addressing food security in my community, we are really fortunate that many different not-for-profits and service organizations work together really well to share excess food and support each other's programs.
- The past few governments in BC – both the left and the right, along with the COVID-19 pandemic – have created a real crisis of affordability in BC.
- Unfortunately many low-income seniors and other vulnerable members of our community have to choose between paying their rent, their utility bills, or prescriptions and medical equipment and food is sometimes last on their list.
- There are hidden additional costs to this – a lack of nutritional food is detrimental to seniors' physical and mental health and general well-being.
- This eventually shows up as increased costs to our medical system and an earlier requirement for long term care, so there is a very strong economic argument for public investment in food security programs.
- As an Independent MLA I would absolutely advocate with all levels of government to support programs that reduce food insecurity.
- One innovative program that I am involved with here in Langley is the creation of a Food Hub.
- Donations from local grocery stores and farmers would be stored in a central location that is accessible for sharing with local community groups such as food banks, schools, and meal programs to help these organizations stretch their dollars.
- Once established this could be a model that we could look at putting in place in communities across BC.

Transportation / HandyDART – Ron Bergen – Translink User Advisory Committee

*(1.5 minutes)*

Mobility is essential to maintaining a person's independence. In an age friendly community, people would have reliable, convenient, earth-friendly transportation options. People who are unable to use regular transit, many of whom are seniors – rely on HandyDART to get to medical appointments, attend Adult Day Care programs and patronize local businesses.

At present, HandyDART services are contracted by Translink to a for-profit company in France.

**Question: Can we count on your support to end contracting out for HandyDART?**

- Over the course of this campaign I have spoken to several seniors and people with intellectual and other disabilities who have said that when they book a HandyDART, the current Translink contractor often sends a taxi instead.
- Taxi drivers are not trained in loading and off-loading and they do not provide the same level of service as HandyDART drivers – they also do not necessarily have the training to assist older adults with emergency medical and safety needs.
- Being able to get out in the community for recreation and to participate in programs like Adult Daycare, for meals and dietary needs, and health care is really important to seniors' overall health as well as their mental health.
- A lack of reliable transportation results in increased isolation.
- As an Independent MLA I would strongly support HandyDart being brought under BC Transit, so that we have a provincial standard to ensure the same level of service across BC, and provide a more reliable service for seniors and people with mobility challenges.

**Needs of Newcomer Seniors – Ana Marie Panczel – Langley Community Social Services**

*(1.5 minutes)*

A lot of immigrant seniors experience social isolation due to factors such as language barriers, family commitments, or mobility challenges. This results in higher risks for health problems or unmet newcomer settlement and integration needs.

**Question: What initiatives are on your platform to make services more accessible for this vulnerable population?**

- In my different roles as a community leader and volunteer organizer I often have the opportunity to engage with newcomers.



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- Getting involved as a volunteer can be a great way for immigrants to develop social connections, practice English, make acquaintances and grow friendships, and experience the joy of supporting their new community.
- As an Independent MLA I would like to see programs like the Langley Immigration Partnership have access to a more stable funding model like we talked about earlier.
- It's the organizations that are on the ground that know what the needs are and can best direct dollars – for example, language programs like LINC's English Language School, making sure newcomers know how to access information and services available to them.
- As MLA I will advocate with all levels of government for better support for immigrant seniors in our community.

## Affordability for Seniors and Seniors Supplement – Leslie Gaudette – Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of BC

*(1.5 minutes)*

BC seniors are falling behind. Approximately 45% of seniors make less than the minimum wage, which the BC government regularly increases to address inflation. Similarly, increases tied to inflation are needed to the BC Seniors Supplement to prevent seniors from falling further and further behind. We acknowledge the BC government increased the Supplement from \$49.30 to 99.30 per month in 2021, however BC still has one of the lowest rates for a senior's supplement in Canada. Approximately 250,000 seniors across the Province and around 10,000 in the Langley area live on incomes of less than \$23,000 per year.

### **Question: What is your party's plan for poverty reduction in general and for getting low-income seniors over the poverty line?**

- The BC Seniors Supplement monthly top up remains the fourth lowest in Canada.
- Low-income seniors are experiencing hardships due to rising costs of living in BC, and more financial supports are urgently needed.
- As I mentioned earlier, successive governments in BC have created an affordability crisis that is really hitting people hard.
- My concern is that if a BC Conservative government is elected it may bring in significant cuts in social supports – they are a little too far right on many issues, and that's one reason why I'm running as a centre-right Independent.

- As an Independent MLA I will advocate for the BC Seniors Supplement to be increased and indexed to inflation, the same as other senior supports like CPP, OAS and GIS.

## Social Housing – Paul Crump – Langley Seniors in Action

*(1 minute)*

Currently, many levels of government seem to be counting on the "for-profit" housing development industry to provide much-needed affordable housing.

Affordable housing can be provided and run by government agencies, co-ops, not-for-profit agencies or groups, faith-based organizations, or the private sector, provided guarantees are in place to ensure it remains as affordable housing in perpetuity.

**Question: Will you and your party commit to ensure the rapid construction of safe, appropriate and affordable (based on no more than 30% of gross annual income) not-for-profit housing?**

- The waitlist for seniors' subsidized housing has increased by 50% in the last 5 years and only 8% of applicants on the wait list were placed in a unit last year.
- It takes years to build any kind of housing – again, we need our governments, both Provincial and Federal, to start thinking more long-term about these issues.
- As an Independent MLA, I will advocate for all levels of government to work towards building more seniors' affordable housing more quickly.
- We need to get creative in finding solutions.
- As an Independent MLA I would support policies that provide social housing projects on Provincial land leased at a minimal cost to not-for-profit organizations.
- One thing we might be able to look at would be standardized designs specifically for seniors' housing complexes, similar to what was recently announced by the BC government for multi-unit homes.
- We need to ensure that planning and design for ALL new housing considers flexibility for age-in-place solutions.

## Home Support – Kate Ludlum

*(1 minute)*

Fraser Health Authorities through the Community Health Works program provide publicly-subsidized home support services to seniors who need help with tasks such as bathing and dressing, lifts and transfer, toileting and medication management. There is a daily rate charge, which is waived if the client receives the Guaranteed Income Supplement of GIS. For those who do not receive GIS, the daily rate charge can be a significant burden. A senior with an annual pension income of \$30,000 will pay \$9,000 a year for one hour of daily home support. Other provinces do not charge for home support services. The Seniors Advocate recommends eliminating the daily rate charge for home support. (Ageing Matters, p. 26)

**Question: Will your party commit to eliminating the daily charge for the home support services provided by Fraser Health Authority?**

- Most seniors prefer to stay at home for as long as they can before they are admitted into long-term care facilities.
- Home support provides these seniors assistance with the help they need to live independently in their homes as long as possible – personal hygiene, medication management, etc.
- The cost to government and the public for covering home support is far less than it would be than if these seniors were all receiving full-time care in a seniors' facility.
- The daily rate charge for home support represents a financial burden for some low-income seniors.
- There is no good reason that BC should be one of the only provinces in Canada to charge for home support services.
- As an Independent MLA I will advocate to eliminate the daily rate charge for home support.

**Unpaid Caregivers – Loretta Solomon – Langley Seniors Resources Society**

*(1 minute)*

This question is about improving support for unpaid caregivers. Many are in distress, exhausted by the demands of work, caring for their own families and caring for their aging parents. Isobel Mackenzie reported, "Overall, 34% of family caregivers in B.C. are in distress and this rises to 57% when looking at clients who are receiving less than an hour per day of home support."

As the current Seniors Advocate noted, "The 'labour of love' provided for seniors by family caregivers is generally unseen and unpaid, and often undertaken by women, for women. As a result, this work can be unnoticed and not receive the recognition it deserves." Over 1.3

million people in British Columbia are unpaid caregivers, providing 80% of care in the community for family and friends (Family Caregivers of BC).

Both the BC Caregiver tax credit (\$5505 in 2024) and the Canada Caregiver Tax Credit are non-refundable.

**Question: How will you and your party improve supports for caregivers?**

- Many of us here are at an age where our parents are elderly – that, or we’re all getting there ourselves!
- Caregivers are exhausted due to cuts in services. I’ve seen statistics that suggest that on average family caregivers provide over 1,300 caregiver hours per year per client.
- The BC Ministry of Health policy is clear that home support services are to 'supplement' and not replace the care provided by family caregivers.
- There are programs available that provide family caregivers with relief by providing in-home respite care, Adult Day Programs at local centres, and facility-based respite for longer periods ranging from a few nights to a few days.
- As an Independent MLA I would advocate for policies and funding that would increase respite care for caregivers.
- We should look at whether the BC and Canada Caregiver Tax Credits should be refundable or partially refundable.
- I’d also like to see there be a single access point where caregivers can obtain support.

A “Seniors’ strategy” – Ian Spence – Federal Retirees

*(1 minute)*

My question is about implementing a strategy to help seniors and their families to navigate the system".

My organization has long been calling for a seniors' strategy at the national level, and in a recent report, the BC Seniors Advocate notes that supports and services for seniors in this province are "...fragmented and uncoordinated across several government ministries, health authorities and service providers" and he calls for a cross-ministry seniors' plan. He also notes that once they are in the system, clients require on-going assistance, like having a case manager, to help them coordinate access to services as their needs change with age.

**Question: What ideas do you and your party have to improve the co-ordination and access to services for seniors and make it easier 'to navigate the system'?**

- We need a national seniors' strategy, 1000 per cent.
- Older Canadians now represent our fastest growing demographic – in just 10 years, one in four Canadians will be over 65 years of age.
- National seniors' organizations have been calling for a national strategy since about 2015 and it has yet to happen.
- But if the Federal government isn't going to take this on BC needs to get going on creating a comprehensive strategy for our greying population.
- The senior population continues to grow and there is more demand for government services.
- Many of the issues we've been talking about tonight are made worse by the fact that seniors' programs are disjointed and difficult to navigate.
- All levels of government must work together to develop a comprehensive plan prioritizing the needs of seniors to help ensure they get the support they need.
- At the moment BC has a Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors' Services and Long-Term Care.
- As MLA I would advocate for the establishment of a ministerial-level position for seniors' issues to ensure that government has seniors front of mind in all decision-making.

## Ageism – Leslie Gaudette

*(1 minute)*

Discrimination based on age (ageism) can seriously impact seniors who often feel invisible, ignored and disrespected. Ageism can negatively affect the financial well-being of seniors, the ability of seniors to access appropriate health care and the ability of seniors to live with dignity. The adverse effects of ageism can be particularly serious for low-income seniors.

The United Nations is currently working to establish a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons and recommendations to address this issue have recently been adopted by the UN General Assembly for consideration by the Human Rights Council.

**Question: Will you and your party commit to supporting the efforts of seniors in BC who are working with allied groups to combat ageism and support the efforts at the United Nations to establish a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons?**

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- Leslie, we are so grateful for your leadership and advocacy for seniors from Langley to the UN!
- Congratulations on the adoption of the resolution acknowledging the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing's completion of its mandate with the formulation of recommendations including establishing an international, legally binding instrument safeguarding the human rights of older persons.
- We all recognize that we are at a tipping point when it comes to the greying of Canada's population.
- As an independent MLA I wholeheartedly support the efforts of seniors in BC who are working with allied groups to combat ageism.
- As someone who is just entering into their senior years – even if I have the energy of an 18 year old! – I absolutely support the efforts of the United Nations to establish a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons!

### Concluding remarks (1 minute)

- Thank you again to the organizers for hosting this event.
- Seniors' issues are something that I have been passionate about for many years in my various roles as a community leader.
- We have to start thinking longer-term about seniors' care in this province and in this country so that we can all age as healthily as possible and with dignity and grace.
- I have lived in and been involved in this community for over 25 years. I know the issues and concerns. I have the connections, work ethic, and leadership experience to get things done.
- We're at a historic time in BC politics, with upwards of 17 very strong centre-right candidates running as Independents across BC.
- The BC NDP has provided slow, ineffective solutions, while the BC Conservatives push outdated and extreme policies.
- As your Independent MLA, I will support centre-right, free-enterprise, fiscally conservative policies.
- A team of elected Independent MLAs may hold the balance of power, forcing whoever forms government to work together for moderate centrist solutions.
- I want Langley-Abbotsford to have a seat at that table.

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- If I am elected as your Independent MLA, I will work to consult widely and advocate for common-sense solutions, ones that won't have to toe party lines.
- On October 19, I ask you to vote Karen Long, your Independent candidate for MLA in Langley-Abbotsford.