

UFCW Canada Local 1006A General Membership Meeting
April 16, 2020
Telephone Town Hall Event Transcript

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Hi everyone. My name is Glacier Effs-Samuel, Recorder of the union. I want to welcome everyone to our second Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting for 2020. We're meeting under difficult circumstances with the COVID pandemic upon us. This telephone town hall is about being together with each other and connecting with our members of 1006A. We've dialed thousands of members across the province, so we'll take some time to connect, so I want to thank you for your patience. Tonight, President Wayne Hanley will be discussing the impact COVID-19 has had on our members, workplaces and communities, and we'll share some union news. We'll talk about the advocacy your union is taking to keep our members safe on the front lines and discuss federal benefits available to help families impacted by illness, closures, and layoffs. Stay with us for the entire call and you'll have a chance to win a tablet computer.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

We'll have more details on that later on in the call today. We'll be talking about the work your union is doing to ensure you're properly compensated and protected at work, how to keep yourself safe at work and at home, and what to do if you or a family member is impacted by COVID-19. Your union representatives across the province have been working tirelessly since this crisis has begun. We've compiled the 'frequently asked questions' members have raised with us and we will be discussing them along with questions you may have tonight. Telephone operators are standing by to take any questions and pass them on to us. To ask a question, press star three on your phone key pad. Make sure you give your full question, your name, and where you work to the operator and they will pass them on to us. Again, press star three to ask a question.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Questions about individual workplace issues will be forwarded to a union representative, who will contact you no later than tomorrow night. If it's an urgent matter, your union rep's contact information is on our website at ufcw1006a.ca. Just click the 'Find Your Rep' button. If we don't get to all the questions tonight, we'll be passing those questions on to your union reps, who will contact you with an answer. We'll post an audio file, meeting transcript, and tonight's meeting minutes to our website under the 'Get Involved' section. During each Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting, we'll vote to adopt the minutes of the previous meeting.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

So before we move on, we'll be taking a vote on the adoption of the minutes of the Telephone Town Hall General Membership Meeting held on January 21, 2020, as posted on our local union website. So use your telephone key pad to participate in the vote. So the question before us is, "Do you approve of the minutes of the telephone town hall general membership meeting on January 21, 2020?" Press one if you approve of the minutes of the meeting held on January 21, 2020. Press two if you do not approve of the minutes of the meeting held on January 21, 2020. Once again, press one if you approve of the minutes and press two if you do not approve of the minutes.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

As we wait for the results to come in, I'll mention once again, for our members convenience, an audio file, a printed transcript of the minutes from each meeting are posted on the 'Get Involved- Membership Meeting' section on our website shortly after every meeting. So if you know a member who couldn't

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make the call tonight, you can let them know they can listen to the call in its entirety online. Well, the results of the minutes of the of January 21 Telephone Town Hall Meeting has been approved. 89% said yes to approve the minutes. Now it's my pleasure and honour to introduce the President of our Local Union, President Wayne Hanley.

Wayne Hanley:

Thank you, Glacier. Good evening. I hope our call tonight finds you well and safe. And I want to thank you for being here during this time where we as a society are dealing with the devastating impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. Wherever you're listening from, please know that your union is with you at this difficult time. Our members and all Canadians are facing challenging times, no doubt, due to this pandemic. Our workplaces, our communities and our way of life have rapidly changed, in ways that we could not have predicted six months ago, or even six weeks ago. Nearly 30,000 Canadians have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and more than a thousand people have died here in Canada. In Ontario, there are over 9,000 confirmed cases with 423 deaths. As of March, over one million Canadians are out of work and over four million have now applied for government assistance.

Wayne Hanley:

I know these are difficult and uncertain times for many of our members and their families, be it from financial impact of layoffs or reduced hours to worries about health and safety on the front lines. Our local union alone has over 5,800 members...our members, your sisters and brothers and friends who are on layoff. At a time of great stress, we also have to endure the pain of being separated from those that we love, our friends and our family. During these difficult times, we've also seen your incredible work...the incredible work of front line heroes at grocery stores, warehouses, transportation, food processing and food servicing.

Wayne Hanley:

This hero status is not news to your union. We have always known the valuable and the vital work that our members do across this province. You. You are a vital part of Canada's effort to fight the pandemic. Thank you for everything that you're doing. All of our members, have my assurance, that while things are rapidly changing, what is not changed is our commitment to you, the members of 1006A. Our union reps have been in your workplaces as needed and are taking a higher than normal volume of calls and emails to ensure that your issues and concerns have been dealt with.

Wayne Hanley:

But this is a time for you to ensure that you call, you text, you email your union rep and keep us close, keep them close, keep in contact with them about the concerns and issues that you're having in your workplace. But again, you have my commitment that during these difficult and uncertain times, your union will be there to help you with the issues that you're facing. Our members have always been our number one priority and they will continue to be. The union has been relentless in advocating to employers and governments to ensure that our members are properly compensated for their hard work during this pandemic and to ensure that your health and safety is protected at work. I'm pleased to say that most companies are listening.

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I can report to you that your union has achieved premium pay or bonuses for members who work at Maple Leaf Foods, Sofina Foods, Weston Bakeries, those who work in our Swiss Chalet corporate restaurants and we can continue to advocate for premium pay for all Swiss Chalet locations across the province. Our members at Hudson Bay Warehouse, our members at No Frills, Loblaws Great Food and Superstores, the Value Marts, the YIG stores, the Loblaws Warehouse and Distribution Center, and our members who are transport, and the Aspect Distribution Center. All those employers are paying premiums to our members. But at this time I just want to take a short break and turn things over to Glacier for a moment to do a short poll. We want to hear and learn from you what matters most to you during this pandemic. Glacier.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

It's amazing to hear what we've been able to achieve for our members in the short few weeks since this crisis has begun. I want to take a moment to remind those of you on the line, if you have a question, just press star three on your phone keypads and our operators are standing by. But before I get back to Wayne's report, I wanted to do a quick poll to check to see how you're doing. We want to know what is the biggest concern for you and your family during this pandemic? Press one if it's financial. Press two if it's health and safety, which includes mental health. Press three if it's being physically separated from your family and friends. Once again, what is your biggest concern during this pandemic? Is it one financial, two health and safety or three being physically separated from your friends and family? Your results are shortly coming in.

Wayne Hanley:

Yeah, and as we sit here and look at the results, it's becoming very clear and almost 65% of you are saying health and safety is your number one concern followed by financials and being separated from loved ones in third. Well, I wanted to address a few of those issues. I want to start with health and safety. Now during this crisis, protecting our members, health and safety is a critical priority and the number one priority that we have. We've been lobbying the Ontario Government for proper personal protective equipment, PPE as it's come to known more widely for workers and we've been advocating for customer limits in the retail stores and for child care for frontline workers. You can see the letter that I wrote to Doug Ford on our website, ufcw1006a.ca. In addition, we've also been lobbying the government to have a common cause day for retail food workers. A day that they can stay home with their families. One day, one common pause day every week. And we're still battling for that.

Wayne Hanley:

But I can't tell you how hard that we had to fight and lobby behind the scenes at the Ministry of Labour and at the Attorney General's Office using all the contacts that we had available and contacts our friends had available to keep all grocery stores closed last Friday and Sunday. And thank goodness, most of the retail food employers were on side with that. We know that Doug Ford wanted stores to be open. He thought it was a great idea. But it was a united effort to keep those doors closed and we did that because we recognize the job that you're doing and the time you're putting in that you needed a day or two days to regroup, spend some time with your family. And we think that that should be a standard now for at least one day a week. So we'll continue to lobby on that.

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For our Loblaw's group and our retail food, we made significant gains for our members. We are in discussions with the company to ensure that our cashiers were in a safer environment by having plexiglass barriers installed. And that process is ongoing until they're all complete. We do recognize that they are in a more restrictive or confined space, but it is a safer space for you as it relates to the virus. And we've worked with our employers to have better physical distance measurements and workplaces as well as providing for more breaks to allow you to wash your hands properly.

Wayne Hanley:

But it hasn't been easy. It hasn't always been the case where store managers are doing what the protocol follows. And we need you to help us consistently remind management to follow the protocols and if that's not happening in your store, then you need to reach out to your union rep. We're continuing to advocate for enhanced measures at all workplaces, but we really need all of you, all of our stewards, all of our activists, all of our members to stand up and speak up to management when you see things aren't being done properly. In York Region, we strongly push for a surgical masks for our 1006A members that are transit workers, and we did that by lobbying the municipal and regional councillors in order to urge them to increase the protection for those workers and we're successful in most cases.

Wayne Hanley:

Our members have not been immune from the devastating impacts of COVID-19. We've had members test positive and in one location early in the process, the former member, a member of 25 years of service and who moved on to management a few short years ago... Keith Saunders passed away. And we send our deepest condolences to Keith's family and to all of his coworkers. 12 members at different locations across province have tested positive, which is quite frankly considerably lower than the provincial and the national and international statistical models. So the 1006A safety measures that you're taking and are working under, they're working. They're working for you and our members and for that, we're so thankful. But we feel also for the many families that are dealing with the illness and with the loss of loved ones, and our hearts go out to them.

Wayne Hanley:

With many of our members on the front lines, our political advocacy continues at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, WSIB. It is important that our members know what their compensation options are if they contract COVID-19 at work or are exposed, and quite frankly, what the long-term effect of this disease might be. We don't know what that is. So we've been calling on the Ontario Government to presumptively apply WSIB benefits to frontline workers who contract COVID-19. Currently, WSIB states that it's adjudicating claims related to COVID on a case by case basis. For a claim to be approved, WSIB notes evidence must show that the person's risk of contracting the disease throughout their employment is greater than the risk of which the public at large is exposed. And it's clear to me the person who wrote this guideline or this directive has not been in a retail food store in the last three or four weeks. Our members are on the front lines.

Wayne Hanley:

If you believe you've contracted COVID at work or you've been diagnosed it or have some symptoms, you can file a WSIB claim to determine your eligibility. For any claim with WSIB, documentation is critical and essential, so please ensure to keep detailed documentation of everything, including your work schedules, all medical consultation, diagnosis, communications with employers, detailed symptom

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onset, exposure dates and the times and keep a daily record of the number of cases in Ontario and your community on a day by day basis so comparisons can be drawn. What you document now will improve your chances of being successful in the event you have to file a claim and it's adjudicated somewhere down the road. If you have any questions on WSIB or COVID-19, please contact your union office. We'll help you through the process. We also have detailed information on our website, but you can find at ufcw1006a.ca.

Wayne Hanley:

As a number of COVID cases rise across Canada, government officials have taken steps to save lives by temporarily closing many businesses to flatten this infamous curve. That's meant layoffs in many of our sectors where our members work, like our hotels or restaurants and service sectors, but we're seeing it across all of our workplaces. As I said earlier, 5,800 members are currently on layoff at 1006. This has meant financial hardship for many of our members and their families. To help people through this time, the Trudeau government has unveiled benefit programs to help workers through the economic impact. We have prepared a guide, again on our website to help our members navigate the benefit options that are available. Canada's CERB program, which seems to be the most popular one, offers eligible participants affected by the virus of \$2,000 a month up to 16 weeks. The application process opened last week. Employment insurance is still available to eligible participants, but please go online, go on our website to find out if you meet the eligibility criteria and be sure to apply.

Wayne Hanley:

While changes are occurring daily, every day there seems to be new announcements or new additions. We encourage you to stay on top of it, but it does look like the government is funneling all claims into the CERB program and they will process them and deal with eligibility rules somewhere down the road. The issues that our members are facing during this pandemic are front and center. And that said, the work that your union normally does for our members must and does still continue, from resolving workplace problems to filing grievances, to arbitration meetings, to negotiations of new, and also contract renewals. And while employers are using COVID-19 as a reason not to meet, delay problems, delay settlements of contracts, not resolve issues and arbitrations, we continue to press on using the tools that are available to us.

Wayne Hanley:

And on that note, I'm pleased to report that since our last meeting, we've been able to negotiate fair contracts for our members at SSP, the food service providers at Billy Bishop Airport in Toronto, at Pliteq Industrial Unit, at Korea Food Trading and Distribution Center and at Rowland's YIG. We're also proud of our organizing efforts. Since our last meeting, we've been able to win rights for workers at Panera Bread and Mama Earth Organics. During this pandemic, workers understand now more than ever how important it is to have a meaningful voice and add protections on their job. And they can find that in our local union.

Wayne Hanley:

COVID-19 has had an impact on the unions events that have rescheduled for this year, events that were to take place. We are following carefully and closely the advisories and guidelines given by Health Canada and Public Health here in Ontario. But we have canceled the local union's annual golf tournament that was scheduled for June. That's where we usually raise close to \$50,000 for leukemia

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research. The steward spring training sessions had been postponed and likely will be canceled and started again in the fall. The City of Toronto has canceled Toronto Pride for this year as have many other communities across the province have.

Wayne Hanley:

The Canadian Labor Congress has postponed its conference, that was a convention that was scheduled in Vancouver in May. As for the 1006 conferences that we have in the fall, we will continue to closely monitor the situation as to determine the timing of each, whether it be later in this year or in next year. And again we will use the guidelines that are set down for us by Health Canada to ensure that our members' safety is protected through social distancing and limitations on crowd sizes. But to be clear we are going full steam ahead in our work to further protect and support members' challenges during this time in their workplaces. And I want to thank our stewards, our everyday heroes for the hard work throughout all of this and keeping our members informed about their rights under very difficult circumstances.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Thank you Wayne. I'd like again to remind everyone, telephone operators are standing by to take your questions and pass them on. To ask a question, press star three. I'd also like to remind members that if you stay on the line for the entire call, we will have a chance to enter membership contest. The winner will receive a computer tablet.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Wayne, you spoke earlier about the advocacy we're doing on behalf of all our members. Just to give those of you listening at home an idea, more than 20,000 of our members work in grocery stores across Ontario. As you can imagine, we have been fielding a multitude of questions from these frontline workers. When it comes to social distancing, members ask, "What can I do about customers not adhering to the two metre distancing guidelines and coming to close to talk to me or bumping into me?"

Wayne Hanley:

It's a great question, but politely, my recommendation, just ask the customers to back up. And where you can take a few steps back. They'll get the idea. Social distancing is such an important part of reducing the spread of the virus. We've spoken to employers about the importance of setting up the limits of customers in the store at one time and the protocols and the plexiglass, etcetera, that I spoke about earlier. Tape markers should be on the floor of the retail stores across the front end. And they should be hand-washing stations available as well, so I encourage it that if management is not observing the customer limits or your store doesn't have any of these items that are supposed to be part of the protocol then contact your union rep as soon as possible so that we can remedy.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Another question that we hear often is "Customers are still bringing their reusable bags. I don't feel safe touching them. What can I do about it?"

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Look, if customers bring reusable bags, let them bag their own groceries. And from my understanding, and that is a direction that is happening quite often, they're not even being allowed by the security guards to take them into the stores, right? Grocery stores will give away free bags, so let the customers bag their own groceries. At this time the reusable bags pose an unnecessary risk. The staying power of the virus on various surfaces means a greater risk and exposure and potential transmission, quite frankly. So for now, exclusively use single use grocery bags, which can be paper, which the employer is offering for free.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Another frequently asked question is, "I don't feel well and I'm worried that I've contracted the COVID-19 what can I do or what should I do?"

Wayne Hanley:

Well listen, if you're experiencing symptoms, whether they are mild or not, or if you've been tested, waiting test results, or have a positive test, you got to know that your job is protected. If you're sick, you're experiencing the symptoms, contact an employer, let them know. All health authorities across Canada, and certainly here in Ontario, advise you to stay home and self-isolated for 14 days. Due to the highly contagious nature of the virus and its ability to rapidly spread, these health authorities have issued specific advice and we've seen legislation to protect workers and the public. So truly, this has to be your choice. You have to be comfortable. Officials don't want you at work if you're symptomatic. Employers don't want you to be at work, if you have symptoms... they shouldn't want you at work, if you have symptoms and may potentially spread the COVID-19.

Wayne Hanley:

There's job protection out there, there's job protected leave for those in isolation or quarantined. So call your supervisors and inform them as soon as you start experiencing some symptoms. You don't require a sick note for government benefits. However, if you are applying for an employer's pay protection program, ensure that you've got documentation backup, whether that be a screenshot of your telephone call to telehealth or whatever document that you can provide to your employer to make it easier to qualify for their pay protection programs.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

The last frequently asked question that we get is, "I want to wear a mask at work because I don't feel safe. What should I do?"

Wayne Hanley:

So we have been advocating for masks for our members since the onset, especially for members working in public spaces and in the transit sector. In most cases, employers have indicated they're willing to supply masks, but as you are all likely aware, masks were in short supply globally and the ones that were available, were being filtered to the medical centers. But that's all improving now. Masks have started to flow to corporate Loblaws and franchise stores. Some stores have already received them, others will start to get them as supply is available. But things are starting to flow. And if you can't have one supplied or your employer won't supply one and you have one, then I encourage you to wear it. And if you have any difficulties, I encourage you to follow up with a phone call to your union representative.

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Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Well that is some of what's happening in our retail grocery locations. We're also taking proactive approaches at our warehouse and food processing locations, where our members work to ensure enhanced safety standards. I want to also mention, staying safe also means taking precautions from when you're at home to when you're taking public transit to work to when you're walking outside. Here's some tips that you can follow. One, wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds at a time, especially when you enter your home. Wear a mask when you're out of your house to reduce any chance of transmission of COVID-19. You can use your scarf if you don't have a mask and while this doesn't make you immune, it generally will help reduce the spread. Three, try your best not to touch your face. Four, adhere to social distancing guidelines. Stay two meters or six feet away from others. After work ends, stay at home as much as you can and restrict contact to those in your household.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Clean commonly touched surfaces in your home, wipe them down, wipe down items like your phone and your key pad often because you touched them often. We're also advocating to only have one family member do grocery shopping or go to the pharmacy, and have a list prepared and events so you can get in and out quickly. And lastly and most important, if you are sick or symptomatic, please self isolate for two weeks to decrease the chance of transmission. Have your friends or family members do the shopping so you can focus on getting better. Help spread these messages to friends and family, it will go a long way to help flatten the curve.

Wayne Hanley:

So Glacier, I've been looking at the questions while you've been going through the seven very important steps that our members can take to help reduce the likelihood of themselves or their family and loved ones getting the virus. Most of the questions, and a number that come in early, have been answered in a general way in the remarks that we've made here tonight. There are a number of questions also that are need specific answers because they deal with specific situations. So I'm going to suggest that those calls, as we outlined at the beginning, will be followed up directly with the member with a telephone call or an email back to you, so look for those calls.

Wayne Hanley:

There is one question that has been asked a number of times, but I will address it and I don't have a specific answer for you or a definite answer and it evolves around the premiums that are being paid right now and will they be extended or how long they will go to? Some of our employers, when they initially agreed to wage increases or bonuses, depending on the workplace, said that it would be in place until they knew more or there was a better understanding of the timeline and they committed to having them in place until the end of April.

Wayne Hanley:

We are working with those employers now to get a more definitive answer as to how long those premiums should be in place, and we are obviously asking them to be extended for the duration of this. And in addition to that, we're also asking that those premiums be reviewed to see whether or not the level of premium is sufficient and justified at the current rate under the circumstances that exist now versus four weeks ago when they were first talked about. So I think that there are a great number of questions and I think we'll handle them in that way.

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Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Thanks Wayne. I'll assume that you might have some closing remarks before our members get to the contest for the tablet.

Wayne Hanley:

Yes. Thanks Glacier. And I know it's been difficult time for all of you, for all of our members and your families. For those that are still working hard to serve our communities, I can't thank you enough and I hope that the people that you are serving recognize this, are thanking you. To our local union staff and our administration staff, I got to thank you for stepping up and being there at this, at this troubling time and being there for our members and doing the job that has to be done in the way that we're doing it. If there's a silver lining to this crisis, it is the realization that many Canadians now see the valuable and the essential role that our members play in society. As I've said before, you're not just heroes in this moment of time, you've always been and you will always be heroes 365 days a year.

Wayne Hanley:

So once again, I encourage you to stay in close contact with your union representatives and their contact information is available by visiting the union website. So thank you for taking the time for being here with us this evening. Stay safe and take care of your yourselves and your loved ones. Thank you, Glacier.

Glacier Effs-Samuel:

Thank you again, Wayne. For those with questions that we were unable to get to, your union rep will be getting back to you within 24 hours. Please remember that an audio file and transcript of tonight's meeting will be posted on our website for your convenience. As well, the minutes of tonight's meeting will also be posted for your review and to be approved during the next meeting, which is scheduled on August 18th at 7:00 PM. Now we have one last business to take care of, which is the contest. So to enter the contest, press one on your telephone key pad. The winner will be announced on our website tomorrow by 3:00 PM. Again, our website is ufcw1006a.ca Again, that's ufcw1006a.ca. For those of you that would like to leave a question or comment, please stay on the line and thank you again for joining us this evening. Please stay well and stay safe. Have a good night.