

# Globe British Columbia

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THE GLOBE AND MAIL ■ CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ■ GLOBEANDMAIL.COM ■ TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2006

## Another big union signs deal with B.C.

Latest public-sector deal gives members  
10-per-cent wage increases over four years

BY PETTI FONG, VANCOUVER

Six months after B.C.'s public-sector workers teetered on the verge of a general strike, the labour feud with the province is showing signs of easing.

But it's not quite spring yet for labour harmony in the province, with two of the largest and most militant unions still to sign on to receive their share of a billion-dollar bonus.

The latest deal, signed during the weekend, was with the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union and its 24,000 members. Union leader George Heyman urged members to accept average wage increases of 10 per cent over four years.

A week ago, the union walked out of talks with the government, saying a \$4,000 bonus was not enough to keep negotiators at the table if there were not better job-security guarantees.

Mr. Heyman said the union was able to talk the government down from a higher cap on job losses due to privatization and persuaded it to add another 1.5-per-cent increase in wages.

The bonus the government dangled to get a deal signed before March 31 was important, Mr. Heyman said, because it offset the holes in bank accounts that workers racked up after two years without pay raises.

"We can't stop a government that is clearly ideologically bent on privatizing and contracting out public services," he said yesterday. "But we have been told that this government wants to start a conversation and move away from confrontation and we hope this round of bargaining has begun to achieve that."

During an illegal strike by teach-

### Who's in the deal?

**\$1-billion**

The bonus the B.C. government promised public-sector workers if unions signed agreements before March 31.

**100,424**

The number of workers represented by unions that have signed. They include:

- The B.C. Medical Association: 8,800 members
- Hospital Employees Union: 44,700 members
- B.C. Government Employees Union: 24,470 members

**78,309**

The number of workers represented by other unions that are still negotiating and trying for the deadline. They include:

- B.C. Nurses Union: 29,000 members
- Community Health and Community Social Services workers in three unions: 15,000 members

Petti Fong

ers last fall, emotions ran high after the provincial government's attempt to impose a zero-per-cent increase settlement. Government employees joined other public-sector workers in a rally of 12,000 people at the legislature in support of teachers.

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Allen Abney addresses a news conference in Yahk yesterday as his daughter Jessica listens. Mr. Abney, a former U.S. Marine who fled his Vietnam duty, was released from military prison last Thursday.

LORNE ECKERSLEY/CANADIAN PRESS

## Deserter regrets fleeing Marines in 1968

BY MARK HUME, YAHK

When a U.S. Customs agent told Allen Abney to pull out of the lineup at the border crossing, he knew that he'd finally been caught.

"I'm screwed," the 56-year-old retiree said to his wife, Adrienne, who was sitting in the truck beside him as they tried to cross into Idaho from southern British Columbia, where they live.

After being absent without leave for 38 years, Mr. Abney was scooped up by U.S. authorities on March 9 after a routine scan of his Canadian passport.

Yesterday, in a news conference at the Yahk Kingsgate Community Hall, near his home in B.C.'s Central Kootenays, Mr. Abney told his story for the first time since he was released from a military prison last Thursday.

And it was a surprising story full of reflection and regret, in which Mr. Abney told of his great admiration for the U.S. Marines, and expressed remorse over his decision in 1968 to walk away from his military commitments.

His voice shaking at times, his blue B4 Logging baseball cap pulled down over a Marine-issue haircut, Mr. Abney struggled to explain why he had fled U.S. military service all those years ago. It wasn't because of moral objections to the Vietnam War, which was raging at the time, and it wasn't because he was a devoted member of the anti-war movement, then sweeping campuses in Canada and the United States.

Mr. Abney shrugged and said he doesn't really know why he did it.

"I certainly didn't leave to escape going to Vietnam," he said. "The reasons are just as obtuse to me now as they were in '68.

"Thirty eight years ago I was just a dumb kid. My parents couldn't tell me anything . . . and I wasn't really aware at the time of how this would affect my life . . . Knowing what I know now, I never would have done it."

Although Mr. Abney was born in the United States, his family moved to Toronto when he was 10.

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## Friend's uphill battle with cancer prompts teen to climb

Thirteen-year-old plans to raise \$1-million

BY JONATHAN WOODWARD  
VANCOUVER

It was a horrible shock for young mountain climber Brandon Schupp, 13, to see his four-year-old friend Cole Petrie stricken by

neuroblastoma, a deadly cancer that often preys on the young.

So the London, Ont., teen decided to move mountains last fall, first raising \$20,000 for Cole's family to pay for some costs of chemotherapy treatment and travel to a Toronto

hospital. Now, he plans to raise \$1-million for children with cancer with a plan that has raised eyebrows and hope across Canada: climbing the 3,240-metre Good Hope Mountain in B.C.'s Coast Mountain range.

"I saw a chance to help and I took it," Brandon said yesterday.

The charity Childhood Cancer

Foundation is organizing the trek and will announce the Mountain of Hope program today. Yesterday, B.C. MLA Lorne Mayencourt told The Globe and Mail he would raise money for the foundation and accompany Brandon as the fourth man on his two-week mountain expedition.

The two children became bud-

dies while Brandon's mother, Ann Freeman, babysat Cole for several months.

Last year, Cole complained of pain in his torso, but his parents and their family doctors thought it was a hip condition. They believed he was healthy and naturally putting on weight, but took him to a specialist when his stomach began

ballooning.

In September, a hospital confirmed their fears: Cole had an advanced, football-sized tumour in his adrenal gland near his kidney.

"He was shiny; he looked like a pregnant kid," his mother, Jennifer Petrie, said in an interview.

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