

Nortel pensioners fear they'll never see a settlement

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Nortel pensioners have suffered another setback in their fight to keep their benefits following the telecom giant's bankruptcy four years ago.

Ontario Chief Justice Warren K. Winkler announced that mediation between Nortel and its creditors failed on Thursday.

As Nortel's former employees get older, they fear the court battles will outlast them.

Anne Clark-Stewart said she started working for Nortel when she was a teenager "right out of high school" and gave 42 years of service to the company.

Her last position was vice-president of human resources for Nortel's wireless division, but now she's the spokesperson for its pensioners group, which represents about 20,000 former employees of the company.

"I'm one of the younger ones," said the 66-year-old.

The average age of the group is 76, said Clark-Stewart, so not only money, but time, is running out for those waiting for a settlement.

"The longer it goes and the more money that gets spent in legal and financial advisor fees, the less likely that there'll be any money left in the pot," said Clark-Stewart, whose own drastically-reduced nest egg is dwindling.

"I used to own a home and I'm now renting a condo ... I hope I won't have to downsize again," she added.

Clark-Stewart lost most of her retirement payout, all of her health benefits and her life insurance when Nortel filed for bankruptcy protection on Jan. 14, 2009.

Frank Mills worked at Nortel for more than 40 years and retired almost 20 years before his former employer went belly-up.

The 77-year-old says he rested easy back in the early years of his retirement, knowing that his wife would be taken care of. Now, he said the pension that remains for her won't be enough.

"I don't think she's going to be able to survive on that ... and keep our home and the other things I was hoping that I could provide for her after I'm gone," he said.

"I'm getting a little emotional right now as I talk about it because that was always my plan. This is certainly a huge blow."



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