



Convention 2011

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On the heels of a difficult ratification vote, HSA members from around the province gathered to do as they've done for 40 years ... work together to meet the future challenges of an ever changing health care system.

-OVER THE NEXT TWO DAYS, we will be focusing on the future of our union. Where we go from here. How we continue to grow, and how we set our agenda for the future."

Addressing over 300 delegates gathered in Vancouver on April 8, President Reid Johnson set a tone of resolve and optimism in the face of trying times. With the provincial government refusing to grant wage increases to health professionals and refusing to listen to key concerns of professionals working in the community social services sector, and governments in Wisconsin and other US states attacking public employees, Johnson stressed that working together ... as a union and with other unions ... is perhaps more important now than ever before. It was a theme picked up by guest speakers James Clancy, President of the National Union of Public and General Employees and Jim Sinclair, President of the BC Federation of Labour. Both extended thanks to the work HSA does in defending public health care and the hardfought rights of unionized employees.

-Im committed ... and your board of directors is committed ... to continuing to build a strong union," Johnson told delegates. -A union thats an important and valued contributor in a much broader coalition to stem the tide of growing anti-union and anti-public sector sentiment driven by ideologically-motivated governments and corporations."

Johnson explained that while the recent round of bargaining in the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association was difficult, HSA negotiators managed to achieve significant changes that will protect members in a changing health care system.

-What we got out of this contract are mechanisms to shore up our defences against what governments have in store for health care ... and all public services."

Johnson acknowledged concerns about the agreement, and praised delegates for asking tough questions. -Its that debate, the thoughtful and thorough considerations that keeps us moving forward as a union."

On the final day of convention, delegates re-elected Johnson for a two-year term.

Delegates began the convention with a full day of workshops that addressed public speaking skills, longterm disability management, the experience of young members, public policy questions on fair taxation and increasing diversity in the workplace (see articles next page, page 15 and page 17).

With 70 resolutions to debate, delegates grappled with a wide range of issues. Workplace safety was one of the most significant; recognizing that while health sector workers make up just 15 per cent of the workforce they account for 40 per cent of WorkSafeBCs violent incidents, delegates voted in favour of a resolution calling on WorkSafeBC to add to their board of directors an additional representative focused on the health sector. They passed a second resolution urging stronger violence prevention protocols in the health sector, more stringent reporting standards for employers and improvement to the Workers Compensation Act to better provide protection for employees facing violence in the workplace.

Recognizing that HSA and the labour movement as a whole is aging, delegates voted in favour of a resolution to establish a task force on young members.

Delegates also took time to recognize the work of Llaesa North, a physiotherapist at the Prince George Child

Development Centre. North received the David Bland award in honour of her efforts to make her workplace safer.

It had become clear to North that a colleague was likely at risk due to a health condition which could affect her driving safely. The employer did not fully comprehend nor act on the risk to this employee and others, and North tirelessly spearheaded efforts to have this situation resolved. Tragically, the colleague died in a car accident.

-Following this tragedy," said President Johnson, North turned her efforts to ensuring that such a situation would not occur again. With HSAs support and mobilization of her coworkers a process started in which the employer was made to revamp policies and procedures, and workers now are more aware of their rights. Communication of risk of injury, in all facets of the workplace, became the norm and is a legacy."

Guest speaker Andre Picard, national health reporter for the Globe and Mail, wrapped up the convention by talking about the future of public health care in Canada ... a future he says looks very bright if we can make a few very simple choices (see article page 18).

Ranj Jabal, respiratory therapist at Surrey Memorial Hospital was impressed with his first experience as a convention delegate.

-The debate was great and the convention gives a bit of insight into what happens in my union. Im just taking a back seat at this one and hopefully Ill get a bit more involved over the next few years. Its a good experience for everybody."

Lila Mah, cardiac ultrasound technologist, said that while delegates were frustrated and worried about the governments refusal to grant wage increases in the recent agreement, members will stay positive.

-Times will always be demanding. Ive been working at Kelowna General Hospital for 22 years and in that time weve seen good times, weve seen bad times, weve seen terrible times and weve risen above it." 

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