

THE Report



POLITICAL ACTION

HSA MEMBERS GET ACTIVE TO GET HEARD

Political action: speaking up for health care and social services

by CINDY STEWART

On November 19, 2005 British Columbians head to the polls again. This time, it's to elect mayors, municipal councillors, school trustees, and regional district representatives.

In the past several years, HSA members have passed resolutions at annual conventions directing the union to do more to encourage HSA members to get involved in their communities through the political processes available to us. I encourage you to participate in the upcoming local elections. Either as a voter, a campaign worker, or as a candidate.

HSA's political action committee has been working hard to respond to members' interests. During the provincial election, a number of HSA members were able to participate in election campaigns and received basic training at our non-partisan campaign school. For the municipal elections, the focus is on information about the process, as well as about why we should care about municipal elections.

Decisions made at the local level affect our everyday lives – from water quality and transportation to commu-

Historically, fewer than 20 per cent of British Columbians get involved in local elections. I encourage you to help reverse that trend.

nity support for seniors, and recreation facilities for our children.

Local representatives speak up for communities on important issues – whether they are local, provincial, or federal in nature. Local politicians are the closest to our communities, and higher levels of government count on municipal-level representatives to ensure communities' voices are heard.

But local government isn't just about standing up for local communities. It's about shaping communities. It's



Cindy Stewart, HSA President

about making our neighbourhoods, our towns, and our cities places where we want to live. Union members, through their local labour councils, are actively involved in community issues, including the election of local government representatives.

Through HSA's membership in the Canadian Labour Congress, the union is affiliated with local labour councils around BC.

Many HSA members will receive information in the mail from the union promoting participation in the municipal election, including information about the candidates who have been endorsed by local labour councils. Labour councils have developed a process to interview candidates in order to identify candidates who share the values of the labour movement, and who want to make a difference on municipal councils, school boards, and regional districts.

They are candidates who have committed to principles like social justice, equity, democracy, quality construction, decent wages and working conditions. All candidates are subject to the same accountable, transparent and fair process to determine which of them the Labour Councils believe will best represent the interests of working families.

Historically, fewer than 20 per cent of British Columbians get involved in local elections. I encourage you to help reverse that trend, and get out to vote on Saturday, November 19. **R**



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THE FRONT COVER

HSA Region 1 activists rallied in Victoria in support of teachers and the protection of public services. Yukie Kurahashi photo.

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News

HSA members to develop bargaining proposals for community health contract

Preparations for bargaining for a new Health Services and Support Community Collective Agreement will begin this month.

All chapters where HSA members are covered by this collective agreement held meetings before November 4, 2005 to set priorities for bargaining in 2006.

HSA's Board of Directors is also seeking expressions of interest from HSA members covered by the collective agreement to participate in a members' focus group to finalize HSA's bargaining priorities.

The mandate of the focus group will be to consider all bargaining proposals submitted by chapters throughout the province. One member of the focus group will also be selected to participate as a member of the HSA bargaining team at the bargaining table in 2006.

Through the efforts of the focus group, HSA will develop the priorities for bargaining to be advanced for consideration by the Community Bargaining Association (CBA), which is comprised of several unions representing about 15,000 workers.

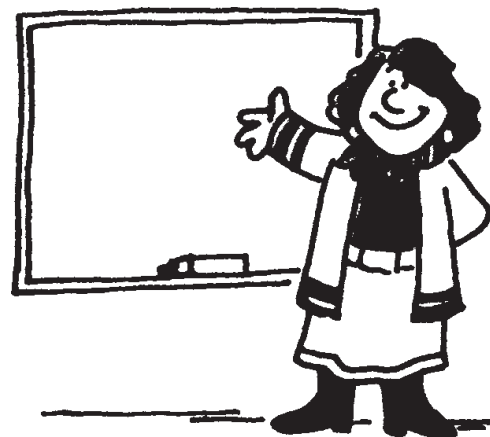
Teachers vote to return to school

BCTF/CALM

Teachers across British Columbia voted to return to their classrooms after a two-week illegal strike, confident they have reasserted their rights and raised quality public education to the top of the political agenda.

BC Teachers' Federation executive committee voted to recommend accepting the settlement and the teachers shared their view. They wanted to get back to work and begin a new stage in their ongoing advocacy for public education. Seventy-seven per cent of the votes cast were to end the strike.

About 25,000 Canadian Union of Public Employee members who work in the school system and other co-workers from the International Union



CALM GRAPHIC

of Operating Engineers and the British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union supported the teachers.

Thousands of parents, students and other community members joined their teachers on the picket lines and at rallies, often bringing cookies and coffee along with their good wishes. Public support for the teachers remained strong even after the strike was declared illegal.

Teachers are prepared to work hard to help students make up for lost time and believe they won't have problems catching up. However, the work of rebuilding relationships between teachers and the government will be a more difficult job.

"This government has enacted six pieces of legislation targeting teachers' rights and profession," BCTF president Jinny Sims noted. "These actions have undermined our trust in this government."

The teachers will be watching and holding the Campbell government accountable for promises it made to amend the School Act to include firm class-size limits, address serious issues of class composition and provide support for students with special needs.

"British Columbians support teachers' speaking out for students, they care deeply about the learning conditions in their children's classrooms,

and they want the government to reinvest in a strong and stable public school system,” Sims said.

December 6: Move to action

CLC/CALM

Most Canadians are proud to live in an egalitarian society. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a woman as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Enrollment of women in professions like medicine and law is at an all time high. We’ve even sent a woman into space.

Yet, there is growing concern that women’s equality has been put on the back burner.

Women’s political progress has stalled and in some areas is declining. Women continue to hold only 21 per cent of the seats in the House of Commons, even though we are more than 50 per cent of the population.

Growing economic inequality and the erosion of women’s rights are bad news for those struggling to end violence against women. Social policies sink women below the poverty line. Women trapped in abusive and violent situations have no way out for themselves and their children. They experience a justice system that works against them. Aboriginal women, women of colour, immigrant women, women with disabilities and deaf women are even more marginalized.

On December 6, 1989, 14 women, mostly young engineering students, were hunted down and murdered at Montreal’s École Polytechnique by a man who blamed women for his failures.

The Montréal massacre galvanized our nation. Many of us vowed to commemorate the murdered women so their names, and not the name of their murderer, would be remembered. We were determined to become a country that would spotlight the causes of such a catastrophe and work for change. Every year we recognize the date with vigils, commemorative ceremonies, candles and tears. And yet, every year, women and girls continue to be assaulted and murdered.

Low wages and shortages of affordable housing and shelters trap women with abusive partners. With about 70 per cent of mothers in the paid workforce, there is a need for good-quality, affordable child care, but it is difficult to find.

Women continue to have great difficulties with the justice system. Governments have not acted on recommendations from high-profile inquests into women’s murders. Restraining orders do not keep men from acting out on their threats. Abusers who clearly need to be detained get out on bail. Guns are still easy to get.

Paul Martin squeaked in with a minority government by promising, among other things, to protect equality and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He said he would bring in a Quebec-style child care program. He got elected with votes of women fearful of the Conservatives. We need to continue to push to ensure that this minority government acts for women’s interests. **R**

HSA’s Committee for Equality and Social Action will be distributing “Dec 6: Day of Action Against Violence AGAINST Women” buttons and posters through your chief steward.



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Why LSIFs? Venturing beyond 30 per cent tax credits

Tax credits of up to 30 per cent help to make labour-sponsored investment funds (LSIFs) an appealing investment. But like any smart investor, you're looking for an investment that goes further to maximize your potential for growth, deliver integrity, and be a socially responsible investment choice. LSIFs, like the Working Opportunity Fund in BC, can do this and more – it's a matter of finding the right manager and the right fund to fit your investment strategy.

What is an LSIF?

LSIFs are venture capital funds that seek to invest in up-and-coming companies with strong growth potential. People who invest in LSIFs receive tax credits of up to 30 per cent because they help provide the vital capital needed by small- and medium-sized firms to realize their full potential. It's the venture capital investing that allows these companies to bring to market the kinds of innovative ideas that make Canada one of the world's leading developers of new technologies.

Maximize your potential for growth

Not all LSIF managers are created equal. To succeed, they must have more than the ability to pick winning firms among the hundreds of potential choices available in Canada; LSIF managers must also have a management philosophy that empowers the companies in their managed funds' portfolios with the knowledge and capital for significant growth, and minimizes the risks for those that invest in those funds.

The Working Opportunity Fund, managed by GrowthWorks Capital, takes an early stage investment approach which offers several distinct advantages: it gives the

By investing in an LSIF, you can have confidence that your investment is going towards the growth and development of BC companies.

Fund's expert management team the opportunity to offer critical advice—the kind of guidance that can mean the difference between success and failure; it minimizes the potential for loss should something go wrong; and it provides the Fund with increased potential for greater gains.

Management with integrity

Returns are obviously important, but so too is the ability to earn them with a trusted manager who can also reduce your risk. Working Opportunity Fund investors have the benefit of conservative asset valuation. The Fund uses the method of valuation recommended by Canada's Venture Capital and Private Equity Association (CVCA). These rules-based and event-driven procedures give investors the confidence of knowing that the Working Opportunity Fund's share prices are determined using the recommended and fair valuation method.

Be socially responsible and help grow BC's economy

By investing in an LSIF, you can have confidence that your investment is going

towards the growth and development of entrepreneurial companies here at home. The Working Opportunity Fund invests solely in BC businesses, providing jobs and economic growth for BC. The Fund is also committed to socially responsible investing, undergoing an ethical review of all of its potential investments.

An intriguing investment vehicle

LSIFs are one of the few investment vehicles that allow smaller investors to participate in the great potential of the venture capital market, minimize their risk, and benefit from the knowledge of an experienced venture capital investment team. When you factor in the up to 30 per cent tax credits, LSIFs become more than an intriguing investment vehicle; they represent a serious opportunity for those looking to augment their portfolio with a strategically sound long-term investment in venture capital.

The Working Opportunity Fund offers BC residents tax credits of up to 30 per cent, is western Canada's largest venture capital fund, and has invested more than \$380 million in small- and medium-sized entrepreneurial BC companies.

Commissions, trailing commissions, management fees and expenses all may be associated with investments in labour-sponsored investment funds (LSIFs). Please read the prospectus before investing. LSIFs are not guaranteed, their values change frequently and past performance may not be repeated.

HSA is a founding member of the Working Opportunity Fund. HSA president Cindy Stewart serves as President of the WOF Board of Directors.

HSA members run in municipal elections

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN

Brigid Kemp: Commitment to grassroots activism leads her to run for city council

Brigid Kemp describes herself as “very much a community activist.” She’s been involved with many citizens’ organizations both local and national; her work, as Older Women’s Liaison for the South Okanagan Women in Need Association, brings her face-to-face with social issues on a daily basis; and she’s an active union member, currently HSA Chief Steward for her facility.



Brigid Kemp, Older Women’s Liaison, South Okanagan Women in Need Association

Kemp’s commitment to the grassroots has led her to run as a candidate for the Penticton City Council in the upcoming municipal election.

“What draws me to municipal politics is that they’re right there, in your face. When you elect an MLA or MP, they’re off in Victoria or Ottawa. You don’t see them. With municipal politicians it’s different,” she says.

Kemp says her decision to run in the election was helped along by her experience with HSA.

“I went through two HSA campaign schools and HSA supported me to attend the Women’s Campaign School put on by the Canadian Women Vot-

ers’ Congress last February. It certainly makes it a lot more possible for me to run,” says Kemp.

There are many issues Kemp plans to address if she is elected – she names land use, public transit, safety, supporting local businesses, affordable housing and health care as examples.

Although health care often isn’t thought of as a municipal issue, Kemp says this is a mistake. “It’s important to have the city involved. Municipal officials have the responsibility to lobby hard to make sure there are no more cuts to health care.”

Along with the responsibility, they have some tools. “We have organizations such as the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). One of its mandates is public health. There are structures in place for municipalities, through UBCM, to talk to the provincial government about health care.”

As another approach, she cites the example of the Municipality of Delta. “They launched a court action against the Fraser Health Authority against service cuts at their hospital.”

Janice Morrison: Diverse skills an asset in running for city council

Janice Morrison wears many hats: she is a health care professional, union activist, businesswoman (she runs a bed and breakfast), and extremely active community member. All these hats are staying firmly on her head as she takes on a candidacy in the municipal election and contemplates the possibility of serving another term – this would be her second – as city councillor in Nelson, BC.

She values her diverse experience as one of her strongest assets.



**Janice Morrison,
Physiotherapist,
Kootenay Lake
Hospital**

“Everything I do – it all fits together,” says Morrison. “I am able to meet with all kinds of community organizations. There are some issues where the community is divided or there’s a lack of trust. I can bring people together at the table because I wear so many different hats.

“For instance, I’ve been involved in the local hockey team, and I’m also on the board of the

new art gallery project. There are these perceived splits, like culture versus sports. But really we can all get along. I’ve been in the Rotary Club for 14 years; it’s the great bastion of business. But I’m also in a union. I was the first public sector person that was a member of our Rotary Club. So I can bridge these different worlds.”

Morrison served on Nelson’s city council in 1999 – 2002 and has run in two other municipal elections. “I’m very passionate about my community,” she says.

In her professional life, Morrison is a physiotherapist at Kootenay Lake Hospital. She is also an active HSA member, currently serving as Chief Steward after six years as Member-at-Large. The union, she says, has been invaluable in helping her pursue her political interests.

“There have been so many educational opportunities – public speaking, parliamentary procedure,

attending conventions and networking,” says Morrison. “And the flexibility is so wonderful. It’s in our contract that you can take a leave of absence if you hold political office. I have taken advantage of this in the past and it’s a great perk.”

Shaping the Future of her Community Debora Munoz Knows she Can Make a Difference as a City Councillor

Although this is her first time running for political office, no one could describe Debora Munoz as politically inexperienced. She has been a community activist for decades, and deciding to run for city council in Prince George was a natural step for her.

“I have over 30 years of leadership and advocacy work in health and community. I have served on many committees and given extensively as a volunteer. I have corporate, non-profit and small business experience,” says Munoz. She also says her work, as a diagnostic neurophysiology technologist at Prince George Regional Hospital, has been valuable preparation.

“Being in diagnostic health care for 25 years I’ve learned you do the necessary research before making decisions,” she says. What applies in a medical



**Debora Munoz,
Diagnostic Neuro-
physiology Technologist,
Prince George
Regional Hospital**

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HSA members run in municipal elections

situation applies in politics. “You don’t make decisions on a whim. You have to take the time to research before deciding on any bylaw or program.”

As well, Munoz draws on the training and support she’s gained from being part of HSA. “Part of my being able to step forward to run was made possible through HSA. It has allowed me to attend four political campaign schools. I’ve gotten incredible information and tools that I’m now applying. The support is tremendous,” she says.

As well as being confident in her abilities, Munoz is clear about her motivations: “I want to be at the table when the decisions are being made on shaping the future of our community,” says Munoz.

Another motivator for Munoz is the opportunity to address gender imbalances. “There’s a huge under-representation of women in all levels of government. Locally, there is currently only one woman on council [out of eight]. There needs to be more women on city council and more women’s voices heard. I can bring my experience as a woman who has been a proven leader in her community. If I am elected, I would hope that I can continue to empower and encourage women to step forward.” **R**

To learn more about Debora Munoz, visit her website at www.deboramunoz.com.

Contributing strength and knowledge through your local labour council

by CAROLE PEARSON

For union members who are looking for ways to contribute to the work of the labour movement in their local community, labour councils are the conduit for that action.

Whether campaigning on the national or local scene, labour council networks play a pivotal role in complementing individual unions by bringing together activists in the communities where they live.

The labour council in your community is a central labour body that combines the strength of local unions, and its mandate is to organize and advocate on issues that are vital to working people throughout the region, and to carry out local campaigns for the Canadian Labour Congress. Delegates from affiliated locals participate in the monthly meetings, and elect the local executive.

In British Columbia, there are 21 Labour Councils. HSA’s Labour Council delegates are active in 11 of those organizations.



**Joan Magee,
Laboratory
Technologist, Cariboo
Memorial Hospital**

Joan Magee is HSA’s delegate to the South Cariboo and District Labour Council. Magee, a lab technologist at Cariboo Memorial Hospital in Williams Lake, said her involvement on the council is a good way of keeping informed about issues in the community. “You’re getting it from the workers, not through the press,” she said.

Maria Tokarchuk, psychiatric nurse and delegate to the North Okanagan and District Labour Council, agrees it is a place for education and information-sharing.

“You get a chance to network with representatives from other unions and hear what their issues are. You can also explain to them what HSA is doing and they can inform their members as well. This helps build support for HSA issues within the greater community, which is important especially during bargaining,” Tokarchuk said.

Anne Davis, the HSA delegate to the Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council, recalls what support meant during a labour dispute she was

BC Municipal Elections: Saturday, November 19

involved in.

“We were on strike a few years back.

“We were a very small workplace – about 16 members – so it was a bit lonely on the picket line. But since our union was involved in the labour council, I told the other union delegates what was going on and their members came out and supported us on the picket line,” Davis said.

Physiotherapist and Vancouver and District La-

“You get a chance to network with representatives from other unions and hear what their issues are. You can also explain to them what HSA is doing and they can inform their members as well. This helps build support for HSA issues within the greater community, which is important especially during bargaining.”

bour Council delegate Rachel Tutte says being HSA’s delegate is a “way to become educated about the struggles of other unions and be part of the larger labour movement.”

It is also, she said, a place to get involved and make a difference in her community.

For example, labour councils are playing a role in the upcoming municipal and school board elections. As she explains, municipal elections are important because city councils are more closely connected to the people who live in their communities.

“They are the ones who see the problems created by poor health care and social services at the street level and can strongly advocate for their communities,” Tutte said.

Magee agrees there is a role at the municipal level for health care workers to raise issues.

“The federal and provincial governments have cut funding for health services so, often, the municipalities have to continue on with local programs for the communities. So I think it is important we endorse and help elect municipal candidates who will help defend the public health care systems” Magee said.

Tokarchuk and Tutte believe that labour councils that endorse municipal candidates are providing



**Maria Tokarchuk,
Registered Psychiatric
Nurse, Kelowna
General Hospital**

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Contributing strength and knowledge through your local labour council



**Rachel Tutte, Physio-
therapist, Providence
Health Care / Holy
Family Hospital**

good information for voters who are navigating their way through their choices in local elections and want to support local representatives who will reflect their own concerns.

“It is important to vote for people who have

progressive values that support working people and public services. These are what labour councils look at when deciding which candidates to endorse. They are people with the kinds of values many union members are looking for in government,” said Tutte.

Tokarchuk says labour council-endorsed candidates are “more supportive of labour issues. They know what it’s like at the workplace. They have a better understanding of issues affecting union members.”

Magee agrees. “When labour councils endorse candidates, they look for people who will defend public health care and other issues that are important to working people.

“I think it helps the electorate to know who these labour-friendly people are,” she said. **R**

Labour councils: the voice of labour in your community

by CAROL RIVIÈRE

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is the largest labour organization in Canada, bringing together over three million union members who belong to Canada’s national and international unions, the provincial and territorial federations of labour and 137 district labour councils.

HSA participates in the CLC through HSA’s membership in the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), which is composed of 15 component unions representing 340,000 members who work primarily in the public sector across Canada.

The CLC and NUPGE provide HSA with a voice on issues affecting HSA members that have national significance, and/or fall under federal government jurisdiction.

The CLC and NUPGE have worked on issues such as protecting and expanding public health care, a national child care program and protecting workers’ pensions.

HSA is also affiliated to the BC Federation of Labour (BCFL), which represents 470,000 members of many different BC unions working in every sector of the BC economy. The BCFL is the voice of labour at the provincial level, promoting the interests of workers to government, employers and the general public.

Individual HSA Chapters are encouraged to affiliate to their local labour councils, which in turn are directly affiliated to the CLC. Labour councils represent the labour movement at the community level. There are 21 labour councils covering nearly the entire province of British Columbia. HSA chapters are currently affiliated to 11 labour councils around the province.

Labour councils are involved in a range of issues and activities. Some activities focus specifically on workers, such as providing worker-related education workshops, organizing local support for workers who are on strike in their community, promoting the use of goods and services provided by unionized workers and supporting issues such as occupational health and safety or pensions.

Many labour councils organize annual events, including Day of Mourning events to commemorate workers who are killed or injured on the job, or Labour Day events to celebrate labour’s contributions to society and to our working conditions.

Labour councils also provide a venue for members from different

BC Municipal Elections: Saturday, November 19



HSA's Labour Council Delegates attended a workshop in September to learn about the role and structure of Labour Councils, and their role as HSA Labour Council Delegates. Workshop participants also discussed the kinds of issues that may arise at their Labour Councils, as well as some of the issues that HSA may ask Delegates to bring to their Labour Councils.

From left: Brigid Kemp, Eileen Carolan, Jennifer Cameron, Agnes Jackman, Debora Munoz, Jackie Spain, Rachel Tutte, Maria Tokarchuk, Joan Magee, and Ann Marie Bagwell.

unions who live in the same communities to work together, and to keep each other informed about issues affecting their members.

In this respect, labour councils have been an important vehicle for HSA labour council delegates to educate members from other unions about the many issues HSA members have faced in the last two rounds of collective bargaining, including the provincial government's imposition of a two-tiered wage settlement on HSA's health science professionals, legislation which stripped important provisions from members' collective agreements and government wage guidelines that allowed no wage increase, or for some members, actually mandated cuts to wages and benefits.

Labour councils also support social services for their entire community, by lobbying for these services and by playing an important role in labour's participation in the United Way, which funds many of these services.

Labour councils also work at the community level to implement CLC and BCFL programs. Some of these programs focus on issues of particular relevance to workers, but many are aimed at benefiting society as a whole, such as the CLC's recent campaign for a national child care program, and the

BCFL's recent campaign against the weakening of BC's child labour laws.

An important tool the labour councils use to promote these worker, community and broader social issues is lobbying the municipal, provincial and federal politicians representing communities within their labour council area.

Many labour councils also get involved during elections, by supporting progressive candidates who will work for the type of worker, community and social issues supported by labour councils.

If your chapter is interested in affiliating to your local labour council, please contact Carol Rivière at the HSA office. **R**

For more information, check the following websites:

Vancouver & District Labour Council
www.vdlc.ca

Canadian Labour Congress
www.clc-ctc.ca

Canadian Labour Congress Pacific Region
pacific.clc-ctc.ca/

Vote to protect health and social services!



Welcome to your regional meeting on the go: HSA President Cindy Stewart addresses Region 1 delegates on board a Greyhound bound for the recent Victoria rally in support of striking teachers. Region 1 Director Kelly Finlayson looks on.

Activists meet for updates, share experiences

HSA's annual regional meetings wrapped up on Oct. 21 in New Westminster.

For delegates to the Region 1 meeting, it was a mobile event, as business was conducted on a bus from Nanaimo to Victoria. The meeting adjourned in Victoria for a massive rally to support striking teachers. Following the rally, delegates re-boarded the bus and continued the meeting's business.

At each of the 10 regional meetings, stewards met at day-long meetings for updates on a number of issues the union is working on at the local, provincial and national levels. In addition to reports on the labour relations and bargaining activities of the union, information was shared about the work be-

ing done by HSA's committees, including the Political Action and Committee for Equality and Social Action.

Regional meetings are also an opportunity for stewards to share information and experiences about the issues in local workplaces, and for HSA's Board of Directors and senior staff to hear the common concerns.

At the meetings, delegates were elected to the Bargaining Proposal Conference for members covered by the HSA Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association. The Bargaining Proposal Conference will be held in January 2006. The current collective agreement expires March 31, 2006. **R**

Helping labour spread community empowerment

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN

The old adage “Think globally, act locally” is nicely embodied in the person of Thalia Vesterback. As an HSA Member at Large for Region 9, Vesterback appreciates the opportunities union activism gives her. When she can help improve conditions for herself and colleagues, she is satisfied.

When she can influence the politics of health care in BC, she is gratified. But she always keeps one eye on the big picture – a picture bigger than health care, bigger than the labour movement, bigger than Canada: for Vesterback, union activism is one strand of a larger weave that includes justice, economic equality, and an empowered citizenry all over the world.

“I’m tired of unions being thought of as a bunch of greedy people,” Vesterback said. “People don’t get the bigger picture. Not everyone is going to be in a well-paying union job, but the unions create a standard for what wages and conditions should be in a profession. Really, not just union people but every-

“Unions create a standard for what wages and conditions should be in a profession. Really, not just union people but everyone should be making those good wages. I see my goal as trying to raise the bar for everyone.”

one should be making those good wages. I see my goal as trying to raise the bar for everyone.

“HSA does lots of support for groups in third world countries as well as working locally. For in-

stance, we support women’s and union groups in Central America. This lets us take a good look at global politics, such as the growing gap between rich and poor, or the privatization of utilities and energy companies,” Vesterback said.

Unions spread empowerment through the community, she said. “We provide education, encourage people to get involved, teach people skills so they can stand up and speak up.”

People take new skills and attitudes out into their lives, bringing energy and know-how to other civic groups or charities they are part of, as well as to their interactions with power structures in general. Unions promote the whole idea of standing up – not just for your own rights but for those of everyone in our human community, Vesterback said.

Vesterback, an X-ray and Ultrasound Technologist by training, is currently the Picture Archiving and Communications System (PACS) Administrator for the Kootenay Boundary area. As the name implies, her job involves complex computer technology, but ultimately it is about improving patient care, sometimes in dramatic ways.

Over the past ten years or so, digital storage has been replacing film in medical imaging. PACS is a centralized computer system for the storage and distribution of these images.

“It used to be that when someone went in for an X-ray or ultrasound, the patient would have a bag that the film went in. This is a fancy masterbag, but instead of having an actual bag, it’s all computerized,” Vesterback explained. “Anyone hooked up to



Through her work and her community activism, Thalia Vesterback is making a difference.

the PACS system can look at it, so it's really improved patient care. It's actually saved lives.

"For example, there was a case where the patient was supposed to be transferred from Grand Forks to Kelowna. The doctor in Kelowna was able to look at the images immediately rather than waiting for the patient to arrive, and based on that he said, no, this patient has to go to Vancouver right away. He was in the OR in two hours. It saved his life. It's nice to be part of a good news story in health care these days," Vesterback said.

It was the bad news stories, however, that spurred her to become active in HSA.

"It was Bill 29 that motivated me. The unilateral position of the government, the changes in health care, the creation of the health authority were all happening and I wanted to learn more about the system. There didn't seem to be a lot of respectful treatment of people in some places and I wanted to make sure people were being treated properly," she said.

"And then the whole reorganization of the lab in this area with lab technologists being given their pink slips and then having them rescinded *twice*—you're

"We met with the MLA for Kootenay Boundary, which went well, and last December we met with Colin Hansen. The first time I was really nervous, but the more you do it the more comfortable you get."

laid off, not laid off, laid off, not laid off. Due process was not being followed."

Vesterback became a steward in early 2002, and a Member at Large later that year. She is now in her second term as Member at Large.

One experience Vesterback particularly values is participation in HSA's Constituency Liaison program, where Vesterback learned how to effectively lobby MLAs. "This is one way I see I can make a difference. We met with the MLA for Kootenay Boundary, which went well, and last December we met with Colin Hansen. The politicians are the ones controlling the money coming in so we need to include them in our sphere," Vesterback said.

Meeting with politicians was scary at first, says Vesterback. "I took co-workers with me. The first time I was really nervous but the more you do it the more comfortable you get." She has learned valuable lessons about effective communication along the way.

Thalia Vesterback
Member at Large
Picture Archiving and
Communications System Administrator
Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital

*Continued
next page*

Helping labour spread community empowerment

*Continued from
previous page*

“There’s so much I’ve learned through different workshops, things like effective letter writing, public speaking, going to BC Federation of Labour conventions and listening to people talk there,” she said. She has learned new skills – “Be prepared. Learn your message. Don’t use notes. Memorize what you need to say so it feels natural” – and also new attitudes, such as the value of keeping a cool head.


“I’ve realized that if you come out with an effective voice and clear message then you’re much more apt to get the attention of people versus if you’re doing a lot of emotional ranting. HSA has taught me that.

“I think it’s really good to try to see the other side, not to think your argument is the only valid

one. I used to be very strong in my opinions but now...well...I’m still a type-A personality but I’m definitely learning to be more aware of other people,” Vesterback said.

The rewards of activism are clear and immediate for Vesterback. For instance, although she was nervous going into meetings with MLAs as part of HSA’s Constituency Liaison program, she felt great walking out.

“Afterwards you feel really good. You really feel you’re part of the solution. You’re trying to make people pause. If that makes even one person change how they think about something, you get the ripple effect and it will change more people’s perspectives,” Vesterback said. **R**

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Will new federal transfer halt privatization of health care?

Lost in the fog of rhetoric surrounding the Gomery commission, and the timing of the next election, is a serious initiative by the federal New Democratic Party to place real limits on the privatization of health care services in Canada.

NDP Leader Jack Layton has been hammered in the mainstream media, and other opposition parties, for continuing to negotiate with Prime Minister Paul Martin on whether or not NDP MPs will maintain support for the minority government of Prime Minister Paul Martin in Parliament.

But far too little attention has been paid so far to one of the most important issues they have been discussing, i.e. the establishment of 'real limits' on the growth of private health care across the country.

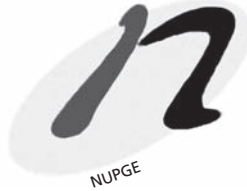
NDP health critic Jean Crowder met with Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh recently, continuing discussions initiated early by Layton and Martin.

"(For-profit health care) is gradually taking apart our medicare system," Layton said. "We've seen no action by this government, despite various pronouncements. And we want to see rules put in place."

The Liberals were expected to make the NDP a serious offer on the issue.

After his earlier meeting with Martin, Layton said he thought the Liberals were prepared to "embark on a significant change in direction on the issue of private health care and may consider rules to prevent its growth.

"This would represent a major change from the last 12 years, in which private care has grown under a Liberal government," he said.



"For-profit health care is gradually taking apart our medicare system. We've seen no action by this government, despite various pronouncements. We want to see rules put in place."

"The NDP presented specific proposals. These included recommendations to attach conditions to federal transfers to prohibit them being used to subsidize private health care, and restrictions on physicians practising inside and outside the public system. It is now incumbent upon the government to outline its ideas," he said.

"Though skeptical given the Liberal record, the NDP believes the movement shown makes it worth continuing the process. We have seen many instances – from proportional representation to climate change to patronage – of the principles

Mr. Martin says he supports being undermined by the policies Liberals enacts. We hope that this is not the case with private health care and some of the other areas outlined on October 16, and await the government's response with interest."

Fighting privatization of health care, and preserving Canada's national public health care system has been an ongoing major policy objective of the 340,000-member National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) and its component unions across the country.

Health science professionals sharing information and canvassing opportunities

Health science professionals from across Canada gathered in Ottawa November 3-4 for a meeting of the Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat (CHPS) to share information and canvass the key opportunities and challenges facing health science professionals.

Some of the issues discussed included:

- the significant and growing shortages of health science professionals across the spectrum of care;
- the status of various government initiatives to address these shortages, including the wait times reduction strategy;
- employment conditions and collective bargaining trends, and
- health reform initiatives, such as regionalization and enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration in primary health care.

James Clancy, president of the National Union of Public and General Employees

*Continued
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CONTRACT INTERPRETATION

It's your right: questions and answers about your collective agreement rights

Job qualifications

by RITU MAHIL

Q A senior colleague of mine has retired and her job has been posted. I would like to apply but the employer has revised the job description and added all sorts of qualifications that were not required before. Could this possibly be the subject of a grievance?

A Yes. Qualifications must have a reasonable relationship to the work to be done; that is, they must actually be required in order to do the work. If the job has not changed and if the newly added qualifications are not required to perform the duties of the job, then the employer may have overstepped its authority to set job qualifications.

Q Given my personal history with this employer, I actually think that the job description has been revised to prevent me from applying for this job. When can an employee or union grieve the contents of a job description?

A It is the employer's right to establish the qualifications necessary for any job, but this right is limited. The employer is required to establish qualifications necessary for a job to genuinely do what they purport to do. They may not, in other words, act arbitrarily, unreasonably, or in bad faith, and use "establishing qualifications" as a guise to restrict employee rights under the collective agreement. If new additions to the job description are unrelated to the actual duties of the job, and you have evidence of the employer's unreasonable or bad faith conduct, you should speak to your union steward.

Q What sorts of things would an arbitrator consider when deciding whether the employer acted reasonably or not in setting job qualifications?

A The test of reasonableness that arbitrators apply in such situations is whether management has deviated from the path of relevancy: in forming its opinion, did it take into account irrelevant considerations, fail to take into account relevant ones, or consider evidence which is insufficient to support the premises from which the opinion is derived? An arbitrator is entitled to review any and all considerations which management took into account or should have taken into account in making its decision

Q I spoke to my supervisor about this new posting and was told that although the employer has hired people in the past without some of the qualifications listed in the job description, they will insist upon all listed qualifications this time. Can they do this?

A Yes, but it may be used as evidence of the employer's bad faith in any selection grievance that may arise from this set of facts. Bad faith in the setting of qualifications might be indicated not only by the fact that those requirements were in themselves unreasonable; but also by the fact that they were imposed upon a job which had been performed in the past, to the apparent satisfaction of the employer, by employees lacking those qualifications.

Where there has been a history of waiving a posting requirement, an arbitrator might be entitled to treat sudden insistence upon the prescribed standard as evidence of discrimination against an individual applicant.

NUPGE news

Continued from page 21

Q My supervisor also told me that in the selection process, they will likely only interview those candidates who have direct experience in that exact position.

I know I could carry out the required duties of the job even without this direct experience and wonder if the employer can insist on this.

A Minimum qualifications must be reasonable in the sense that they must bear a reasonable relationship to the basic requirements of the particular job.

An employer cannot artificially puff up the qualifications – particularly preferred qualifications – of the job to the extent that employees who, by any objective standard, have the knowledge, ability and skills to perform the job are either discouraged from applying or, even if they apply, are told they do not meet the qualifications and consequently are “not capable.” **R**

Ritu Mahil is legal counsel for HSA.



This column is designed to help members use their collective agreement to assert or defend their rights and working conditions. Please feel free to send your questions to the editor, by fax, mail, or email yukie@hsabc.org. Don't forget to include a telephone number where you can be reached during the day.

addressed the Secretariat on November 4. Among other things, he discussed the status of the 2004 first ministers' 10-year plan to strengthen health care, and the ramifications of the Supreme Court of Canada's Chaoulli decision.

As well, Dr. Brian Postl, the recently-appointed federal ad-

Some of the issues discussed included the significant and growing shortages of health science professionals across the spectrum of care, and the status of various government initiatives to address these shortages, including strategies to reduce wait times.

visor on wait times, met with the Secretariat to share his perspective and to hear from members. The Secretariat took the opportunity to underline that the health human resource shortages at the heart of the wait list problem extends well beyond doctors and nurses, and that inattention to the equally pressing problem of health science professionals shortages threatens to erode any wait list improvement we've seen so far.

The Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat was created by NUPGE to address challenges and opportunities facing health science professionals across the country. The Secretariat represents more than 60,000 women and men who deliver the diagnostic, clinical, rehabilitation, pharmacy and other services essential to quality health care. HSA President Cindy Stewart is Co-Chair of the Secretariat. **R**

FOCUS ON PENSIONS

How is the Municipal Pension Plan funded?

Looking forward to a secure future

Q: How is my pension funded?

A: As a member of the Municipal Pension Plan, you are no doubt looking forward to a secure retirement, with enough income to enjoy life when your working income ends. But you may wonder where the money will come from, not only for your pension, but for the pensions of all the other members of the plan.

Plan funding comes from member and employer contributions, and income from the plan's investment assets. These funding sources are managed on behalf of all members by the Municipal Pension Board of Trustees.

To make sure contributions are adequate to fund current and future pensions, the board assesses the plan every three years with an actuarial valuation. This is an in-depth review of the plan's financial health that considers economic statistics and demographic factors such as the age, gender and life expectancy of plan members. If the valuation indicates that there is a gap between plan liabilities

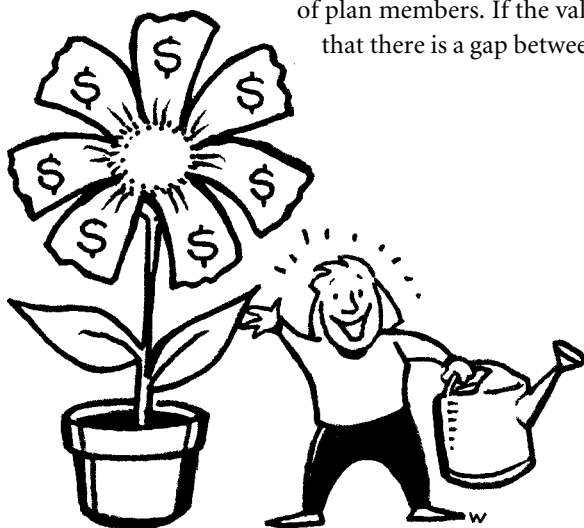
(the total pension promise) and plan assets, contributions may be increased.

Also, the board oversees the management of the plan's investment assets through its investment management agent, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation. In the 2004 *Annual Report*, the board explains that its investment goal is "to achieve consistent and steady performance over the longer term based on a disciplined approach and prudent decision-making."

As you can see, the plan's funds are carefully managed, not only for the short term, but also for the future.

To learn more about plan funding, visit the plan's website at pensionsbc.ca, where you will find the current and past annual reports and other investment-related information.

Also on the website is information about the board and about plan governance. **R**



In this regular feature, the Municipal Pension Plan answers frequently-asked questions. See pensionsbc.ca for more information about the Municipal Pension Plan.

Disputes show public services matter

by JEANNE MEYERS

History appears to be repeating itself in the world of labour relations under a Liberal government.

Bill 12 was introduced October 3 to end the teachers' job action, and the reaction from teachers was swift and decisive. They decided to defy the legislation. And then they defied the BC Labour Relations Board and BC Supreme Court rulings their withdrawal of service was illegal.

Sound familiar?

What has changed since HSA and other unions first faced the heavy hand of Liberal-style labour relations?

On the face of it, not very much, really. In the past four years, the government has shown time and again that it prefers a heavy legislative hammer over productive, cooperative negotiations.

Since the Liberal government came to power in 2001, the International Labour Organization (ILO) – a branch of the United Nations has found that the government violated ILO standards nine times. Canada is a signatory to those standards, and has sworn to uphold them.

BC Labour Minister Mike DeJong is just the latest Liberal to brush off the criticisms of this

In just four years of Liberal government, BC leads all of North America in the rate of complaints to the United Nations' International Labour Organization.



Jeanne Meyers, HSA Legal Services

respected international body, clearly unconcerned that British Columbia now has the embarrassing record of have more ILO complaints filed against it than any other Canadian province in the organization's 84-year history. In fact, British Columbia leads all of North America in the rate of complaints in just four years.

The rights the government has been found by this international tribunal to violate are fundamental ones: the right to join a union and to engage in free collective bargaining, without undue government interference.

But that's not the only way history has repeated itself.

The disputes that led to job action by HEU last year, and the BCTF this year caught the government by surprise. While they believed their formula of attack on big, bad, labour would win them points with the public, they seriously underestimated labour's success in getting important messages about public services like health care and education out to the public.

The 15 per cent roll-back of HEU members' wages – and the plan to make the roll-back

Continued page 27

Labour councils: a necessity in our communities

by JACKIE SPAIN

After a short time in office as HSA Regional Director for the Kootenays, Region 9, I was asked to consider participating as a delegate to the East Kootenay Labour Council.

My first question was, 'what is a Labour Council?' I learned that Labour Councils are part of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) which is the central labour organization in Canada. In the East Kootenays, which includes Cranbrook, the Elk Valley, Creston and as far north as Golden, union activists from unions affiliated to the CLC meet regularly.

There is representation from public and private sector unions. Public sector unions include teachers, public health care workers, government workers at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Private sector unions are unions that primarily represent people who work in the private sector, including forest company and mill workers, retail workers, and construction workers.

Some are provincial unions, like HSA, that represent members only in the province. Some are national unions, like the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) or the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) that have members across the country. There are also international unions, like the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), which represent workers in and outside Canada.

To become a delegate to the Labour Council, I went through the process laid

out in HSA policy, which allows for chapters to elect their representative to the Labour Council and HSA board approval of the election.

I have never regretted going to my first meeting. I found a group of volunteers who came together with the best interests of their co-workers and communities in mind. We worked hard to create a place where real issues affecting workers and their communities were discussed with some honesty and solutions in mind. I soon was vice-president and later president of the labour council.

The East Kootenay and Labour Council is very active – from supporting affiliated unions and their members when help is needed, lending help to community organizations, and organizing one of the most successful Labour Day picnics in BC.

I absolutely felt the spirit of Labour Day this year when I saw hundreds of people enjoy themselves, and where the whole community was invited and included – whatever their circumstances. Proceeds from the concession and other fundraising events that day were donated to the the local food bank.

As part of continuing to build awareness about unions and workers' issues, the East Kootenay Labour



Jackie Spain, Region 9 Director

Council organizes other events such as the Day of Mourning, April 28th. This is the day that is used to remember fallen workers. It is a day that can be used to bring awareness about the issues through the media.

Labour Councils also get involved in politics through a Political Action Committee, supporting municipal, school and library board candidates by giving what is called an endorsement.

This means the candidate has undergone a process – usually a formal interview – to demonstrate their commitment to issues important to the working people of the community.

Labour Councils work for the good of working people and communities throughout this country and internationally. Some have been in existence for over 100 years here in British Columbia.

I encourage you to check out your local labour council and see for yourself this hard-working group of volunteers working for you and your community. **R**

Jackie Spain represents Region 9 on HSA's Board of Directors.

The Report is dedicated to giving information to HSA members, presenting their views and providing them a forum. The Report is published six times a year as the official publication of the Health Sciences Association, a union representing health and social service professionals in BC. Readers are encouraged to submit their views, opinions and ideas.

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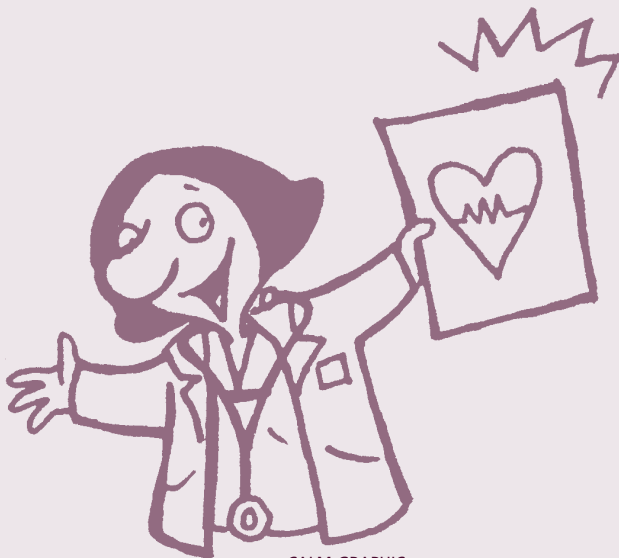
Attacks on labour not working for government

retroactive – enraged not just HEU members, but the general public who understood the fundamental unfairness of changing contract terms so unjustly.

The dispute this fall between teachers and the government also didn't go according to plan. Premier Gordon Campbell admitted that the public support for the teachers had taken his government by surprise. Public opinion was with the teachers, who in their dispute were able to bring classroom size and composition into the popular lexicon. The public understood that fundamentally what teachers were speaking up for was better learning conditions for students.

While public sector unions have been a favourite target for the Liberal government, the experience of the past few years has shown that public services are important to British Columbians — and that bodes well for an improved negotiating climate for the public sector unions, including HSA, that are heading into an important round of bargaining next year. **R**

Jeanne Meyers oversees HSA's legal services.



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MEMBER PUBLICATION

VICTORIA RALLY OCTOBER 18

Speaking up for teachers and other public service providers



Cindy Stewart (HSA President) and Ron Ohmart (Executive Director of Labour Relations) joined Region 1 members in supporting BC teachers as they fought for a fair contract. More coverage page 16.



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