



A return to good faith

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Months of uncertainty ended July 9.

That's when an historic agreement between the NDP and Green Party of BC created a governing coalition that could hold a majority of seats in the BC Legislature, and bring down the minority BC Liberal government that had been hanging on since the May election.

Years of indifference ended July 18. That's when Premier John Horgan and his cabinet was sworn in after 16 years of BC Liberal government.

Much can be said about the record of cuts, creeping privatization and lack of investment in people which characterized the administrations of Gordon Campbell and his successor Christy Clark. Throughout it all, HSA strived to maintain a constructive relationship with the government, and we met with some success even at the most difficult times. But we fought constantly against a discouraging indifference. The BC Liberal governments did not give high priority to working with unions. They did not put the needs of working people at the centre of their government. Their commitment to public health care itself often seemed weaker than their desire to open the doors for private, for-profit opportunities.

I have no doubt that those days are now behind us.

The NDP government will not be able to solve the many problems it inherits overnight. They face many difficult decisions, and not all will please members of unions like ours, because the NDP takes seriously their responsibility to govern for all British Columbians, not just the ones who helped them achieve power. I think that is something we should respect.

But while we must be prepared for disappointments, I know that this is a government that puts the needs of working people at the heart of its choices. A government that respects and understands unions. A government that is deeply committed to restoring public health care in BC. A government that is listening intently to the needs of our members.

HSA has already engaged productively with the new ministers of Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Labour and others. The work of our Constituency Liaisons over the last few years has ensured that the new government understands our members and their contribution to the health care and social services systems. They are seeking our input on key matters like reducing wait times, improving mental health and addictions services, reducing violence in the workplace, and addressing shortages in many professions.

This fall, we ask our members to guide the priorities of the coming round of contract negotiations. We will take those priorities forward to an NDP government that will, in many ways, be tougher than the BC Liberals because of their commitment to accountability. But for the first time in decades, we will be negotiating with a government that understands what it means to bargain in good faith. And that's a very good thing.

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