

BULLETIN

Delegates gather to share mobilizing ideas, debate issues

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SAs 32nd annual convention wrapped up Saturday, April 12 after two days of debate on issues ranging from the Campbell governments record on health care and social services, to the unions support for the 2010 Olympic bid.

Stewart acclaimed for sixth term
Cindy Stewart, a physiotherapist from Vernon, was elected to a sixth term as president of the Health Sciences Association. Stewart has served 10 years as the unions president. In her speech to the unions 32nd annual convention, she reflected on how HSA has grown in the past 10 years, and particularly the past two years of a Liberal government.

-These past 18 months came on the heels of an imposed contract that had the potential to rip us apart; you didn't let that happen," she told convention delegates.

-You showed what we already know. We know that together we are stronger. From how we organize the staff working for the membership• to education programs for members• to taking a lead role in consolidating the strength of unions with the same community of interest on a national level• we have taken advantage of the best things about HSA and put them together to make an impact.

-As an organization, we've worked to be forward-looking. By sticking to our goals, and being true to our culture, we're finding ways to get to where we want to be.

"And we're starting to see some results."

For example, she said, HSA has been a key player in developing the Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat, which brings together unions from across Canada who represent health science professionals. The secretariat, co-chaired by Stewart, is working to establish a national presence and identity for health science professionals.

Here at home, it was HSA that led the way to the International Labour Organization.

HSA was the first union to take a complaint to the ILO following the Liberal government's attack on our contracts. Several other unions joined HSA and the international condemnation of the BC laws backs the complaints of more than 150,000 union members working in the public service ... in government, health care or education.

-This is a high profile and significant victory, but in the short term you won't feel the effects directly. Gordon Campbell said "thanks for your input" but has no plans to change anything, even in light of this black eye BC now sports at the international level," Stewart said.

And that, she said, is the next challenge to HSA members.

-We all want a union that's relevant. A union that is able to uphold rights you have negotiated. A union that delivers sound, solid and successful labour relations.

"If we want that, then we have a responsibility to ensure that the environment we live in values those goals and allows them to thrive.

-Our political system demands that we take measures to be noticed. Like all the other strategies we've developed, we are working on a political strategy that reflects our values, and gives us a distinct voice. Because we have a responsibility to make our voices heard." She announced the appointment of HSA constituency liaisons, who will work to ensure key MLAs in the Liberal government hear from HSA about the unions' perspective on government activities.

She reminded delegates that the work has just begun.

-We've stuck to a training plan, we've got the right shoes, we've kept ourselves hydrated, and we've hit our pace.

-The finish line may seem a long way away. But, taking it one step at a time, we're well prepared for the journey," she said.

Over the course of convention, delegates spoke about the devastating impact of the Campbell cuts to health care and social services. Many delegates also noted the effects of the Liberals contract-breaking legislation which has led to increased stress, burnout and a general feeling that health care professionals are not valued by government. Delegates passed several resolutions calling on the union to take a strong stand against the Liberal agenda.

Delegates called on HSA to lobby the provincial government to take action to stop the erosion of services in a number of areas, including:

- Providing supported childcare and early childhood education to best meet the needs of children who have disabilities, and their caregivers;
- Reinstatement of benefits previously covered under the BC Medical Services Plan (MSP), as well as the elimination of MSP premiums;
- Reversing the governments decision to de-list eye examinations from MSP;
- Public outpatient physiotherapy services; and
- Reversing the decision to privatize and contract out health services.

Resolutions were also passed calling on HSA to continue to lobby the federal government to adopt the recommendations contained in the Romanow Report, as well as to ensure the federal government make provincial governments accountable for health care spending.

Reflecting the convention theme of "Stronger Together," delegates directed the union to continue to work through the BC Federation of Labour to promote and facilitate the development of a coalition between labour and community social action groups to fight the provincial government cuts to social programs and services. Delegates also passed a resolution supporting the unions efforts to work together with professional associations to advance issues of interest and concern to HSA members.

Delegates rejected a resolution to waive the payment of union dues from on-call pay received by members.

"I've been packing a beeper for 14 years," delegate Allen Peters said.

"The union has gone to bat for us. Its gone to arbitration and we have an award," he said, referring to a recent award that found employers have violated the paramedical professional bargaining association collective agreement since October 2001 by denying double time pay for call-backs on scheduled days off.

"That's because of the dues we pay. If we dont pay, we dont get service like that. Its that simple," Peters said.

Other resolutions passed at convention included a resolution that the Board of Directors investigate ways of supporting stewards work, including the feasibility of paid steward time. Several resolutions were also passed supporting the unions continued work with the BC Federation of Labour to campaign against cuts to occupational health and safety, and the watering down of workers compensation legislation. 

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