

BULLETIN

Your participation counts, more than ever

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September is always a month of renewal. After a summer with friends and family we're re-energized to take on another year of challenges.

And we will not lack for challenges facing us in the coming year. Fortunately, it has been my experience that HSA members are always there when the issues are important to their families, their communities and their work. With municipal elections just around the corner, the coming months will be an important opportunity to have a say in how your communities are represented. You need to know if candidates are aware of and taking positions to protect their communities from the effects that changes to public services will have on their communities and the local economy.

Mark November 16 on your calendar as the day that you can make a difference. In municipalities right across British Columbia, Saturday, November 16 is election day.

But also mark the days on your calendar before that. Because the biggest difference you can make is by being an active participant in the process.

Municipal and school board elections don't get the attention of either the media or the voters that they should. Voter turn-out on election day is traditionally very low – particularly in larger communities. For example, in Surrey less than one third of eligible voters cast their ballots in the 1999 municipal election.

Voting is a basic way for you to participate in community decision-making, particularly at the municipal level. But perhaps more important than your vote is letting your community know about the issues that are important to you.

Participation comes in all shapes and sizes. Some HSA members will run for office, some will work for specific candidates, some will lobby local politicians to support their particular issues, some will vote.

Whatever you do on election day, don't stay home. Spend the next few weeks finding out something about the people who want to represent you at the city council table or on the local school board. Are they defending your interests? Your family's interests? Your community's interests?

And remember, municipal and school board elections aren't just about your local community. They are about the political fabric of our province. Councils and school boards are the farm teams for provincial politics. It's at the municipal level that politicians cut their teeth and groom themselves for higher office.

When your mayor, city councillor or school board representative sits in silence as the actions of the provincial government hurt health care, the delivery of public services and the economy in your own community, that's

your cue for speaking up.

Local elected officials have an obligation to represent your community's interests. If your community is affected by the closure or downsizing of a health care facility, and your representatives on council do nothing to oppose the cuts, they're giving tacit support to the decision.

Don't let them get away with it. Write letters to the editor, find out about the candidates in your community and find out how you can help support those candidates who reflect your feelings and concerns for the issues facing your community.

Don't sit back and wait for someone else to take on the responsibility for your community.

Municipal elections and getting involved in the local decision-making in your area will be on the agenda at our upcoming fall regional meetings. In addition, we have designed a new course on getting involved in municipal elections and developing effective lobbying tools to help HSA activists develop the skills needed to work on making a difference in your community.

We are all responsible for our communities and by extension our province, and now, more than ever, we must accept that responsibility. 

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