



A unique opportunity

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Negotiating contracts is a big part of what unions do for their members. But it's not the only thing.

Yet for the last several years, HSA and other unions have expended the bulk of their resources and time negotiating contracts with governments intent on imposing austerity terms on public employees. It's been a tough slog, and I'm proud of the results we've achieved in spite of many, many challenges, but now that we have a five-year deal, I'm looking forward to making progress on other important work.

Every day, HSA members need help with problems at the workplace, and our labour relations staff is now able to turn their full attention to servicing. We have plans to expedite work on classifications to ensure members are getting paid properly, make progress on sorting out the mess caused by employers misunderstanding the transition to a 37.5 hour work week, and help members with all manner of grievances.

Outside the workplace, unions and their members are facing some very serious threats at the national level, where the Harper government appears to be demonizing unions and their members as it prepares for a divisive election campaign next year. They have begun to attack public sector pensions, claiming that they are a drain on spending rather than an important tool for reducing income inequality. They have tabled legislation to impose financial disclosure laws that would tie unions up with excessive reporting obligations that wouldn't apply to any other organizations. And in some provinces, there are plans to introduce American-style dues evasion laws, allowing individuals to skip out on paying union dues while still enjoying the benefits of union protection.

All of these developments threaten HSA, but we're not alone. This is where our national affiliations allow us to work with unions across the country and address these concerns with collective action. We're already working together to make the public and our own membership aware of these issues.

We'll also be working with our affiliated partners on threats to our public health care system. The federal government's refusal to show leadership on funding or co-ordination of provincial health care systems is steadily eroding the safety of the care Canadians need. And at the provincial level, we are closely monitoring the legal challenge of private clinics.

With a five-year deal, we have a unique opportunity to make progress on all these fronts, and I intend to make the most of it.

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