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We don't back down from a fight, Whiteside tells HEU delegates

In her inaugural speech to convention as HEU's secretary-business manager, Jennifer Whiteside urged delegates to build member power by fostering a culture of solidarity and inclusion.

She asked, "Do we understand what different groups of workers face at work and in their communities? Where are they subject to racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and other forms of discrimination? And how have they been unduly impacted by privatization?"

Whiteside said the union's work on equity is both urgent and ongoing. "We have a moral responsibility to eliminate bias and prejudice, not just in our workplaces, but within our union. And it will take leadership at all levels to make this a reality."

She praised members in their fightback campaigns against privatization and contracting out in various communities.

"We don't back down from a fight," said Whiteside. "There's courage everywhere in our union... And I have to say, HEU is lucky to have such courageous and committed members who believe in our union."

Whiteside called the BC Liberals' boast of a strong economy a "rigged economy", where the benefits are not shared, where one in five kids is poor, where community social services are neglected, and workers can no longer afford to live in the communities where they are employed.

After sharing her personal concerns about how her 87-year-old mother will be cared for when she needs it, Whiteside introduced HEU's recent commercial promoting the union's *Care Can't Wait* seniors' campaign, prompting a spontaneous ovation.



In closing, Whiteside thanked the Provincial Executive, HEU staff and members for their dedication to the union and their support.

"I've witnessed many acts of kindness, courage and solidarity shared between HEU members – and such strength," she said. "That's why I know this union will continue to thrive and inspire a whole new generation of activists."

Local building, social justice and political action underscore president's message

In his opening address, HEU president Victor Elkins thanked delegates for attending convention to carry out the democratic business of our union.

"I know that it takes a lot of commitment to be an activist these days, and a lot of personal sacrifice," he said.

And Elkins recognized the many challenges locals are facing in engaging members at the local level.

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HEU president Victor Elkins pledges the union's continued fight for a health system that "does not provide care based on the size of your wallet."

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"Locals are the foundation of HEU," said Elkins. "If we are to keep building our union power, we need strong, functioning locals that can inspire, involve and mobilize members."

After reminding delegates that HEU's Political Action Campaign helped unseat Stephen Harper, he said, "This spring, we will be again working with our members and allies to give Christy Clark her pink slip and put her out of a job."

Elkins said that how members cast their ballots in the voting booth is their own choice.

"However, it's the union's responsibility to provide political leadership during an election by informing members about policies and platforms that will affect their lives and livelihoods."

Putting people ahead of profits

In a passionate speech to delegates, the public health care advocate tag team of BC Health Coalition campaigner Adam Lynes-Ford and Canadian Doctors for Medicare Dr. Rupinder Brar inspired members to take action.

In their keynote address about the legal battle now underway in B.C.'s highest court between private clinic CEO Brian Day and supporters of public Medicare, the speakers made it clear what losing this case may mean for Canada's most cherished social program.

"A win for Brian Day would be a loss for Canadians," said Lynes-Ford. "If long wait times is truly the illness that Brian Day wants to treat, his cure would be much worse than the disease."

Dr. Brar affirmed that groups like the BC Health Coalition and Canadian Doctors for Medicare are fighting this case on behalf of all Canadians who rely on a universal health care system.

"A two-tier system would mean longer wait times, poorer health and skyrocketing health care costs for Canadians," explained Brar.

The speakers also thanked HEU and the delegates for being a vital part of this fight, recognizing the union's strong support and financial aid to challenge Day in court.

Following the presentation, delegates adopted two motions to protect, maintain and strengthen Canada's public health system.

In particular, both the motions called on the provincial and federal governments to enforce national standards, scale-up public solutions to deal with the issues facing the public system and reverse the expansion of private care.

Tuesday wrapped up with the start of Provincial Executive elections for regional positions, as well as an exciting program for Equity Night.



HEU member Joanne Foote shares information and promotes First Nations culture at the union's Equity Night festivities.