

CUPE BC Political Action Committee

Report to Convention – April 2018

Every level of government has an impact on every aspect of our lives. Every decision a government makes has an impact on our families, our communities and our workplaces. In a democracy, our power lies in being able to influence government decisions but more significantly, it lies in our ability to influence who forms government.

Political action is fundamental to the work of our union. CUPE BC, together with its Locals and the National Union, has the ability to advocate for fairness and equality, workplace rights, and better public services for our families, our communities, and ourselves. With 87,000 members across BC, we also have a critical mass of voters we can mobilize in an election.

Our committee works to engage CUPE BC members in political action, and particularly electoral politics. Our goal is to elect and support progressive representatives who care as much as we do for our communities and the public services our members deliver.

CUPE Fights Back

The summer of 2017 saw 600 members of CUPE Local 1816, Pacific Blue Cross, locked out of their workplace. An anti-worker agenda focused on concession bargaining brought the work of Pacific Blue Cross to a virtual standstill. Labour rallied in support of the CUPE Local 1816 members and they held strong with a round-the-clock picket line during the 66-day lockout. In December, once again with massive CUPE and labour support, over 700 primary plan members attended the Pacific Blue Cross annual general meeting. All seven board seats up for election were replaced by a slate of labour-endorsed candidates. The election sent a clear message about the desire for change at PBC and represents an overwhelming rebuke of the company's treatment of its workers in the last round of bargaining.

Community Elections

On October 20, 2018 elections are being held across BC for school trustees, councilors, mayors and electoral area directors. In communities large and small we will be electing representatives to hold office and make decisions that will affect you and your community. In some cases, the candidates might be your neighbour, friend, or family member. In some cases, the candidate might be you. We all know someone who would be a progressive candidate but if they haven't run for office before they may not know what is involved or even where to start. Our committee has created a roadmap document to becoming a candidate. It is available at our booth so please stop by and pick up a copy and see what else we have to share.

Local Elections Campaign Financing

Bill 15, Local Elections Campaign Financing Amendment Act, bans corporate and union donations, restricts individual donations and set limits for campaign spending in municipal election campaigns. This means many things we did in the past as activists, locals and candidates will no longer be allowed.

The good news is that there are still many ways to get involved including:

- ✓ Identify and train candidates in the period between elections (activists can run for office provided their campaigns are independent from the activities of their union);
- ✓ Train candidates during the election/campaign period provided we charge market rate;
- ✓ Endorse candidates through Locals, District Councils, and Labour Councils;
- ✓ Host all-candidate meetings;
- ✓ Promote endorsed candidates directly to members by phone, email, face-to-face, social media, and get out the vote (GOTV) activities;
- ✓ Encourage union members to volunteer for endorsed candidates (on their own time);
- ✓ Encourage union members to vote for endorsed candidates.

We need to get back to basics with tried and true member-to-member activities. Union members can donate to campaigns as individuals, can work on campaigns as long as it is on their own time, can take vacation time to work on campaigns, can talk to one

another about endorsed candidates and how they are going to vote. Since member-to-member contact will be so important in elections moving forward, ensuring that CUPE BC have up-to-date membership contact lists including email addresses will be vital. Please update your information as soon as possible.

Community Elections Coordinator

CUPE has a Community Elections Coordinator working fulltime and all-out to ensure our Locals across BC are doing everything they can to elect politicians who share our values.

We will be targeting our efforts, focusing on communities where we have the opportunity and capacity to make a difference – by re-electing politicians we have established working relationships with, and defeating politicians who have made things difficult for our members and our Locals.

We will be working closely with the Canadian Labour Congress, Labour Councils, and other like-minded organizations to ensure that our efforts are as effective as possible. We will be more successful in these elections if we coordinate our efforts and we will work with you to ensure that there is a progressive candidate on as many ballots as possible in communities throughout BC.

We challenge every Local in BC to find new ways to participate in community elections – and we commit that you will have our support for these efforts. When the votes are counted on October 20th, we hope to celebrate victories in communities across the province.

Political Education

At the CUPE Spring School in Kamloops, May 27 - June 1, there is an intensive weeklong Politics in Action course. This is an excellent opportunity for your existing political activists to take their skills to the next level.

CUPE BC will also ensure that political education opportunities are available to you in your community in whatever format fits the needs of your Locals. They can work with your Local to develop an action plan for the community election, speak to your stewards and members about the importance of participating in these elections, and provide political skills building workshops in an hour or over two days.

We encourage you to consider your Local's political education needs and plan to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Provincial Government

Almost one year ago we went to the polls to vote for our next provincial government. After the closest results ever in a provincial election, an extremely close recount, a motion of non-confidence toppling the BC Liberal government, a Lieutenant Governor's decision and support from the Greens, we have once again achieved an NDP Government in BC.

The BC NDP government respects and supports public services and is focused on those that need the most help in our society.

Congratulations to CUPE member Lisa Beare who was elected to represent Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows and was appointed Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture; former CUPE National President, Judy Darcy, re-elected to represent New Westminster and appointed Minister of Mental Health and Addictions; and CUPE National Representative Rachna Singh, elected to represent Surrey-Green Timbers. Three strong voices in Government. Thank you to CUPE members Stephanie Goudie (Peace River South), Sylvia Lindgren (Shuswap) and Tracey O'Hara (Chilliwack) for running as NDP candidates. Your hard work helped make a difference. Every person on the campaign trail we can educate and shift one step closer to supporting the NDP values of supporting workers, public services and our society will only help in building a better BC.

Electoral Reform

The BC NDP Government is moving forward with its election promise to hold a referendum to ask British Columbians if they want to continue with the current voting system (First Past the Post) or move to a system of Proportional Representation. The referendum must be held no later than November 30, 2018 and will be conducted through a mail-in ballot, with results binding at 50%+1 of the vote province wide. If a new voting system is approved, legislation will be introduced in time for the 2021 provincial general election.

As we work to prepare for the referendum campaign, CUPE BC has joined the Vote PR Campaign, a broad-based coalition supporting the efforts of the electoral reform movements in BC and Canada – Fair Voting BC and Fair Vote Canada, along with many affiliates of the BC Federation of Labour.

Our committee urges you to support the yes side in the electoral reform referendum and to encourage member-to-member political action to have your members vote yes. We also encourage you to campaign in your communities to encourage a successful yes vote.

In closing

Our committee continues to work on the front line of political action, educating CUPE members about the importance of political action and engaging them in electoral process.

We encourage CUPE Locals to affiliate and engage with our Labour Councils and coordinate in upcoming elections. We encourage you to develop a plan for school board and local government elections in your communities. These elections are an opportunity to elect leaders who will stand up for our communities, and an opportunity for us to continue to build our political capacity.

We urge you to ensure CUPE BC has up-to-date contact information for all of your members. This work is vital to our ability to communicate with and mobilize our members.

There is much hard work ahead, but if we work together to engage our members in political education and political action, we can make a difference for working people across BC.

Respectfully submitted:

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