



**COMMUNICATIONS
OFFICERS'
VIDEOCONFERENCE**

September 25, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Communications Officers Videoconference
September 25, 2020
11:00 am EDT

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	Bronwen Barnett Jocelyn Wagner
HSABC/NUPGE	Katie Riecken
HSAA/NUPGE	Kirk Hueser
SGEU/NUPGE	Betty Ann Cox Roseann Strelezki Carolyn Rebeyka
MGEU/NUPGE	Jeremy Peterson John Baert
OPSEU/NUPGE	Andy Pedersen
NSGEU/NUPGE	Holly Fraughton Deedee Slye
NBU/NUPGE	Andrew McGilligan Susie Proulx-Daigle
PEIUPSE/NUPGE	Mark Barrett
NUPGE	Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President) Deborah Duffy, National Representative Theresa Clemen, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

Deborah Duffy, a NUPGE National Representative, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for joining the call. She reviewed the agenda with the participants.

2. National Report

Political Landscape

Sister Duffy reviewed aspects of the most recent federal Throne Speech, highlighting the areas that touched on NUPGE campaigns, such as child care, long-term care, and economic recovery. The government set out its intention to provide a national system of child care that was accessible, affordable, and of high quality. It had adopted the language the labour and social movements use to describe universal child care, which could indicate they are ready to invest what is needed to make it happen. The speech also made reference to establishing national standards for the long-term care sector, and a wage top-up for personal support workers, things that NUPGE has been calling for as part of its campaign to bring long-term care services under the *Canada Health Act*.

As in previous election campaigns and throne speeches, many of the details will not be known until we see if the federal budget includes the money attached to each issue.

Communications and Campaigns

Duffy updated participants on the Canadian Labour Congress's *Forward Together* campaign focused on Canada's social and economic recovery after COVID, with key elements that will benefit both workers and the public. A package of shareables and research will be sent by email to participants.

The campaign is based on polling, focus groups, and research conducted in early September about the priorities of people living in Canada. That analysis determined the campaign's key messaging and narrative framing. It determined that people believe that Canada has fared better than the US, but there are things that need improvement. Participants want to see pragmatic and sensible changes in our recovery plan. The CLC's message about supporting each other through the pandemic and disaster proofing the country is bright, hopeful, and clear.

Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer, joined the meeting. Blundon reminded participants that at the last communications officers' meeting he had asked them what direction NUPGE's communication strategy should move in. Following that, he allocated \$500,000 in the communications budget to start that process. There were current things lacking in the infrastructure for communications (hardware, software, and resources) within NUPGE, or items that need updating.

It was Bert's hope that he would be able to visit Components to see how they did things and to incorporate best practices. NUPGE wants to complement the work of Components and expand its reach, while not scooping issues at the provincial level.

NUPGE has been doing a lot of great work, but doesn't always receive the exposure it deserves. There is an interest in ensuring NUPGE can react in a timely fashion to issues facing our Components and the broader labour movement.

While COVID-19 has altered plans in some regards, it has given us the opportunity to partner with Components to provide financial support for organizations that provide support for different communities across the provinces. To date, 2 Components have organized donations:

- HSABC to Ending Violence Association of BC and the Union Project
- NAPE to the Community Food Sharing Association (CFSA)

Blundon commented on the challenges facing the labour movement, especially on issues such as child care and pharmacare, and that we need to continue to speak out in support of these programs. At the same time, we are facing the attacks from various provincial governments, like Alberta. What is happening in one province will quickly spread to others, and our communications need to be ready to respond to warn members and the public about what's at stake.

Blundon thanked participants for their ongoing work and for taking the time to attend the meeting.

3. Component Reports

British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU/NUPGE) has been campaigning for a national child care program and increased investment in seniors' care. With the election being called, the focus will shift to pressing candidates to make commitments on these issues.

Since the pandemic started, the BCGEU/NUPGE has been collecting photos and stories from members working on the front lines to share online. The campaign highlights the important work members are doing to keep communities safe and healthy.

The BCGEU/NUPGE also established a microsite early on to provide information to help members access the CERB. The union continues to fight for the pandemic pay that was announced by the government.

BCGEU/NUPGE staff were working from home, but now it is only approximately 20% to 50% of the time.

Health Sciences Association of BC (HSABC)

COVID Response

Health Sciences Association of BC reported that most of its members have continued to work during the pandemic. Many members who could work from home did so: information management staff, or administrative staff, as well as significant clinical councilors, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists attended meetings via Zoom.

HSABC/NUPGE members wanted information on health and safety, their rights to accommodation on child care, and in the first 2 months, there were many calls about personal protective equipment (PPE) because the province was undergoing rationing. There were so many calls about health and safety during the first 4 months that HSABC/NUPGE needed to double their health and safety staff.

Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)

Political Landscape

The government is using this moment to further its privatization agenda. They are looking into doubling private surgeries from 15% to 30%. The operating rooms are only functioning at 70%, so there's no need to contract out the work.

The Cambie decision was barely mentioned in Alberta media (Postmedia owned). But the Alberta government has already passed Bill 32, which restricts the work that unions can do. The government is putting in provisions that do not require professional associations to be staffed by professionals in those associations and now can appoint 50% of the regulatory boards. The goal is to set it up that people can opt out of paying dues, without removing the requirement for unions to represent them. Specifically, they are targeting the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL), as well as other associations such as the National Union and the CLC.

There have been no layoffs at this point, but they have not dropped their plans moving forward.

COVID Response

At the onset of COVID-19, members of Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA/NUPGE) contacted the union requesting information on many of the issues mentioned by HSABC/NUPGE. There was a major problem early on about accessing PPE. At first, there was an attempt to keep our members who work in a specific site to work only in that site, but that isn't happening anymore. A lot of the top-ups for wage increases from the federal government have not been passed on by the provincial government. The government is using the money to pay their political staffers and not passing it along to the health care workers, while at the same time extolling their virtues to the province.

Communication and Campaigns

In terms of HSAA communications, there was a large campaign scheduled to start at the beginning of the pandemic, so there was a need to rewrite some of it. The campaign highlights Kenney's promises made during the election to maintain health care services. Postmedia has a strong hold over media in the province, so HSAA is looking to tap into more regional outlets.

The union has been explaining that the positions it takes are approved by members, and are therefore democratic decisions, and that members support working with different organizations. The government wants to undermine the union's support so that it eventually lacks the resources to put up a fight. The government is making so many changes that the labour movement is divided about what it's focusing on as they try to put out fires. There is not a coordinated approach yet. HSAA is focusing on the fact that every public dollar should be going to public health care.

There was a brief discussion about using lawn signs for members and the public to show their support for public health care and the union.

Duffy encouraged people to send their designs of different outreach materials (lawn signs, hand sanitizers, masks, etc.) to her in order to share with the group.

Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)

Political Landscape

In Saskatchewan, the writ will drop on September 26, 2020. SGEU/NUPGE has a couple of staff people running for the NDP.

The government is following the themes in Alberta, some of which Kenny drew from Saskatchewan in the first place, with the *Saskatchewan Employment Act* introduced shortly after the Saskatchewan Party was elected. The government had initially contemplated putting right-to-work legislation forward, but decided not to introduce it. They are likely watching Alberta to see how things are working.

The government is intent on privatizing more public services, including in the Crown sector, by setting up agencies for groups like the firefighters. The province makes big money when they go out to fight fires in other provinces and countries, and the government is looking to make more by selling off the jobs.

COVID response

The SGEU/NUPGE convention was scheduled for April but has been postponed until 2021. It is also a big election year for many sectors in SGEU. The focus has been to set up infrastructure to hold provincial council meetings and weekly administrative meetings virtually.

Buildings were closed to the public, with a small group working at the office. In May,

doors were slowly opened to members for meetings, and SGEU/NUPGE focused on putting all the health and safety protocols in place. By end of June, 40% to 50% of the SGEU/NUPGE staff were back at the office. There was an increase in the fall, with a demand for in-person meetings. October 1 is the date for all of the staff to return to the office to work.

Communications and Campaigns

In the health sector, there has been a focus on ensuring workers have PPE and are receiving their top-up of pandemic pay. The union has been promoting the important work of all front-line workers during the pandemic.

SGEU/NUPGE is developing a new website with an integrated member portal site that will be launched before the end of the year. The union has worked with an internal committee and put out tenders for the redesign. The union has been using Facebook for its communications.

The community-based organization sector is launching a lawn sign campaign.

Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)

Political Landscape

The Manitoba government is moving in directions similar to those in Alberta and Saskatchewan. During COVID, Pallister's approval ratings were very low because Manitoba was the only provincial government without any sort of support for COVID. Manitoba relied exclusively on the federal programs, like the CERB.

The Premier's primary focus, at first, was determining how to lay off MGEU members. The MGEU fought that issue very early. The government wanted to lay off public sector workers, but not health care workers.

COVID response

MGEU members had a lot of questions and were looking for information on COVID, so the union set up a Q & A on the website which was updated regularly and used for emailing members. There were many questions about PPE, as it was a big issue, because there was not enough PPE for all health care workers.

There was a lot of focus on face masks, as workers were required to wear them but the public wasn't at first. The MGEU pushed the government to make it mandatory for the public to wear face masks.

The union filed a grievance for members in the western part of the province over the issue of access to PPEs. People who do health care support services (hands-on direct contact with patients) were ordered to wear face masks inside public spaces, but employers were not going to provide them with any. The issue is ongoing, and the

employer has not changed their position. The MGEU received some media attention when they handed out face masks where it was possible. They had ordered about 10,000 of them, and they were gone quickly.

About 33% of MGEU members employed as civil servants are working from home.

100% of the MGEU's staff members are back in the office, with health and safety protocols in place.

Communications and Campaigns

The MGEU ran a television campaign prior to COVID, so it needed to change the digital content a bit to run during COVID. The campaign was extended almost to June and at the same time, the union also wrote and then ran for a month some radio ads with feel-good messages supporting public services. The radio ad was run a lot mainly because, during COVID, station advertising had dropped considerably. The MGEU had to phone a couple of radio stations to ask them to slow down on the airing of this ad.

The MGEU has launched an internal member campaign called *Healthy Minds at Work*, which is taking hold now. The union is working on a microsite for shareables, and that will be the most public part of the campaign.

In April, May, and June, the MGEU asked members for photos for a photo contest, with a draw to make it more popular. There was certainly no need for a contest and a draw since people were so happy to provide them with photos. The project may be repeated in the fall. The union has also launched a window-sign campaign that focuses on supporting public services.

Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/NUPGE)

Political Landscape

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/NUPGE) polled about 1,000 people in Ontario, and the findings echo some of the things that the CLC found out. People really came to appreciate the value of public services in a way that we had not seen before. Once the pandemic hit, people were more willing to invest in public services as their priority.

COVID Response

Since the pandemic started, OPSEU's approach to public messaging has changed. Now that people are treating public services workers with more respect, the union wants to present itself a little bit differently.

Public sector workers in Ontario have been doing quite well during the pandemic. Overall, few have lost their jobs, particularly on the government side. Since the pandemic, Ford's ratings have gone up with a high public opinion. OPSEU is

communicating in a more measured way and so is Ford. Ford has been quickly ensuring good safety and access to PPE. With OPSEU having only 300 to 400 members contracting the virus in a union of 170,000 members, is very good.

The OPSEU convention has been postponed for 2020.

The union reorganized their staff with a great triage team. Communications are more on the social media platform.

Internally, 23 offices and 5 to 6 membership centres were closed, and for the most part, have remained closed. There is a skeleton crew of staff and leadership in head office, and occasionally, support staff will go into the regional offices for supplies. No sign soon that this is going to change.

Communications and Campaigns

OPSEU has been using telephone town halls to reach members, who are responding very well to this platform.

OPSEU is launching a podcast today that will discuss a hot issue with a member for about 20 minutes.

Their anti-privatization campaign is ongoing. The Ford government tore up a plan that the previous government had made and put in motion to have the sale of cannabis done by public sector workers. It is now in a private system. While the liquor stores remain public, they are always under threat. The previous government instituted beer and wine sales in the grocery stores. They started with 200 stores across the province, but Ford has increased it to 400, and has taken small steps to target small rural LCBO stores.

Along the same lines, Ford has started to undo how health care is delivered in Ontario. While they haven't done it yet, they plan to totally reorganize health care. All these discussions have taken place behind closed doors.

New Brunswick Union (NBU)

Political Landscape

The election that just took place was basically a referendum on how COVID was handled in the province. The Conservative government won a majority, but the new Premier is not liked. The government had closed Clinic 544, which provided public abortions, prior to the election. The anti-abortion legislation became an issue during the election.

COVID response

NBU members have been back in the office for the past several months, with safety protocols in place. The NBU office is still closed to the public.

The NBU is still having its convention at the end of October, but it will be done online via Zoom. The union will be using town hall calls to communicate with members.

Responding to questions about the convention, McGilligan responded that they are using Zoom and will have about 200 people in total on it. They are still working on the logistics of it. There are no requirements for secret ballots this year, so that is not a concern.

Communications and Campaigns

The New Brunswick Union (NBU/NUPGE) used Zoom and town hall meetings to connect with members regarding access to PPE.

The union launched 2 new commercials in English and French during COVID that are still running. They have been the most popular campaign.

Duffy suggested that, since a number of Components are investigating how to hold online conventions, people share information and feedback on what they find and how successful it has been.

Prince Edward Island Union of Public Service Employees (PEIUPSE/NUPGE)

Political Landscape

In 2019, the Conservatives were elected to a minority government. Denis King is the Premier. There will be a by-election, and if the Conservatives win, they will form a majority government.

Liquor stores have been an issue. One election issue was to extend the beer and wine sales into the grocery stores.

COVID Response

In PEI, there have been 58 confirmed cases, and 57 people have recovered. No one is in hospital, and there have not been any deaths.

The government has reported that 16% of the civil servants are working from home.

The PEIUPSE staff worked from home from March until June, but are all back in the office now.

Communication and Campaigns

PEI UPSE launched a campaign, Faces of the Frontline, asking their front-line members for selfies. The union's *Access Newsletter* is mailed out to members and has gone out. The union has found that using social media is good way to communicate with members and the public.

Nova Scotia Government and General Employees' Union (NSGEU)

COVID Response

The NSGEU has been busy answering a lot of questions from members. Most of the 32,000 members are working from home.

Some hospital members did not have access to PPE and had to bring their own face masks but were told by their employers not to wear them.

There were issues around pandemic pay that the union had to deal with.

NSGEU staff were working from home from March until about the 2nd week of June, with safety protocols in place. Some staff were coming into the office to hold town hall calls during the evening. The questions and answers from the town hall calls were posted on the union's website.

The NSGEU is using Zoom for meetings with members and directors. The union will be having a leadership symposium virtually.

Communications and Campaigns

The NSGEU collected about 100 stories from members to use for their publications and magazines.

4. NUPGE Update

The National Union continued to convene meetings via Zoom with committees and occupational working groups in which members were on the front line of the pandemic. Many groups met multiple times a week to provide and receive updates on the pandemic and government responses, including updates on meetings with the federal public health officials.

NUPGE worked with Components to address major problems and used its website to promote issues that were not getting the attention they deserved, such as what was happening to vulnerable communities.

Duffy also reported on the Cambie decision and updated participants on the union's involvement and support for those groups that intervened. She warned that while the case turned out favorably for public health care, there will be more attempts to push privatization in health care from other provinces in the future.

Sister Duffy raised an issue that had been discussed in previous meetings with regard to ways NUPGE and Components could collaborate. She shared her screen to present a few graphics that can be used on social media for "commemorative days." The National Union will continue to produce these items and circulate them to Component communications staff.

A concern was raised about the amount of text in some of the graphics, since screen readers have difficulty capturing them. Images with associated text seem to be a better option.

Sister Duffy encouraged Components to share upcoming releases of projects or papers so NUPGE can be ready to amplify the work. Likewise, Duffy committed to providing some lead time to Communications staff on items NUPGE releases, so they can share items with the members.

There was a discussion about the tools being used to disseminate campaigns and online advertising. It was suggested that the Communications folks could try to use a program that is a little more conducive to working together in a regular place for sharing ideas and information (i.e., Microsoft Teams). Participants commented that not everyone uses that as a platform, so we will continue to look into it.

Duffy reported that someone had asked about having a discussion on how we include anti-racism into our communications. NUPGE now has a committee to look at this issue. Katie Reiken from HSABC/NUPGE mentioned that they have a course to education people on this issue. Duffy asked if their course platform could be forwarded to her to share with others in the national office, as well as with Component communicators.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

15 AURIGA DRIVE
NEPEAN, ONTARIO
CANADA / K2E 1B7

[613] 228-9800
FAX [613] 228-9801

www.nupge.ca

national@nupge.ca

