

2012

CONVENTION UPDATE

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# Public Services: *Something to Value*

Judy Wasylycia-Leis, Chair of the Commission on Quality Public Services and Tax Fairness, presented Convention’s attendees with the Commission’s report *Something to Value*. The Commission is a partnership created between the Public Services Foundation of Canada and OPSEU to respond to the Drummond Commission.

Unlike the Drummond Commission, the Commission on Quality Public Services and Tax Fairness gathered real public opinion about the future of public services in Ontario. The assumptions going into the fact-finding process were Ontarians would show up to be heard. And they did.

Public hearings were conducted in 12 communities. Over 1,000 Ontarians and 100 experts voiced their concerns. They also shared their ideas for a stronger future for Ontario that didn’t involve austerity measures like the Drummond Commission report recommended.

“This produced a groundbreaking report with grassroots participation and honest conversations,” Wasylycia-Leis said. “People came forward with courage and conviction to paint an accurate picture of this province.”

The Commission believed that participatory democracy ought to mean something. Any reform is meaningless if it doesn’t involve consultation with those who provide and receive the services. Financial reform cannot focus only on expenditures.

The Commission was moved by the “depths of despair” in the testimonies they heard: the most vulnerable said the services they rely on have been drastically slashed or cut altogether; people suffering loss of freedom and dignity; and families who have been driven to the point of bankruptcy and/or poverty from the loss of good-paying jobs.

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# Horwath accepts award on behalf of Broadbent

Smokey Thomas presented this year's Stanley Knowles Award to former federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent. Broadbent, who couldn't be at the Convention this year, thanked OPSEU for his award via video message.

In his message, Broadbent said there is much more to be done, "The conservative agenda is threatening fairness. Inequality and job loss are growing. More and more people are being left behind."

"OPSEU has proven it can take on a tough and intelligent leadership role and working together we can mobilize members with new ideas and strong resources," Broadbent said. He looks forward to working with OPSEU for many years to come.

On Broadbent's behalf, Ontario NDP Leader, Andrea Horwath, accepted the award. "Ed has been



a force in politics," Horwath said. "The work he is doing now shows us that he is needed now more than ever. These are interesting times, and challenging ones."

"The mandate and message is clear. It's time for something new," said Horwath. "Voters want to see a different kind of politics taking place in this province. They want us to roll up our sleeves and work together to address the challenges.

"Ontario will be financially secure when Ontarian families are financially secure; when the people who make this province work, are working." ☺

## Something to Value

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"This province has lost billions as a result of the recession, income inequality, and corporate tax cuts," Wasylycia-Leis said. "Seventy-eight per cent of Ontarians support the idea of a surtax on the most wealthy in our midst."

She summarized the recommendations in the report that constitutes a road map to the future of the province:

1. There can be no recovery without addressing income equality.
2. The measure of a society is in how it treats its most vulnerable members.
3. Public services are the most powerful instrument we have to affect the impact of growing inequality.
4. Public sector reform cannot be done in isolation from those who work on the front lines.
5. Ontario has a revenue problem not a spending problem.

"This report is a validation of what Ontarians have been saying for years," said Wasylycia-Leis. "If we do not do it now, if we do not go on the offensive now, it will be harder and harder to reverse course. The longer we wait, the further we fall into the inequality trap."

The report has been circulated to all MPPs and media with astounding interest.

"With more partnerships like this one with OPSEU, we are one step closer to stopping the austerity folks in their tracks," Wasylycia-Leis said. "We have to take on the assault on public services. The assault on public services is bigger than all of us.

"And let us never underestimate the power and influence of the Occupy Movement. We can rise up and fight for a society based on the values of caring and sharing."

Wasylycia-Leis is a former Member of Parliament and one-time Manitoba cabinet member. Wasylycia-Leis, a former resident of Ontario, has spent the past 30 years of her life in politics and public service. ☺

# More budget, still no closure

After yesterday's defeat of the Board's proposed dues levy, 1st Vice-President/Treasurer Eddy Almeida presented a revised budget to delegates. Without the proposed dues levy, the 2012 budget was changed from a \$2.16 million surplus to a \$2.8 million deficit.

Debate ensued regarding ways to reduce spending in order for the budget to come closer to being balanced.

Almeida reported that membership growth was strong in the past, but the economic crisis of 2008 has slowed the trend. Plus, employers' increased reliance on part-time workers has decreased dues revenue. However, member services remain essential. This year alone, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology—Academic and the Ontario Public Service face contract negotiations, and 18 new contracts are being negotiated.

The Board has been busy in their attempt to shave surplus from the proposed budget: negotiating budgets, staff development funds, Executive Board

Member and committee budget costs, campaigns and local full-time book off have been reduced by a total of \$3.5 million. In addition, two projects have been cancelled saving an additional \$260,000.

The Board continues to be committed to find savings through initiatives such as bulk pricing, centralized purchasing, video conferencing, and reducing travel costs.

Members voted for a reduction in local dues rebates by 15 per cent for the next four rebate periods. They passed an additional motion which reduced Executive Board Members' time off to a maximum of 50 per cent of their regularly scheduled work hours.

Convention was temporarily interrupted when most members from Regions 4 and 7 walked off the Convention floor during the budget debate. However, quorum was maintained, and debate continued until the orders of the day. Budget debate continues Saturday morning. ☺



# Social Mapping Project leads the way

relevant as OPSEU reviews ways to increase revenues through organizing. Also, the report provides recommendations to allow even stronger bargaining of collective agreements that expire over the next year

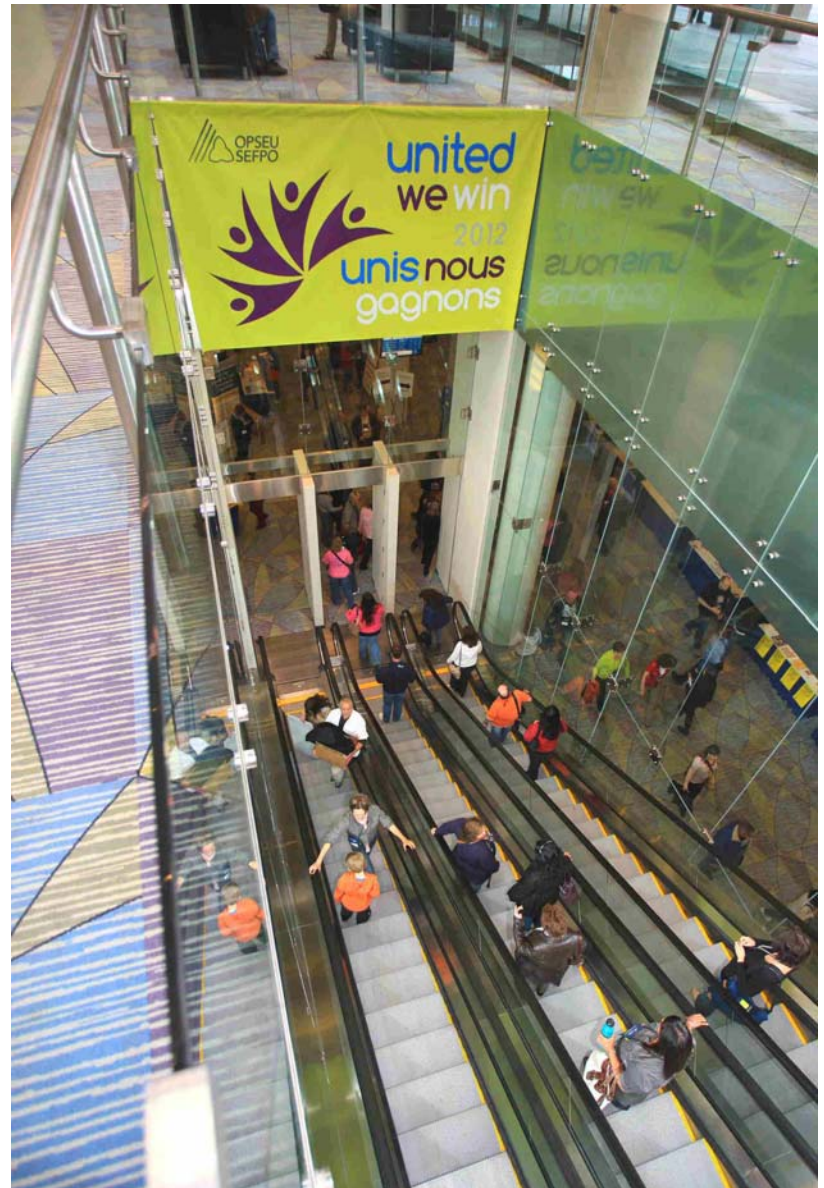
OPSEU's Social Mapping Project is recognized as a pioneering initiative. In 2010, Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner for the Ontario Human Rights Commission, said, "OPSEU's collection of human-rights based data will certainly help, whether you're looking for indications of gaps or ceilings in your organizations, or the ability to expand services to reach all members. OPSEU is not only doing the right thing, but the smart thing, and is leading a path in the labour sector by doing this important."

As the project continues, OPSEU will forge a position as a leader within the labour movement as an inclusive union home in Ontario's increasingly diverse work force. ☺

Debbie Tungatt, Executive Board liaison to OPSEU's Social Mapping Project, presented attendees with an update on the initiative. Mandated at the 2008 Annual Convention, the purpose of the project is to ensure that OPSEU is a diverse, inclusive and barrier-free organization.

Phase I began in 2010, with members completing a survey. Phase II took place over 2011. A membership system review was completed, focusing on education and electoral systems, resulting in 47 recommendations. A task force was approved by the Board. The mandate of the task force was to research, prioritize, cost and develop an action plan to implement the recommendations.

A report was developed as a part of Phase III in March 2012. The report focused on a review of communications, bargaining and organizing. Based on the current budget debate, this report becomes even more



## Who is here?

<b>Delegates</b>	908
<b>Alternates</b>	476
<b>Observers</b>	172
<b>Retirees</b>	6
<b>EBMs</b>	20
<b>Committees</b>	40
<b>Solidarity Guests</b>	22
<b>Guests</b>	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,664</b>