REPORT OF THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY
BETTY VALENZUELA
HEU 2024 CONVENTION

Good afternoon, sisters, brothers and friends. I am Betty Valenzuela, your Financial Secretary. And I am privileged to be speaking with you on these unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. My pronouns are she and her.

Well, we sure have come a long way.

When I attended my first HEU convention in 2008, we were in a large tent outside a Richmond Hotel. It was cold. Windy. Raining.

I thought, "what kind of operation is this union running – having us work outside in this cold, damp weather for really long days of debate?"

But you know what? I actually loved it because I learned so much. And I felt part of something much bigger than just my Vancouver General Hospital local.

I was part of a provincial union of activists from various bargaining units, job families and cities. And we were making decisions together as a large group of delegates.

It was exciting. At times, dramatic, yes. But that sense of solidarity was palpable. And I was hooked.

But now, look at us?

We've outgrown that tent and other big hotels to bring us to the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Wow! So, welcome to HEU Convention 2024. It's truly an honour to present my third convention report as your Financial Secretary.

You know, as I just mentioned what it was like to attend my first convention and feeling empowered by our collective voice – and feeling part of something bigger as we made decisions on how to move our union forward – it filled me with a sense of pride.

Not pride in myself – Betty – as a person. But pride in Betty, the HEU member, who is using her voice to help create change.

That's what activism looks like. And that's at the core of solidarity.

All of you here in this room are activists.

You are all part of something bigger than yourselves, bigger than your local – you are here to create changes, to make a difference.

And often, the advances HEU makes, trickle down to benefit all members of the labour movement – not just in British Columbia, but all across Canada.

We saw that when we won our *Bill 29* Supreme Court challenge, which enshrined collective bargaining as a constitutional right for all unionized workers.

This week, you will be debating and voting on issues that matter to HEU members, and policies that will impact all members. It is a responsibility your local has entrusted you with – as you are here to represent your local's entire membership. You're not just speaking on behalf of a few outspoken activists.

You are the voice of rank-and-file members covering all of our HEU job families, including clerical, trades and maintenance, support services, patient care and patient care technical. And also our members in community health, community social services, and the independent sectors.

That's also the spirit of solidarity.

Even when we disagree, we are united in our quest to make this union bigger, stronger, more diverse and more inclusive.

That's why I was especially proud of HEU when delegates elected six new diversity vice-presidents at our last convention.

It's more than symbolic. More than checking off boxes. It is a commitment to ensure equity-deserving groups have a voice at decision-making tables.

I could spend the entire afternoon talking about all the changes I've seen in this union over the years.

But I know you've got important work to do, and you probably don't want to hear me relaying "The History of HEU According to Betty".

Or maybe you do. But we can talk another time.

So, now, let's get down to business.

Financial business.

My job as Financial Secretary since 2018 is to manage the union's finances with transparency, accountability, responsibility and accuracy.

I hold a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, with a major in accounting, from the Philippines, where I was born and raised and went to university.

So, my accuracy is pretty good, if I do say so myself.

Of course, I have a talented group of hardworking HEU staff who work with me every day.

State of the Union

I'm happy to report our union is in solid financial shape. HEU's 2023 audited financial report is included in your binders. And it's based on a budget that was reviewed, and approved, by the Provincial Executive.

These financial statements show that HEU is in a strong financial position.

A number of things have contributed to our increased revenues, such as bringing thousands of privatized support services workers and protection services – including the new relational security guard positions – back into the public sector.

The BC NDP government has also fulfilled its commitment to continue wage-levelling in the seniors' care sector, increasing wages to facilities subsector rates.

And we've organized 2,603 new HEU members since our last convention. Way to go, HEU Organizing Team! The best Organizing Team!

In 2023, we had an average of about 64,000 dues-paying members with dues and initiation revenues of about $58.8 million.

Because we had a budget surplus for a few years, we were able to put monies aside for future projects and needs.

2024 is a big year for HEU.

It's our 80th anniversary. We just had a provincial election. We are holding our biennial convention here. And we have three public sector bargaining conferences next month.

So, as you can imagine, our operating activities and resulting expenses can fluctuate greatly between years. But our reserved funds have helped us manage these added expenses.

What are we spending money on?

This year, we spent more than $1.1 million on our **HEU Votes** campaign training and engaging members in political action.

As we know from experience, it's critical that we have a worker-friendly government in power. One who respects and values workers and their families.

This is especially important as we enter our next round of contract talks with the government.

Historically, the union has set aside a $6.8 million fund to support pre-bargaining and bargaining, for both public and private sector contracts.

We currently have $20.4 million in our **Strike Fund**; and $7.4 million in our **Fightback Campaign/Political Action Fund**.

Convention – which is the centrepiece of our union's democracy – costs a lot of money unless you want to go back to the tent (laughs). We have budgeted $3.6 million for this year's convention.

We have reserved $7.5 million in our **Convention Fund**.

There is a resolution that our HEU elected officer wages be transparent. And we agree.

This wage scale has been our practice for the last two decades and for the current leadership. It is comparable to other public sector unions such as BCGEU or CUPE.

The base salary of the President, Financial Secretary and Assistant Secretary-Business Manager are five per cent above the coordinator wage rate. This year the annual wage rate is $169,915.

The coordinators manage staff in the various HEU departments, who in turn, provide services to members and locals.

The previous Secretary-Business Manager (SBM) wage rate was negotiated at the time of hire. Our current SBM is at the same wage rate of $217,402.

We all want a leadership wage structure that properly reflects the scope of work as well as the level of responsibility the leaders perform in serving HEU members and supporting HEU staff.

We are committed to having an external review conducted early in the next term to ensure we are following a practice that is fair.

We are also committed to abide by pay equity and to ensure an ongoing practice of transparency is established.

Now, let's talk **Education**. We all know the value of education. That's why we've committed significant funds to support the union's educational programs to support activists on the ground.

We've also provided 50 **bursaries** to HEU members and their families to support educational opportunities.

And delegates at our 2022 convention passed a **Small- and Mid-Sized Local Supplement** resolution to provide additional financial resources to HEU's smaller locals.

In 2023, 120 locals received the supplement. And 102 locals have received it so far in 2024.

Over the past two years, we've also distributed more than $7,000 as part of the **Local-Building Fund**, which supports local activities, campaigns and initiatives.

HEU owns buildings in Burnaby, Prince George and Nelson, and leases space in Victoria, Kelowna and Courtenay.

The union has $26.4 million in our **Building Fund** to ensure we have the appropriate space to provide services and education to our members.

To meet the needs of our growing membership, we've significantly increased our staffing complement.

We have about 230 staff working at our six offices across the province.

They work in: Servicing. Finance. Bargaining. Organizing. Communications. Occupational Health and Safety. Education and Human Rights. Research. Legal. Workers Compensation and Long-term Disability Appeals. Building Services. And administration – including information technology, human resources, data management, switchboard, and the production centre.

Our dedicated HEU staff work really hard on behalf of our membership.

And I would like to personally thank them for their commitment to serving our members throughout British Columbia.

Where do my union dues go?

That's the number one question I get asked by members.

You know, I talk about this at every convention and most HEU functions I attend. And I talk about it because it's important for members to understand how your union dues are spent.

Union dues are established at convention by HEU delegates like you.

They support the staffing and expenses required to carry out the business of our union, including member services and education, campaigns, conferences, conventions, the Provincial Executive, and committees.

Every HEU local is entitled to a portion of the union dues their membership contributes under Article 2, Section B of the *HEU Constitution & By-Laws*.

These "dues rebates" support local activities, including educational opportunities, conducting local meetings, and to commemorate special workplace events, like HEU Day.

If there are no local officers to administer the funds, or if expenses are not in line with the criteria, or Quarterly Reports are behind, then I will contact the local to provide support.

Local "dues rebates" may be held, or frozen, if locals do not comply. And that certainly does not promote local-building or provide services to the membership.

Since taking office as Financial Secretary in 2018, my goal has been to help struggling locals get back on track financially.

I'm proud to report that, to date, I have released the rebates of 84 locals.

As a social justice union, HEU also steps up to the plate regularly to show our solidarity by supporting organizations aligned with our values, and other worthy partners and causes.

It's not a news flash that we are living in challenging times. We are dealing with inflation. A cost-of-living that is straining the budgets of most families. Unsustainable housing costs

and shortages. Chronic understaffing in health care. The toxic drug crisis. And horrific wars and conflicts around the world.

It's hard. And we all feel it in different ways. But we can improve things by working together in solidarity with the shared value of making life better for everyone, not just ourselves.

We are the strongest, most resilient union I know. And we became strong by standing up against injustices, fighting for fairness, and leaving nobody behind.

In closing, I would personally like to thank the team who provides me with daily support, without whom I could not successfully do my job.

Our Provincial Executive, our Admin team, the Trustees, and finance staff – especially Carol Delveris, our Coordinator of Finance.

Thank you for being here. And thank you for listening.