

President's Speech, 2018 AGM

Friends, colleagues, brothers and sisters.

Welcome to our 99th AGM! (So close, eh? Next year is going to be something special!)

When I look back at our accomplishments over the past year, I'm reminded how many were the result of deliberate, long-term planning – not just before 2018 but before the 2015 election. I'm also reminded how many are the result of vital relationships built and maintained over time, and strengthened by both setbacks and success.

While our first and most important relationship is always with our members, building and maintaining relationships with government decision-makers, unions, media, NGOs, and others is crucial to our success.

On science, we have made great progress! This summer, the federal government adopted our model of Scientific Integrity policy, which obligates departments to uphold scientific standards and practices. This was the culmination of efforts (and relationships) begun before the last election. At that time, funding cuts and muzzling of scientists cast serious doubt over scientific integrity. Scientists all over the world recognized the threat and lent us their support.

The Trudeau government committed to adopt departmental scientific integrity policies based on our own model policy by the end of this year. This is a tremendous victory for our members and Canadians.

Surveys are fundamental to ensuring we approach our dealings with facts and evidence direct from our members. They validate our concerns. They amplify our voice. They start a conversation.

We learned this with the release of *The Big Chill* in 2013 and *Vanishing Science* in 2014.

The release of *Defrosting Science* this February, our survey report on the progress made unmuzzling federal scientists, received widespread media attention. It also shed light on work the government still needs to do. Yes, far fewer federal scientists feel “muzzled” now than in 2013. But when over half (53%) still say they feel unable to speak freely, we know more needs to be done to educate members and managers about their rights and obligations.

Our recent report on *Women in Science* also confirmed some longstanding barriers that continue to beset many, especially younger, female scientists, who are twice as likely as older scientists to perceive gender bias in the hiring process. Those barriers too demand change.

Surveys then matter.

On tax fairness, this year was the turn of our 12,000 tax professionals at the Canada Revenue Agency to get the spotlight. While the Trudeau government has re-invested significant amounts of money in the CRA, there remains a \$500-million gap in funding compared to 2012. That’s when the Harper government heavily cut funding and staff.

And it’s made defending tax fairness difficult for our members. As *Shell Game*, our most recent survey report, showed, off-shore tax

havens, loopholes and federal cost-cutting have combined to make tax fairness harder than ever to maintain. Eight out of 10 Canadians and 9 out of 10 of our members agree: “it is easier for corporations and wealthy individuals to evade or avoid tax responsibilities than it is for average Canadians.”

Defending tax fairness therefore must be a priority of ours and of the government.

That report also received extensive media coverage and is the basis of our call for more funding in next year’s budget, specifically to improve training and technology for our members.

Partnerships with NGOs also matter.

Throughout the past year we’ve continued to maintain and enjoy the support of organizations such as Evidence for Democracy on scientific integrity, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on our call for reinvestment in the public service, and Canadians for Tax Fairness on more investment in the CRA.

Partnerships with government matter too. (What, after all, is a collective agreement if not a partnership?)

Of course, these partnerships have been challenging when it comes to Phoenix. Nearly a year ago, I held a press conference in which I called on the government to forget the Phoenix pay system and build a new system that works. An informal poll of our members at the time showed 87% had given up hope Phoenix would ever be fixed. So it made sense to urge the government to replace it as soon as possible.

I don't think I overstate our influence when I say that the government's decision this spring to spend \$16 million on finding a replacement would never have happened were it not for our public call then and our lobbying efforts in person and online after.

Nor would more recent steps to modernize and expedite procurement of a new system have been taken without direct talks between me and Treasury Board President Scott Brison.

As a result, PIPSC is now a partner with government in deciding on a replacement. And the government has indicated that the testing of possible replacements will begin soon, and a replacement chosen by the spring of next year.

Relationships matter.

The last round of federal bargaining was long, difficult and demonstrated how important good relationships are to successful outcomes. Not only did we win recognition of the right of scientists to speak freely and adoption of scientific integrity policies, we also secured strong language to help fight outsourcing. We protected sick leave. And our protests restored bargaining rights that the Harper government removed.

Along with other unions, this year we also won better birth control coverage and a long-awaited electronic claims system as part of the federal Public Service Health Care Plan. Members can now submit vision and physiotherapy claims electronically. And birth control is no longer limited to the pill. At last, progress! And thanks to stronger relationships these won't be the last much-needed improvements negotiated either.

One area in which I'm also proud to say progress has been made this year is in setting new ground rules for the upcoming round of federal bargaining. The new protocols agreed to with the government should help expedite and focus negotiations on our demands and ensure better bargaining on both sides.

Of course real progress takes time and usually doesn't come without opposition. The fight for fair pensions, for example, is far from over – as our members who work for the New Brunswick government as well as the Chalk River, Ontario and Whiteshell, Manitoba nuclear labs know all too well. Our rally with other unions outside the offices of the Treasury Board in June proclaimed loud and clear our determination to preserve and restore members' defined benefit pensions.

And we're more determined than ever to reach a deal on behalf of our Scientific and Analytical Group members at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Their collective agreement is well past its best before date.

The trend to more and more open office work – which 62% of our professional members say harms productivity and efficiency, and 79% say makes it harder just to focus and concentrate – must be addressed. From mental health to productivity, from collaboration to privacy, on every level our members report these new office configurations make things worse, not better.

But as the government's new pay equity legislation announced this week shows, while the road is long, we can make progress.

Of course, none of our work this year would have been possible without the remarkable contributions of members. And I would like, in particular, to note the contributions of a few now.

- Del Dickson for his steadfast championing of the Legacy Cup,
- Ginette Tardif for her outstanding work on Phoenix and Contract Implementation,
- The Domestic Violence Team for their ground-breaking work on behalf of victims of domestic violence,
- The Strategic Bargaining Committee for their work in support of a Central Table and Modernizing Bargaining,
- Matt MacLeod and Judith Leblanc for their work with the Chief Science Advisor in developing a model Scientific Integrity Policy and guidelines,
- Mike Pauly and Jonathan Fitzpatrick for their tireless work on preserving pensions.

Last, I want to thank those of you who continue to engage in our work together even though we don't always agree on the direction we need to go in. You make us stronger!

As our achievements of the past year demonstrate, long-term planning and relationships matter. So does the courage to stick with those plans despite occasional obstacles and setbacks.

We have a lot to be proud of this year, and we have a video to prove it.

[CUE 2018 HIGHLIGHTS VIDEO]

As successful as we've been, we cannot rest on past victories. Old and new challenges arise. Longstanding relationships must be maintained and new ones nurtured.

That's one reason why I took time this year to discuss labour relations with students at the Telfer School of Management and Ottawa University. Understanding early the importance of consultation and cooperation can save not only our members but government and the public costly grievances later on. It's a lesson all aspiring executives would be advised to learn before they join the public service.

And later this month I'll be speaking at the Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy's Year 4 Conference on the priorities we believe the federal government should address before the next election. Priority number one: Don't stop investing in the public service.

One of the greatest challenges confronting PIPSC today is retaining our members' gains in the face of losses suffered by professionals elsewhere in the economy. And not just retaining those gains, but building on them, despite efforts to undermine hard-won rights in other areas.

The Harper government's assaults on union bargaining rights, on union dues, and on unions themselves may have been fended off – for now.

But they should never be seen as isolated threats or distant memories.

As the Trump administration in the U.S. and the Ford government in Ontario remind us, we are always one election away from another attack on public servants, labour laws, and unions.

These attacks will come to us again in time. We need to prepare now to respond from a position of strength.

And by that I mean *strength in numbers*.

We also need to confront some harsh realities – such as the federal government’s failure to rein in its over-reliance on outsourcing.

We described this phenomenon and its harmful impacts in our 2016 report *Programmed to Fail*. And in the last round of bargaining, we negotiated provisions specifically empowering our CS Group members to challenge this trend in the workplace.

But the trend continues.

In fact, and despite their promises to reduce spending on outsourcing, it’s growing under the Trudeau government. Overall spending on outsourcing has increased from \$10 billion, when the Liberals were elected, to \$12 billion today.

I believe this is a very dangerous trend for a union such as PIPSC to ignore.

The temptation of employers – public and private – to point to lower-paid, pension-less workers with too few benefits as the norm is simply too great.

That should not be our 100th anniversary legacy.

The theme of this year’s AGM is “crossroads” – by which we mean a choice lies before us. PIPSC will decide what path to take.

Whatever the decision, one thing is certain: We need to strengthen our union for the future.

We need to bolster old relationships and nurture new ones.

I plan to do that. I hope you do too.

Whatever our choice, I know we'll make it together.

Thank you.