Why I’ll Be Voting YES

Lindsay Baranowski, NASA Treasurer

As you will know from recent communications, our Finance Committee and Executive Board have put forward a new motion to update NASA’s dues structure. We based this motion on feedback we received in consultation with the membership since August 2016, as well as through the survey we conducted after our first motion on dues failed to pass.

I would like to explain this new motion and tell you why I, as a NASA member, will be voting “yes” when voting opens on May 19.

The new motion specifies that, over the course of the next four years, dues will gradually increase to a maximum of 0.9% of base income for all dues-payers. At the start of the fifth year, everyone will pay the same rate of 0.9%. But, under the motion, no member will see an increase of more than $6/paycheque from one year to the next during the first four years. The motion further requires that, over the next two years, NASA must develop member-approved policies around how we manage any funds collected over our annual operating expenses, and that we must conduct another review of dues in five years and every five years thereafter.

This is a change from NASA’s current dues structure, implemented back in 1998, which sets dues at 0.9% of base income or $24/month, whichever is less. While some members still pay 0.9% of income in dues, a large majority of members long ago reached the $24/month maximum as salary scales increased over the years, to the point that some now pay as little as 0.23%. In effect, this means that those who earn the least now pay the largest...

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(Continued on page 2)
percent of their income in dues, while those who earn the most pay the smallest percent of their income. The motion is also a change from past practice in that it requires us to establish member-approved policies around surplus revenue, and conduct regular reviews of our dues structure.

As a member, I'll be voting “yes” on the new motion because I believe it’s wrong to ask lower-earning members to contribute a larger share of their income toward NASA’s work. We all work hard for our wages, and we should all get to take home the same share of them. A majority of members who responded to our last survey agree that it’s fair for everyone to pay the same rate.

I’ll be voting “yes” because I support the motion’s rate of 0.9%, well below the norm of 1.25% for other post-secondary support staff unions in Alberta. While I actually agree with the majority of survey respondents who said that the rate could be higher than 0.9%, I believe that the motion’s end result of applying the rate of 0.9% equally to all members is a fair compromise with those members who are concerned about an increase. I’m satisfied that 0.9%, applied equally, will let us eliminate our operating deficit and ensure that we can represent our members’ interests as they deserve to be represented.

I’ll be voting “yes” because I think it’s reasonable to limit increases to no more than $6/paycheque in any one year. This is half of the increase that was put forward in the original motion. And in reality, most members will reach the maximum of 0.9% before the end of the fourth year, so that they don’t see any increase at all in later years. If you have concerns about what this will mean for you, I strongly encourage you to try out our dues calculator on the NASA Dues Page.

I’ll be voting “yes” because I believe it’s right that we should have member-approved policies on how to handle any revenues in excess of what we spend on our regular operations. Just as the membership votes to approve our annual operating budget, they should also vote to approve the target size and uses of any surplus funds.

I’ll be voting “yes” because I think it’s appropriate for any member-funded organization like ours to regularly assess if our dues are still appropriate. We can’t let another 19 years pass without taking a hard look at our dues and letting the membership decide whether they’re too low, too high, or just right.

To sum up, I’ll be voting “yes” because I believe it’s the fair and responsible thing to do. Changing dues is one of the most difficult issues for any union to come to an agreement on, and it requires us all to think of the big picture and make compromises in support of our common goals. If we can do this together, we can do anything.

If you agree with me, please vote “yes” on this motion.
Can A Special Bargaining Fund Help Achieve Our Goals?

Brendan Van Alstine, Communications Assistant

Employers and unions sometimes just don’t agree; it’s simply a fact of life. When disagreements arise, they need a way to solve the problem. In the past, before the changes to legislation, NASA’s dispute resolution mechanism was binding arbitration.

Since the legislation that mandated binding arbitration has been struck down as unconstitutional, this now means that if we can’t come to agreement our members can vote to go on strike, or the employer can lock us out. We’re in a new context, whether we like it or not, and we need to find a way to make it work. Whether you like the change or hate the change, the fact is we now have a new, different set of tools to help get what we want in the event of disagreement; and when disputes happen, it’s best to be prepared.

Do we want to go on strike? Of course not! No one does. Our goal at the bargaining table is to get the best possible collective agreement for our members, and going on strike is an action of last resort. There are a lot of things that we can do both during and outside of the bargaining process to convince the employer to make concessions.

One of the biggest things unions do to prepare is to set aside funds in the event of a disagreement. Sometimes, when things get pushed far enough, these funds are used for strike and lockout pay; but often times, the money can be used for more effective tactics to help avoid a strike or lockout in the first place.

The point of the special bargaining fund is to help us achieve what our members want to achieve, when they want to achieve it. So how does this new right to strike fit into our toolkit and help us to get a good collective agreement?

The potential uses for the fund are numerous, and limited only by the imagination of the bargaining committee, NASA and our members. It could be that media campaigns may be created. It may be that research papers are commissioned and released, or it’s possible that simply having the fund itself will be enough to encourage the employer to accept a more favourable deal.

Over the next two years we will consulting extensively with our members to develop policies around how you want to see the special bargaining fund used. The terms and conditions of the fund, including how big the fund should be and how the money can be spent, will be voted on by the membership some time in 2019.

Check out the NASA Dues Page for the entire dues proposal and more!
https://www.nasa.ualberta.ca/nasa--dues
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Dues Information Meeting

Thursday, May 18

Noon - 1 PM
SAB 325

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IN THE COMMUNITY is published six times a year

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