



# 2022 report of the **GENERAL SECRETARY**

I appreciate the opportunity to again report on the business of your union. I hope you have a thorough discussion about the direction of GSU and how it can best serve its members.

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## GSU Bargaining in 2022

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GSU will soon be engaged in agreement renewal collective bargaining with the following employers:

- Viterra (Locals 1 and 2)
- The Western Producer (Local 5)
- Heartland Livestock Services (Local 7)
- Lakeland Co-operative Association (Local 16)
- Discovery Co-operative Ltd. (Local 17)
- Lloydminster and District Co-operative Association (Local 18)

Not surprisingly, the major focus in bargaining will be wage increases as consumer inflation has spiked upwards in 2022 and the Bank of Canada's antidote of higher interest rates is also increasing the cost of living for many working people.

GSU members in each of the above Locals will pursue wage increases substantially higher than the norms of the last decade and we anticipate meeting employer resistance to decent wage increases for their work forces.

Employer opposition to higher wages is not new. However, there are several factors supporting wage demands, including a general labour shortage exacerbated by much lower than normal immigration to Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing numbers of workers retiring or leaving the fulltime workforce for other reasons.

Added to the equation is the growing dominance of millennials and succeeding generations of workers who have an approach to work that tends to be more balanced and healthy. Include the emerging phenomenon of “quiet quitting” along with the resurgence of unions and what we have is potential for a so-called paradigm shift in the labour market.

Despite the added leverage for labour, determination and fortitude in bargaining will still be required in order to break new ground and improve wages. The success of GSU members in Local 4 (Grain Millers) is proof that the straitjacket of low wage increases can be unravelled if union members stick together and make it clear they will not back down.

With their settlement for across-the-board wage increases of 6 percent, 5 percent and 4 percent over a three-year collective agreement, Local 4 (Grain Millers) broke the mould and achieved terms that haven't been exceeded to date. Hats off to Local 4 members and their bargaining committee.

I am confident in GSU's ability to bargain good settlements with good wage increases and other improvements for union members. We have the resources to do the job, including the GSU Defense Fund which is there to support members who strike or are locked out.

Whatever the challenges, GSU will continue to work, communicate, educate and organize members to support one another in the struggle for improved wages, working conditions and benefits.

It is time for change and the bargaining table is a good a place to start making change happen. We know our rights and now it is time to own our rights.

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## Where We Are

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Instead of returning to normal following the worst phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has continued to take some nasty turns.

The war in Ukraine was launched in February knocking an already wobbly geo-political system even more off kilter. Global political instability has exacerbated rising shortages, increasing costs and a supply chain already interrupted by the pandemic and catastrophic weather events.

The growing uncertainty and precarity confronting people worldwide seems to have taken us back in time to something resembling the 1930s. A significant difference, however, is how communication technology has accelerated the awareness of events, but not necessarily awareness itself and certainly not calm nor respectful debate.

Anger and hatred infect political and social discourse. Meanwhile distrust or dislike of the other is fanned by trolls large and small who prey on discontent to gain material and political advantage.

Through all of the contemporary noise, GSU will continue to speak truth to power, to honestly represent workers and to promote democracy in the workplace and society. GSU is a big tent that can accommodate difference of opinion while working towards making a better life for union members.

I caution against being taken in by those who offer simple solutions to complex problems just as I also caution against

being taken in by those who claim there are mysterious forces engaged in manipulation too complex for us to understand.

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## Union Representation

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Administering collective agreements and assisting GSU members is a big part of your union's daily work and we strive to assist members in realizing the full potential of their collective agreements.

We report on issues identified and resolved as part of our regular communication to GSU members through the *Tuesday Members' Memo*. If there are things we are overlooking, additional information we could be including, or other platforms we should be using, please let us know.

Representing employees in pursuit of a fair deal for all is an advantage held by workers represented by a union. Non-union employees do not have the benefit of contractual rights or an organization to represent them and communicate results.

Neither do non-union employees have the right to protection from unjust dismissal and reinstatement to employment when they are wrongfully fired. This protection is part of the bedrock of being unionized.

GSU is committed to unionizing workers not currently represented by a union and we are committed to making union representation work for union members.

This past spring, members of GSU Local 6 (Wild West Steelhead) considered leaving the union, but quick action and engagement with the members brought to light flaws in the representation they'd been receiving. The experience also provided a reminder of the rights and benefits employees would be giving up if they relinquished union representation.

Lead by staff representative Steve Torgerson, all of GSU's staff pitched in to help address the beefs and concerns expressed by

Local 6 members. The result was a new and improved collective agreement and a new beginning for the Local. The experience is proof positive of what we can do when we listen to one another, communicate with one another and work together to solve problems.

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## GSU Administration

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GSU executive and staff are planning for the union's biennial policy convention to be held on March 30, 31 and April 1, 2023. The location and venue for the convention are being nailed down and we expect to be able to make an announcement to that effect by the end of November.

In the meantime, we encourage all members to submit ideas and resolutions that they'd like delegates to the 2023 convention to consider. If there is a policy or service you think GSU should be embracing, please take a few moments to pass on your thoughts to a union delegate or GSU staff person. You can also communicate by sending an email to [GSUconvention@gsu.ca](mailto:GSUconvention@gsu.ca).

GSU policy conventions are gatherings of union delegates where the administrative and policy business of the union is decided, the union president and vice presidents are elected and the five-member board of directors of the GSU Defense Fund is elected. Union education workshops are also part of the convention agenda.

GSU requests leave of absence from work and covers the wages, benefits and expenses of delegates attending the union's policy conventions.

We encourage members to be a delegate to the 2023 GSU policy convention. If you're not sure how to become a delegate, contact your GSU staff representative. Your engagement and input are

welcome and an important part of the democratic representation that we strive for.

GSU's finances continue to be in good shape even as we are running an operating deficit of approximately \$100,000 year to date as budgeted for by the Joint Executive Council.

The operating deficit is the result of a net increase to GSU staff for a period of about 18 months as GSU transitions to my retirement from the general secretary position in March 2023. The deficit is being paid for out of operating reserves and I do not anticipate any borrowing will be required.

I am extremely happy to report that the Executive Committee has completed interviewing for the new general secretary and is recommending that Steve Torgerson be appointed to the position.

Steve comes to the job well positioned and experienced to lead GSU into the future. He has a considerable resume of solid experience inside and outside of GSU. I ask everyone to join with me in congratulating and welcoming Steve as the next general secretary.

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## GSU Defense Fund

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As of September 1, 2022 the market value of the GSU Defense Fund stood at slightly more than \$5.1 million as a result of major declines in the values of stocks worldwide. Holding to the investment strategy adopted by the board of directors, we expect these losses to be temporary and to return to normalcy when the market recovers from the current jitters.

Notwithstanding the current turmoil in financial markets, as GSU enters agreement renewal bargaining this autumn, union members will still have the financial resources they need to sustain collective bargaining disputes for better wages and working conditions.

Currently strike/lockout pay for participating GSU members is 75 percent of the individual's gross regular pay plus payment of premiums to continue group insurance and health benefits coverage.

Each year, GSU members attending annual meetings of their Locals or Sub-Locals have the opportunity to debate and vote on whether to continue paying additional dues into the GSU Defense Fund. This year is no different and GSU's Executive Committee is submitting the following resolution to be voted on at annual membership meetings.

*"Be it resolved that the additional dues being paid into the GSU Defense Fund by members/employees represented by GSU shall continue until December 31, 2023, subject to review by members of the union at the 2023 annual Local and Sub-Local meetings."*

A majority of 50 percent plus one of all the votes cast at all of the meetings is required for the resolution to be carried or defeated. The number voting in favour and against the resolution should be recorded and transmitted to GSU's general secretary.

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## GSU and the Path Forward

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As our current experience reveals, no one is immune from the effects and challenges of a constantly changing natural and social environment. Accordingly, it is essential to constantly adapt and reinvent the union in order to be relevant and resilient in responding to evolving circumstances and new challenges.

There are tremendous changes occurring in the ag, grain handling and crop processing sectors as new market entrants expand operations and capital is invested in new processing operations. This presents GSU with an enormous opportunity to organize. The challenge is to get out there and do it.

I urge every member and elected officer of GSU to seize the day to build a strong union firm in its resolve to get the best collective agreements for union members.

It is our responsibility to fearlessly promote the good that GSU does not just for union members, but also for the broader community and society.

What we've accomplished together is good, but it's not enough. I hope you make the next years of this decade the years in which you helped change the world profoundly and for the good.

Get involved.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Solidarity,



Hugh Wagner  
General Secretary

## QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.

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