

**JOHN EDMUNDS
U.S.G.E. NATIONAL PRESIDENT
14TH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION
SPEECH 2008**

Sisters and brothers, welcome to the 14th Triennial National Convention of the Union of Solicitor General Employees.

And welcome to Edmonton...home of the Alberta legislature... and the West Edmonton Mall!

As your National President, I'd like to extend a special welcome to those of you who are attending your very first USGE National Convention. If you would, I'd like all you 'first-timers' you to please raise your hands.

I can see that there are a good number of you. To my mind, that's a good sign...a very healthy sign of the development of new leadership, with new ideas and new energy, at the Local level. I want to urge you to feel at home, to jump right in and participate fully in this week's debates and deliberations.

We are all family here. And, of course, like all families, we occasionally have our squabbles and differences. But, at the end of the day, we come together and we stand together. And the USGE is stronger precisely because of the vigorous democratic exercise that will unfold over the next few days

Those of you who have not seen me in a few months have commented on my new slim and trim look. I have in fact

dropped 107 pounds. And I know that many of you are curious to know how I did that.

Well, brothers and sisters, I have discovered a new diet. It's called the *'Have Yet Another Useless Meeting with Senior Management Diet'*.

It's a simple diet, really. You just show up at these headquarters meetings, and you lose weight by continually running around in circles. Your blood pressure goes up so much that you sweat off more weight than you would in a sauna. Then, after the meeting is over, you're so disgusted that you can't eat for a week!

But, seriously, I want to assure you that when it comes to taking on the employer on our members' behalf, I may be lean...but I'm just as mean as ever!

All of us here today have the privilege of representing the real boss in this union – USGE members. We have a lot of work to get through over the next five days. Work that is critical to the wellbeing of USGE members from coast to coast to coast. It's a big responsibility. And, meeting in Convention only once every three years, it's critical that we don't take our collective eye off the ball.

I've always been the type of guy who believes that actions speak a whole lot louder than words. So, I want to hopefully set a tone for the next five days right here and now.

Contrary to past practice, my opening remarks won't take up a lot of time this morning. And that's not because there isn't a lot to talk about. Quite the contrary. In fact, I urge all of you to read my National President's Report. It's included in your Convention kit. My Report is a detailed account of just how much we have accomplished together as a team – and I emphasize 'as a team' – over the past three years.

I viewed my election three years ago as a great privilege. I still do. I can tell you that this is a job that's keeps you humble.

If I had expected a small post-election honeymoon, reality quickly put an end to that hope! I hit the ground running. Within days of our last Convention, we were faced with an unjust and arbitrary move by CSC management to strip some 2,000 USGE members of their longstanding Penological Factor Allowance.

Dealing with employers like CSC, the RCMP and CSIS isn't easy. In fact, that's probably the understatement of the year! You know that, and I know that. To those of us who fight in the

trenches, day after day, it may often seem that we're just running hard just to stand still. But the last three years have seen us make significant progress on a number of fronts.

Take the PFA issue, for example. It took a 14-month battle, but we won. Those 2,000 USGE members saw their PFA restored. The lesson of from that struggle is we can win if the membership stands together and gets involved in their union's fight on their behalf.

There were many other highlights...

...the long-sought attainment of full-time union status for National Executive members representing our CSC and RCMP members...

...the RCMP's yielding to our demands for a new the Detachment Clerks model work description...

...creation of the Parole Officer Working Group, ACCOSS and a number of major advances on staff security for our Parole Community members...

...the working constructively with the employer to speed the implementation of a new contract for our CSIS members...

...the successful transfer of a number of our Justice members to the newly-created Office of Director of Public Prosecutions...

...and lobbying to ensure a number of the key concerns of our members were reflected in the key CSC Review Panel report.

These, and many other advances, were made through a careful balance of public militancy and private diplomacy. I have been able to develop a cordial and constructive relationship with the Minister of Public Safety, Stockwell Day. A similar connection to Rob Sampson, head of the CSC Review Panel, gave the USGE greater influence on the Panel's report.

And let's not forget that for every major breakthrough, every important advance, there were literally thousands of other victories in USGE workplaces across the country. Small victories in comparison, perhaps. But giant victories to the members whose grievances and concerns were fought for and won by Local officers and activists like all of you here in this room.

All this isn't to say that we didn't face some set-backs. The Supreme Court ruling on our decade-long effort to represent RCMP Municipal Employees was a bitter pill to swallow. We continue to spin our wheels with the Force's Category of

Employees project. And the struggle for pay equity for our CSIS members goes on.

Both our major employers – CSC and the RCMP – are now wrestling with the implementation of major reforms recommended by outside review panels. We will make sure that the concerns of our members are heard loud and clear in these dealings with the employer.

Speaking of our employer, negotiations for a new collective agreement for almost all USGE members is by far the biggest issue we face in the year ahead.

These contract talks are the first to be held under the new Public Service Labour Relations Act. The new PSLRA brought about the biggest reform of federal government labour relations since we first gained collective bargaining rights in the mid-1960s. Both sides have had to learn new ways of doing old things.

For instance, over the past few months, our National Office staff has been consumed with the need to establish Essential Service Agreements with each of our many employers. ESAs have replaced the former designations process, and we all know just how slow, difficult and time-consuming this process has been.

As frustrating as this is, it's important to get it right. For a lot is at stake in this round of negotiations. So I am both pleased and proud to say that our union was successful in seeing a USGE member elected to each of the three PSAC bargaining teams.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge these USGE members...

Ken Boone, of Local 79, sits as a member of the Program and Administrative Services Group...

Melvin Dureen, President of Local 20054 and USGE Alternate Regional Vice-President for BC/Yukon CSC members, was elected a member of the Operational Services Group...

And Byron Duguay, of Local 00101 and USGE Alternate RVP for CSC Ontario members, is a member of the Education and Library Science Services Group team.

These USGE activists, and all team members, have a heavy responsibility. They deserve, and will need, the support of each USGE member. I know that – thanks to you – Ken, Melvin and Byron can count on that support!

Brothers and sisters, if there was one theme that has marked the three years since you trusted me with the national leadership of our union, it was the drive to strengthen the USGE at every level.

And we've done that...together.

We developed skills, and we built solidarity, on a number of levels. We did it at our 2006 National Local President's Meeting. And we did it a year later, at our Regional Conferences across the country.

And we did it throughout the past three years with what I like to call our not-so-secret weapon – the USGE's own training program.

Our custom-designed education courses, created by the USGE for USGE members, saw hundreds and hundreds of activists from all our employer groups receive focused and practical instruction tailored to their daily workplace needs...training that allowed them to better organize and mobilize their Locals.

You know, I've been involved in our union for some time now. But when it comes to our in-house training, I can't think of

any other USGE initiative that has received such an overwhelmingly positive response. Our existing education offerings have created a thirst for even more practical training.

Yet, up to now, we've all been attempting to have our cake and eat it too. Our last Convention approved the program, but provided no direct funding. As a result, these immensely positive activities were left to be funded from general revenues.

Now, we have an opportunity at this Convention to set things right...to fully fund this program on an ongoing basis. This will provide a predictable budget. It will allow us to better plan for the future. And, it will allow us to end the unacceptable level of uncertainty on the National Office staff person carrying out our education activities on a term basis.

As I mentioned at the start of my remarks, none of this would have been possible without teamwork.

I am gratified by the teamwork shown by the members of the USGE's National Executive. They are the eyes and ears of our union, representing and reflecting regional interests and concerns.

I am thankful for the demanding work carried out on a daily basis by our National Office staff. The USGE is truly fortunate to have such a high calibre of knowledgeable and dedicated employees.

I am deeply grateful to you, our Local executive officers and activists, for your selfless dedication to the wellbeing of your fellow USGE members. You are the glue that holds this organization together and keeps us strong.

And I am truly indebted to our membership for their loyalty and support for their union. In return, they have every right to expect that we exercise our responsibilities this week with maturity and mutual-respect.

So, in closing, let's all remember that we were sent here to show leadership...to deliver the goods for the membership. Let's strive to be the leaders our members want us to be. Let's keep our focus on what's really important this week. Let's work together, for the interests of all.

Let's, all of us, play a constructive part in building a stronger, more united and even more effective Union of Solicitor General Employees.

Have a great Convention. Thank you.