



Houston Cuts Good Paying Jobs On Top of Deficit Budget
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THE NO-ON STAND

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.S. GOVERNMENT & GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION

Winter/Spring 2026

Dear members,

How is it only March? 2026 is only three months old and, with the help of Tim Houston, the year has already brought cuts to jobs, cuts to program funding, cuts to remote work, cuts to museums, cuts to tourism centers, and cuts to community groups and not-for-profits.

Even with all the cutting, the Houston government has tabled a budget with the largest deficit in Nova Scotia's history - a whopping \$1.2 billion budget deficit.

While working people lost their jobs and not-for-profits lost their funding, the Houston government still found a \$1 million for high performance yacht racing in the Halifax Harbour. Which people can enjoy for free as they drive back and forth over the toll-less MacDonald bridge.

The Premier tried to sell this as a 'spending budget' but with each passing day the true impact of the cuts became clearer, and people were not happy.

What happened next was a series of rallies against the cuts at Province House. Each day the Premier and his band of MLAs had to walk through a sea of people all asking for some rationale for the cuts. Most didn't seem to know where the cuts came from or how they would impact their departments.

Cabinet Ministers quickly came under fire and very few were able to answer questions about their own departmental budgets. Perhaps the most embarrassing was Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage who was unable to provide any answers to the media's most basic questions.

The NSGEU was visible at every rally, with members standing in solidarity with people from all impacted sectors.

The pressure did have some effect. After the first week some Ministers began to voice concerns over the impact of some of the cuts. The Premier was booed off the stage at the African Heritage Month Gala, and families began to tell their stories of how the cuts would hurt their loved ones.

Nearly \$60 million in cuts were reversed by the Premier, with a focus on reversing cuts to African Nova Scotian Affairs, senior's care and supports for people with disabilities.

A win for those groups but there is still about \$70 million in cuts that will remain.

This has become a familiar habit in Nova Scotia politics. The government of the day spends at an unsustainable rate and when it comes time to rein in spending it's the working people and the groups that need it the most that wind up paying the price. However, there has never been an example of a government, in any province, at any level, who has been able to cut their way to prosperity.

The last round of bargaining for the civil service, in retrospect, may have been one of the most important in recent memory. The union was able to protect key job security language that will make sure members have options beyond just being laid off. Those protections were under attack but the union and bargaining committee stood strong and members will benefit from that show of strength.

Working people also earned a win, nearly a decade in the making with the courts finding that

Stephen McNeil's Bill 148 was unconstitutional. This was the legislation that forced a wage pattern onto union members and removed the long service award.

The court has given the province and unions a year to try and negotiate a financial resolution. If no resolution can be reached the court has maintained authority to order one. The Houston government, who once committed to repealing Bill 148 only to flip flop, once elected, has yet to announce if they will appeal the courts decision or enter negotiations with the unions.

If this is what unions and working people have to look forward to in 2026, its going to be a heck of a year.

In Solidarity,



Sandra Mullen
President, NSGEU



NSGEU President Sandra Mullen and NUPGE Secretary Treasurer Jason MacLean attend a rally in Halifax against Public Service cuts.

FEATURES

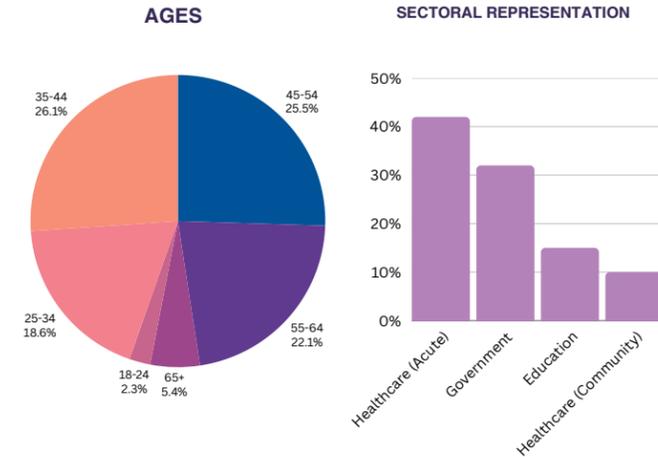
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CONNECT WITH US!

We want to hear from our members. If you have thoughts on this issue of The Stand, or ongoing union issues, send us your feedback! You can email us at inquiry@nsgeu.ca or connect with us:

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-  [@thensgeu](https://instagram.com/thensgeu)
-  [nsgeu.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/nsgeu.bsky.social)

YOUR UNION AT A GLANCE



NSGEU STAFF



NSGEU HAS 71 PEOPLE ON STAFF THAT WORK TO SERVICE THE UNION MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERS

38,041

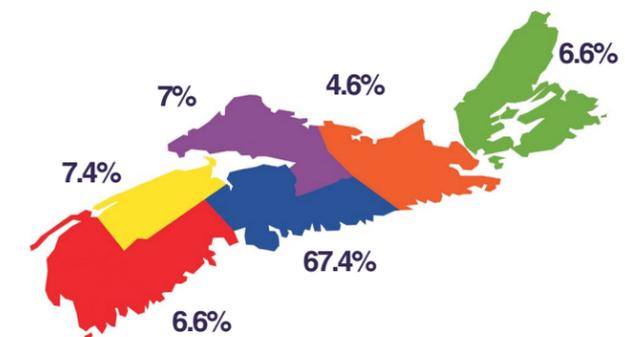
SIGNED MEMBERS

80.4%

FUN FACT

The total number of NSGEU members are equal to more than the populations of Richmond, Inverness and Guysborough Counties combined. Our memberships is large enough to span three counties; that's strength in numbers!

MEMBERS BY REGION



THE STAND

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The NSGEU is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.



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Houston Cuts Good Paying Jobs On Top of Deficit Budget

Nova Scotia will be less welcoming to tourists, have fewer good paying rural jobs, and less culture and heritage museums as part of a series of layoffs Premier Tim Houston made leading into his historical \$1.2 billion budget deficit.

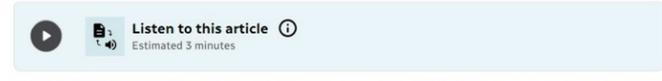
"This has become an all too familiar situation in Nova Scotia. Governments make big spending commitments favoured by corporations, they reduce revenue through tax cuts, and then when it comes time to be held accountable, it's the workers who are left to pay the price," said Sandra Mullen, President of the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU). "These layoffs come after the Finance Minister reassured workers that frontline jobs would not be cut."

The layoffs include the closure of visitor information centres and museums around the province at a time when tourism is

Houston says smaller government, program cuts likely as N.S. contends with 'big' deficit

Premier says difficult times mean doing more with less

Michael Gorman · CBC News · Posted: Feb 07, 2026 10:00 AM AST | Last Updated: February 7



Premier Tim Houston speaks at the annual meeting of the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives on Friday, Feb. 6, 2026. (Michael Gorman/CBC)

Nova Scotia government announces job cuts, museum and visitor information centre closures

NSGEU says premier 'attacking hard-working and dedicated civil servants'

By Willy Palov
Published Feb 19, 2026 Last updated Feb 20, 2026 3 minute read



The Fisherman's Life Museum in Oyster Pond near Dartmouth will be closed permanently. - FILE

an important source of revenue.

"This is not just about hotel bookings, this is about people on the front line welcoming visitors to our province and providing them with information on restaurants, local businesses, community events, all of which promote our overall economy," said Mullen. "Telling people to 'Google it' ignores our greatest tourism advantage: our people and their hospitality."

Other layoffs will impact food inspectors, agricultural labs, and highway construction services.

"Because of the financial choices made by Tim Houston and his government, Nova Scotia is facing its largest deficit in the province's history," said Mullen. "Taking good paying jobs out of our rural communities is not the solution. I wonder how many rural MLAs support the cutting of these jobs? And is this the end of job losses or just the beginning?"

The government

tabled their budget on February 23.

"The Premier now has a track record of attacking hard-working and dedicated civil servants and we will be looking at his budget and any new legislation for further attacks on them."

Nova Scotia government cuts at least 70 unionized employees

BY JENNIFER HENDERSON FEBRUARY 20, 2026



Tim Houston's austerity budget envisions huge deficits, staff cuts, and a billion dollars in additional cuts by 2030

BY TIM BOUSQUET AND JENNIFER HENDERSON FEBRUARY 23, 2026



Opposition parties blast Houston gov't over accountability, 'reckless spending'

NDP leader says premier is evading scrutiny

Taryn Grant · CBC News · Posted: Feb 19, 2026 4:05 PM AST | Last Updated: February 19



NDP Leader Claudia Chender, flanked by NDP MLAs Lisa Lachance and Paul Wozney, at Province House on Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026. (Taryn Grant/CBC)

The Slash and Burn Blizzard Budget

It was a budget so bad that the PCs chose to introduce it during a blizzard. Perhaps they were hoping people would be so preoccupied with digging out that they wouldn't notice the deep cuts government planned to make to our public services and community groups.

They also decided – for only the fourth time in 40 years – to table their budget on the opening day of the Spring sitting of the Legislature, which meant the contents of the budget only started trickling out publicly after 4 p.m., so they could escape the brunt of the news cycle for that day.

This slash-and-burn budget contains enormous cuts to the public sector: an estimated 443 FTE from the civil service alone, as well as \$130 million in cuts to grants-based programs, which many of our members help deliver in the community-based sector.

The union was quick to speak out, releasing a statement from President Sandra Mullen defending our civil service:

“We know that the unionized civil service has grown by approximately four per cent since 2018, while our population has grown by 14 per cent over that same eight-year period: an effective cut. If (Houston) cuts

another five per cent per year for four years, the public services we all rely on will be devastated.”

What is becoming progressively clearer as details emerge is that most MLAs have no clear sense of what these cuts mean to their community, nor can they explain the rationale behind them.



Rally for Arts & Culture March 4 at Province House. NSGEU 1st VP Hugh Gillis was in attendance, along with NSGEU members from Sherbrooke Village (above,) who are facing a 20 per cent provincial funding cut.

Stop the CUTS!

NSGEU



- Environment/Climate Change: -56.5 FTE
- Natural Resources: -52.0 FTE

In the days leading up to the budget, we learned that 77 members would be losing their jobs, including 30 members who would be affected by the closure of our Visitor Information Centres, and another 10 staff working at three museums government had decided to shutter.

The union is still waiting to learn which members will be directly impacted by the full extent of the budget cuts, but so far, it appears the following departments that will be hardest hit in terms of loss in Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions are:

- Opportunities & Social Development: -112.0 FTE
- Justice: -109.1 FTE
- Service NS: -68.0 FTE

One thing is clear, though: Houston's plan to bury their budget in a blizzard hasn't worked. Citizens from throughout the province have taken notice of these deep cuts, and are pushing back.

The Premier was met with an emphatic chorus of booing at the African Heritage Gala a few days after the budget was tabled, and hundreds of Nova Scotians took to the streets around the Legislature during a series of rallies to push back against the regressive cuts to our services and social programs. Thousands more have written and called their MLA to have their voices heard.

While government cries poor, people clearly understand that these cuts are the result of choices these officials have made: choices to forego more than \$400 million in revenue annually that result from Houston's election promises of reducing the HST and removing tolls from the bridges.

At the same time, while this budget eviscerates many department budgets, it contains plenty of money to support private industry to exploit the province's natural resources, while cutting climate change resources, sustainability and applied sciences, and introducing a new tax for hybrid and electric vehicle users.

Of note, only the Departments of Health & Wellness and Energy – the portfolio the Premier appointed himself to – received increases in staffing complements.

“The Premier seems to be solely focused on resource extraction, but has lost sight of the fact that Nova Scotians rely on much more than that,” Mullen said.

The union remains committed to fighting the regressive cuts contained in this budget, and to enforce the strong job protection language in the civil service master agreement.

N.S. budget contains major cuts as province confronts \$1.2B deficit

About 1,000 full-time equivalent jobs could come off the books this year

Michael Gorman · CBC News · Posted: Feb 23, 2026 4:10 PM AST | Last Updated: February 23

Listen to this article
Estimated 7 minutes



N.S. finance minister takes budget questions

February 23 | 6:13

The Houston government tabled a budget on Monday that touts record capital investment, but also comes with major spending cuts and job losses in the civil service. Finance Minister John Lohr took questions from reporters. Here is some of that Q&A.

N.S. premier booed at African Heritage Month gala as budget cuts spark upset

Government budget includes \$130M in grant cuts across sectors

Michael Gorman · CBC News · Posted: Mar 01, 2026 9:32 AM AST | Last Updated: March 1

Listen to this article
Estimated 5 minutes



Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston was booed on Saturday night at the African Heritage Month gala in Halifax. Houston's government recently announced cuts to grants and services, including ones supporting Black and African Nova Scotian communities. (Ryan Somers/Facebook)

The Power of the People Forces Premier to Back Pedal on Some Cuts

The Houston government seemed unprepared to deal with the backlash of their budget that included an historic budget deficit of \$1.2 billion and over \$130 million in cuts to programs and services that Nova Scotians count on.

Following the introduction of the Houston budget, government Ministers seemed unable to answer basic questions about how decisions were made on the cuts to their individual departments. For the first time in the Houston governments tenure Nova Scotians were angry and wanted answers. It appeared that many ministers were unaware or did not understand the budget impacts on their departments.

What happened next showed the true power of the people.

A series of rallies took place outside the Legislature, each one gathering more participation and more frustration with the Houston government. Cuts to African Nova Scotian Affairs led to both the Premier and the Minister responsible to be jeered and booed during their attendance at the African Heritage Month gala.

The arts and culture communities were loud advocates against cuts to their funding, and the Opposition parties stood shoulder to shoulder with families directly impacted by cuts to supports for people with disabilities and cuts to care for seniors.

Each day government MLAs were questioned on their cuts and the first cracks started to be revealed as government MLAs and cabinet ministers started to voice their concerns in the media.

The NSGEU did its part in organizing and participating in rallies outside the legislature as well as launching a media campaign that aimed to keep the pressure on government and questioning the cuts.

On Tuesday, March 10, the Premier held a press conference where he reversed nearly \$54 million in cuts. Funding was restored to programming for

people with disabilities, seniors and African Nova Scotia and Indigenous students.

Cuts to tourism, culture and heritage all remain on the chopping block. Which is counter-productive to the government's argument

that the province needs more revenue. Arts, culture and tourism all generate revenue and if done strategically could increase even more. There is no example of a government ever cutting their way to prosperity.

The Premier also suggested that in the future, his government will initiate a budget consultation process so decisions would be more informed and thoughtful going forward.

Leader of the Opposition, Claudia Chender (NDP) called the cuts cruel, "and the fact that the government couldn't foresee that raises questions about their competence."

The back peddling has forced the government to amend their own budget and has pushed the legislative sitting beyond March break. When the government returns, they will be hopeful the rallies have died down and move for a quick passage of the budget and adjourn the legislature until the fall.

The pressure created by the power of the people has produced results. Is there enough momentum to force the government to back track even further or will they get their budget passed as it is now?

The legislature resumes after the March break on March 23. ■



NSGEU held a rally against Public Service cuts at Province House on February 25.



Houston Puts End to Remote Work Arrangements

In February the Houston government suddenly issued a directive that put an end to all remote work arrangements and forces civil servants back to their offices effective April 20.

Remote work arrangements were fundamental to the province providing programs and services during the pandemic. People demonstrated they could do their jobs remotely and remain engaged and connected to their work teams.

In 2024 the government ended remote work for non-unionized employees and at the time the Minister of the Public Service Commission indicated that any further changes would be part of the bargaining process. But during the most recent round of bargaining for civil service, the employer refused to engage in any remote work language.

The new directive comes at a time when government is passing a budget with deficit of more than \$1.2 billion – the largest deficit in the province’s history. Yet the government has not produced or referenced any data or analysis to show how this will save money or make government more efficient.

In fact, at a time when the downtown area is consistently jammed with traffic, it seems counterproductive and harmful to the environment to add another 2500 people to the daily rush. Additional

parking costs, skyrocketing gas prices, and the need for childcare only serve to hurt people already struggling to make ends meet. Many people also live in rural communities where these good paying jobs help support the rural economy. This move puts these jobs at risk, as it leaves people asking, can I really afford to commute to work?

Unionized N.S. civil servants working remotely told they must return to office

Union says new measure will affect more than 2,500 employees

Richard Cuthbertson · CBC News · Posted: Feb 13, 2026 5:43 PM AST | Last Updated: February 13

Listen to this article
Estimated 2 minutes



Sandra Mullen is the president of the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union. (Sebastian Asprey/CBC)

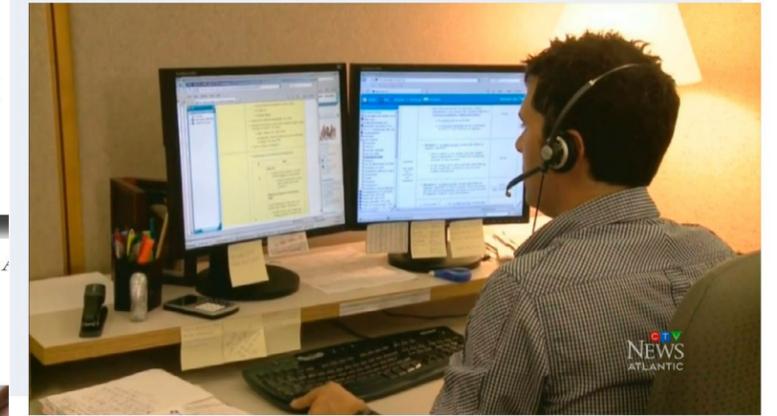
Within days of the government announcement the union was flooded with calls, emails and letters from members all around the province concerned about the impact this will have on them and their families. Many members have documented remote work arrangements or have medical requirements that make working remotely a necessary option.

In response, the union has filed a formal policy grievance with the province. The union will continue to

reach out to impacted members. Every call, email and letter has been received and logged, but due to the overwhelming volume not every communication has received a formal response. As the grievance process continues the union will be in touch with individual members.

N.S. government union critical of back-to-office mandate

By Sean Matt
Published: February 13, 2026 at 5:29PM EST



The Nova Scotia government is ordering all provincial employees back to the office by April 20.

Thousands of Nova Scotia's unionized provincial workers being ordered back into the office

Between 2,500 and 3,000 workers are expected to return to office for April 20.

By Ally Bowes
Published Feb 13, 2026 Last updated Feb 13, 2026 1 minute read

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Published Feb 13, 2026 Last updated Feb 13, 2026 1 minute read



NSGEU president Sandra Mullen speaks during the Standing Committee on Human Resources meeting at One Government Place on Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026. PHOTO BY RYAN TAPLIN /The Chronicle Herald

NSGEU concerned back-to-office mandate will 'add to traffic congestion' in Halifax

By Jesse Thomas
Published: February 17, 2026 at 3:15PM EST



Government workers in Nova Scotia are being told to return to office full time, which is not going down well with the unions representing civil servants.

Sorry about the traffic,
I have to commute to the
office for a video call.

NSGEU remote work works



Workers Win Historic Ruling in Bill 148 Charter Challenge

More than a decade after the McNeil Liberal government passed Bill 148, the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia issued a historic decision that rules government violated the constitutional rights of public sector workers.

“This is a great day for workers’ rights in Nova Scotia,” said NSGEU President Sandra Mullen, “This ruling is the first step towards correcting this historic injustice towards our members, and many others.”

The legislation, which was passed in December 2015, imposed a two-year wage freeze on public servants and reached into their collective agreement to remove the public service award. The unions representing these workers – NSGEU, CUPE, CUPE Local 1867, NSNU, NSTU, Unifor, SEIU, IUOE, and CUPW – came together under the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL), committed to fighting this legislation.

Tim Houston had promised to repeal Bill 148 when he was campaigning in August 2021. But when he was elected as Premier, he broke that promise and continued to waste taxpayers’ money on this legal challenge, which he has now lost.

“Now, Premier Houston and Premier McNeil can share this stain on their respective legacies,” said Mullen.

The legal battle which ensued spanned almost a decade and included 17 affidavit submissions filed on behalf of the unions, as well as four rebuttal submissions. Ultimately, the judge accepted the unions’ positions on both the wage restraint and loss of long service award and completely rejected the government’s arguments.

The ruling states that: “Bill 148 removed the Applicant Unions’ leverage on monetary items and thereby upset the balance of power between the parties and negated the ability of the Unions to engage in meaningful

bargaining.”

The decision also notes that “the fiscal implications of an immediate declaration of invalidity would likely be considerable,” so they are allowing government an additional 12 months to find a remedy, but the judge has reserved jurisdiction on the case to order a remedy, if required. Government may choose to file an appeal, but given they have already been ordered to pay the unions’ legal costs, this would be a fiscally irresponsible decision.

“We look forward to government making our members whole and finally correcting this injustice for workers,” said Mullen.

The legal decision can be read here: <https://nsgeu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026-nssc-57.pdf>

Bill 148 – A Look Back

Stephen McNeil’s Liberal government passed Bill 148 in 2015 and proclaimed it in 2017. The legislation froze the long service award

and legislated five years of low wage increases including two zero per cent increases for thousands of public sector workers.

The NSGEU, in solidarity with other impacted unions, immediately began work to have this dangerous piece of anti-worker legislation repealed as a breach of Section 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The union knew that pursuing legal action would be a slow and long process.

The challenge was delayed almost right away when Premier McNeil referred the legislation to the Court of Appeal for an opinion. The province then made a series of preliminary objections to material being sought by the Unions. Once those matters were resolved, the Court of Appeal concluded in 2022 that it was not

the appropriate forum to decide whether the legislation breached the Charter.

There was some reason for optimism in 2021 when Tim Houston and the Conservatives formed government. In a survey sent to the union the Conservatives committed to repealing Bill 148 if elected.

Once in government then Finance Minister Allan McMaster did a U-turn on this commitment and said the legislation is redundant and does not need to be repealed. This forced the unions to continue the court process.

From there the Court held a hearing that looked at the impact of the government’s legislation.

Bill 148 did three things that directly interfered with members right to full, free, collective bargaining:

- It imposed a non-negotiated wage pattern on the entire public sector (0%, 0%, 1.0%, 1.5% & an additional 0.5% on the last day of the agreement);
- It removed long-standing articles from the Civil Service Agreement (ending the retirement allowance/public service award as of April 1, 2015);
- And it prohibited an arbitrator from awarding

anything above the above-noted wage pattern. Even before government proclaimed the Bill into force, the threat of legislation hobbled the unions’ bargaining power and prevented the union from being able to freely conclude the collective bargaining process, because it took away the leverage of wages and monetary items like the service award off the table completely. After a significant amount of time with very little progress in bargaining at any major tables, the NSGEU announced in late summer 2017 that it would apply to the Labour Board to appoint an Interest Arbitration Board to settle the Civil Service Agreement, as is our right under the legislation that applied. Government proclaimed the legislation to prevent the interest arbitrator from awarding any monetary increases that were higher than was set out in the legislation. The unions successfully argued that Bill 148 breached Section 2(d) of the Charter, which guarantees Canadians Freedom of Association and protects the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.



Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia's top court to look at controversial sections of Bill 148

Province has asked Appeal Court to examine bill's language on long-service award

Susan Bradley - CBC News - Posted: Oct 04, 2017 2:54 PM ADT | Last Updated: October 5, 2017



Protesters gather in front of Province House in 2016 to protest Bill 148. (Catharine Tunney/CBC)

Around the union in Photos

Shoulder to Shoulder: We are all Treaty People rally on March 3 at Province House. NSGEU 1st VP Hugh Gillis was in attendance.



Around the union in Photos



Rally for Arts & Culture March 4 at Province House. NSGEU 1st VP Hugh Gillis was in attendance with members from Sherbrooke Village.



Around the union in Photos

The Board of Directors met in February for strategic planning and discussed a roadmap outlining the union's direction over the next several years.



Celebrating our Administrative Professionals

The following photos of members and their pets have been submitted on behalf of the Administrative Professionals Occupational Council in honour of Administrative Professionals' Week, which we celebrate from April 19-25. Thank you for the important work that you do in all sectors and settings: your work is invaluable and does not go unnoticed.



Ashleigh Schnare and Rasca, Local 189



Amy Smith and Mack, Local 189



Heather-Ann Slade, Local 189



Kalei Lou and Kylo, Local 189



Patty Pye, Local 193



Shauna Richardson and Gunner, Local 189



Ashley Lepage, Local 193



Vanessa Skinner and Lili, Local 189

Menstrual May

Ending period poverty in our community through advocacy and menstrual product drives.

Menstrual MAY is your opportunity to help. Donate menstrual products or gift cards at locations below up until May 29th.

Drop off at:

NSGEU 255 John Savage Ave.

Any branch of Halifax Public Libraries

Any local food banks

Menstrual MAY is supported by the NSGEU Women's Committee.



United Way
Halifax

NSGEU

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