REPORT OF THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER & EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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Pandemic forces us to focus on our strategic priorities

Even before the pandemic, the 2020s were already posing significant challenges to the future of unions like ours. The pandemic made it more essential that we maintain our strategic focus.

At the outset of the new decade, PIPSC leaders were faced with three significant challenges. A major demographic shift, with a large percentage of our members reaching retirement age. The rapid introduction of new technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, requiring new strategies to protect and enhance the careers of our members. And the ever-present threat against the Rand formula – the cornerstone of our financial stability.

The pandemic has thrown these challenges into sharp relief.

In the first few weeks, we faced acute new problems – notably needing to conduct all our operations remotely while representing and protecting our members during an uncertain time.

Our team came through.

Staff switched to working from home while providing our members with the quality services they expected. We launched a new video conferencing tool for staff and elected officials. We negotiated and consulted with employers to ensure our members were protected at work and set up to work remotely, wherever possible. We secured support for members who could not do their work due to childcare and school closures. Our team established new mechanisms to quickly address labour relations issues that were triggered by the pandemic. We significantly increased the volume of our communication with members to give them up-to-date information. We also launched a TV and digital ad campaign to cement the public's appreciation for our members' work in supporting Canadians through the pandemic.

Through all of this, bargaining continued. We made progress on the Employee Wellness Support Program – to ensure every member has the sick leave they need when they need it. We continued the momentum to replace the Phoenix pay system. A pension campaign was launched, attracting thousands of members to webinars where they learned about their pensions and how to protect them. We created six caucuses, as subcommittees of the Human Rights and Diversity Committee, to make our community more inclusive. We secured new saving opportunities for our members through

ServicePlus. The Legacy Foundation awarded 57 scholarships to aspiring future professionals. To celebrate our centennial, we launched our book, **Leading Progress: The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada 1920–2020**. We even sent members union-branded, protective face masks.

Despite all this good work, we also suffered setbacks.

Employers are not being as collaborative as they were in the first weeks of the pandemic. The Treasury Board Secretariat is making leave under Code 699 less accessible and forcing us to defend our members through a policy grievance. The Government of Ontario refused to extend pandemic pay to our members even though they had to be exposed to health risks while conducting their duties. The Government of Manitoba forced our engineers to choose between pay cuts or job losses. Our NAV Canada members didn’t even have a choice – over fifty members were laid off.

These setbacks are a harbinger of the long term impact of the pandemic on our union.

The financial pressures created by the economic downturn and the cost of managing the pandemic will create new opportunities for those governments who have always wanted to balance the books on the backs of workers. At a time of demographic shift and technological change, some employers may be tempted to cut jobs through attrition.

That’s why it’s essential for the PIPSC to maintain its strategic focus during this time of uncertainty. We must make the case for a strong, professional public service as an essential part of post-pandemic recovery. We must continue advocating for tax fairness, not cuts to public service, as the answer to the financial challenges faced by the government.

Internally, we must double down on strategies that engage newer members and build a sense of belonging and commitment to the union – so that they can carry the torch as demographics shift.

We must build new services to support our members in meeting their career development goals, giving them insight on the future of their work and connecting them to training opportunities that allow them to thrive in a world of constant change.

And we must keep building a professional, modern, progressive, innovative and forward-looking community, so that no matter the challenges to the Rand formula, we maintain the support and commitment of our members to their union.

There is no denying that the 2020s will be rife with challenges for every union, including PIPSC. We are starting from a position of strength and by maintaining our focus, we can get through these challenges better and stronger.