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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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Sask. Finance Minister misleading media about what public servants want

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Contrary to what Finance Minister Kevin Doherty told reporters yesterday, public servants are not in favour of additional unpaid days off, according to SGEU.

“We’ve been holding meetings across the province, and I can tell you that our membership is overwhelmingly opposed to mandatory unpaid days off,” says SGEU President Bob Bymoer. “Workers are coming to these meetings because they’re concerned, and they’re telling us that they can’t afford pay cuts or more time away from their jobs. They have families, and mortgages, and bills to pay. Some of our members, especially in the Ministry of Social Services, are already overworked and will only be set back further if forced to take more days off.”

Requiring public employees to take additional unpaid days off would amount to a pay cut. Public workers facing such a cut would reduce their spending accordingly, which would do major damage to local business and the provincial economy.

Still, Doherty told reporters that unpaid days off are “more palatable” to public sector employees than job losses.

“Why are public sector workers even being presented with an ultimatum like this?” asks Bymoer. “They didn’t put the province in debt; this government did.”

“What would be palatable to our membership is if government stopped trying to bargain in the media,” says Bymoer. “Maybe if government had actually sat down with us, it would know what its employees want. Instead, they keep floating ideas in the media that have real-life consequences on our members and cause added stress and worry. It’s completely unethical.”

In year-end interviews, Premier Brad Wall said he was considering wage rollbacks and layoffs for public servants.

“Bringing up wage rollbacks and job losses in the media when the premier did was a calculated move to make mandatory unpaid days off seem like the lesser of two evils,” says Bymoer. “But neither is necessary.”

Bymoer points to alternative measures to address the deficit such as cancelling liquor privatization, instead of giving millions in annual profits away to out-of-province businesses like Sobeys. Government could eliminate the three new MLAs it added to the Legislature at a combined cost of roughly \$700,000 per year. Premier Wall could roll back the 74 percent payroll increase that he gave to his Executive Council. Government could stop wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on overpriced consultants.

“Public employees have not been a major contributor to rising government expenditures,” says Bymoer. “SGEU members’ wage increases have barely matched inflation under the Wall government, and most already have mandatory unpaid days off every second or third week.”

“Public sector workers don’t want mandatory unpaid days off, and they shouldn’t be threatened with them, or with job losses, just because this government blew billions of taxpayers’ dollars.”

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