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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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Budget response: Sask. families and public services continue to pay the price

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Public services and the Saskatchewan families who rely on them continue to pay the price for the Sask. Party government's shameful mismanagement of the province's finances, according to SGEU.

"Saskatchewan people and the public employees of this province did not get us into this mess, yet we are forced to accept the consequences of government's mishandling of taxpayers' money," says SGEU president Bob Bymoan.

The 2017-18 provincial budget cuts jobs in executive government in crucial areas where workers meet basic needs of Saskatchewan people, including the Ministries of Highways, Education and Environment. In total, there is a net loss of 111 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, which includes some previously announced reductions.

"Saskatchewan public services have already been cut to the bone, leaving gaps in the workforce and chronic understaffing in vital areas, like child protection and correctional services. More than 1,900 government jobs were cut between 2010 and 2014. Now, workers struggle to deal with unmanageable workloads, and families who need services suffer the consequences," says Bymoan. "Additional cuts will place even more strain on overburdened staff and the people they serve."

On top of an ongoing cascade of job losses, the public service is being targeted for even more harmful cuts.

"If a threatened 3.5 per cent wage cut is imposed on public service workers, they will be much worse off than before the beginning of the resource boom," Bymoan points out. "Wages for government employees have not kept up with the cost of living. In real dollar terms, government workers already take home less today than they did a decade ago. A further wage cut would be excessively punitive."

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Public service jobs and wages stimulate growth. “Public employees spend their wages in their local communities, and their purchases help stimulate economic activity that benefits everyone,” he adds. “Austerity agendas that hurt families also slow economic recovery,” notes Bymoén.

Funding cuts to Meewasin Valley Authority are short-sighted, and threaten a world-class nature conservancy that enables Saskatchewan people, and visitors from around the world, to experience this irreplaceable natural resource. “We urge government to re-asses its priorities, and help preserve the fragile shoreline, parkland and waters in the Meewasin Valley,” says Bymoén.

“Changes to the management of Wascana Park are cause for concern,” according to Bymoén. “We will be monitoring the transition to ensure the operational funding is not eroded, leading to a decline in the ability to maintain the park to its current standards.”

Cuts to post-secondary education, which will affect Sask Polytechnic and the province’s regional colleges, will hurt young people, and those who lost their jobs in the economic downturn. “Why would you erode funding for post-secondary education at a time when we need to support skills training to equip people to prepare for a future in an increasingly competitive economy?” asks Bymoén.

“Substantive cuts to Ministry of Justice Community Services, which funds community-based agencies, suggest that vulnerable and at-risk citizens will lose important support and advocacy services,” Bymoén adds.

Instead of cutting valuable services, like the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, government should be held accountable for its mishandling of Saskatchewan’s finances. “It squandered record revenues on over-priced consultants, costly mega-projects, adding three new MLAs, increasing the payroll for political staff by 74 per cent, and handing out millions in questionable contracts to private, often out-of-province companies,” says Bymoén.

Giving away revenue-generating public assets, like liquor stores, is another financial mistake. Liquor privatization alone will cost the province \$115 million in public profits in the first five years alone, he adds.

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“Government needs to start managing more effectively, and it should start with a review of all contracts with consultants and private contractors to assess the real cost and value to the province. Any contract that is found to be inefficient should be immediately cancelled.”

“Saskatchewan people expect their public services and Crowns to be there when they need them. It’s time to stop the cutbacks and privatization, before it’s too late,” Bymoer says. “It’s irresponsible for this government to put the well-being of today’s families and future generations at risk.”

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