

If you love Saskatchewan....

Help stop the quiet selling off of our public services

The Brad Wall government is quietly starting to privatize our public services. Here are some examples:

HEALTH CARE

Private, for-profit clinics will now be permitted to offer surgeries in Regina and Saskatoon. The government's move to re-direct \$5.5 million in public funds to finance private surgeries and diagnostic tests will mean:

- higher costs;
- less money for public health services; and
- fewer health professionals in the public system.

Higher costs

The costs of surgeries in private, for-profit clinics will escalate after the initial 'introductory offer', according to the Saskatchewan Health Coalition. For example, the Alberta Health Services says the cost of hip and knee surgery in Edmonton's Royal Alexander Hospital is \$4,500, while the cost in the for-profit Health Resources Centre is \$14,000.

Less money for public health services

Diverting government funds to private clinics means less for publicly delivered services. The government has recently put a hold on \$3 million in capital funding for a new public outpatient surgical care centre in Regina. Money for more staff and resources that would boost the public health system is now being siphoned off into the pockets of private companies.

Staff shortages worsen

There is a province-wide shortage of health professionals. Spreading our limited human resources across two systems - public and private - does not solve the problem. In fact, it will make the staff shortages in the public health system worse. We need to maximize staff recruitment and retention in our public hospitals.

POST-SECONDARY SKILLS TRAINING

Private companies and for-profit career colleges are making inroads into the province, threatening the quality and affordability of training for learners.

Public skills training eroded

SIAST has stopped delivering some key training courses, which are now being offered by private companies. These include first aid and safety training, truck driver training, and heavy equipment operator instruction.

Students pay the price

Last year, two private vocational schools run by the Academy of Learning in Regina and Swift Current were shut down because they failed to meet provincial standards. Students faced the possibility that they would lose their tuition, as well as the time they had spent in the program.

Quality doesn't make the grade

The quality of education in private career colleges just doesn't make the grade, according to a recent Globe and Mail investigation.

"High tuition fees and an inability to secure well-paying jobs after graduation - combined with what some former students and teachers identify as lax teaching and entrance standards - resulted in 40 per cent of career-college students missing loan payments between 2006 and 2008, compared with 20 per cent of students at public colleges and universities. Average tuition at a career college is \$14,000, a recent study found." - *Globe and Mail, May 3, 2010.*

Regional college system threatened

The government's recent move to dismantle the Carlton Trail Regional College points to the privatization of public post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, and will mean reduced access and higher costs for rural families.

The Carlton Trail Regional College, which serves a wide range of towns and rural communities in east-central Saskatchewan, is merging with St. Peter's College in Muenster. A new board will be created, and at least one board position will be reserved for a member of the Benedictine community.

This move signals a fundamental re-structuring of the province's post-secondary skills training network, and it is being done behind closed doors.

HIGHWAYS

We all rely on our highways crews to keep our roadways safe, especially in winter.

Increasingly, repair work on our highways trucks and graders is being contracted out to private companies. Privatizing highway equipment repair will cost more and lead to less efficient service.

Privatizing highways maintenance. What's the bottom line?

Ministry of Highways mechanics have for years provided high quality workmanship at reasonable costs. The move to have repair work done by businesses whose goal is to make a profit will drive up costs.

When private companies are repairing vehicles, there is no guarantee that they will make highways equipment their priority. So snow plows might sit in a private garage waiting for repair - making it tough for road crews to keep up with the demands of winter weather in Saskatchewan.

Higher costs for repair will lead to cuts in road maintenance - making it difficult for snow plow operators and road maintenance work crews to get the job done.

PARKS

Provincial parks are part of our natural heritage. They require careful stewardship, and should be affordable for all.

But, government is putting parts of our parks up for sale.

Twenty-three cabins in Greenwater Lake Provincial Park have been sold to a Regina-based property management company. The new private owner will add 10 more cabins, ensuring that it is a significant money-maker.

Private companies are moving into development of seasonal campsites in some of our provincial parks.

The provision of firewood, garbage and sanitation services in some provincial parks have been handed over to private companies.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Privatizing information technology services within the provincial government benefits private business owners, but is a losing proposition for the people of Saskatchewan. The government has recently announced its intention to contract more information technology work out of the public service to private IT companies.

It costs more

Government is paying business two to three times more to do the same work that has traditionally been done in-house by government workers. This is because:

- contract employees are typically paid more than government workers; and
- business owners take a substantial profit off the top.

The bottom line is that privatizing information technology services costs taxpayers more.

We lose skilled workers

Saskatchewan people should also be concerned about a 'brain drain' from our province. We are in danger of losing specialized knowledge and skills in the IT area, as more and more of this work gets contracted out. We may well see this work leaving not only our province, but our country in future.

Our privacy rights at risk

We risk losing control of our personal information -- health files and legal records - if companies are sold or work is transferred to the U.S. or an off-shore country.

When our electronic records are held in Saskatchewan, by the Saskatchewan government, there is built-in accountability. Most citizens are powerless to ensure that private companies in other countries protect their privacy rights.

It's in our best interests as a province to keep IT capacity within our own government. We don't want to see our money, or the technological capabilities in this area leave the province.

The government should be strengthening our internal capacity, not putting us at the mercy of business interests who have no real commitment to our province or its people.

SAFETY INSPECTIONS

Licensing and inspections belong in public, not private, hands. But the government is turning over its responsibility to inspect and license mechanical equipment - such as elevators, amusement rides, and boilers - to private interests.

Safety inspections are moving from the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing to a Delegated Authority. This new authority will be governed by a board of directors that will include industry representation.

Lower standards and less accountability

The government has a responsibility to ensure public safety, and is accountable to the public for its actions. Private corporations are responsible to their shareholders, and are not accountable to the people of the province.

When public safety is the issue, citizens have a right to expect high standards of accountability. Industry self-regulation too often means lower standards, inadequate reporting, limited monitoring and reduced compliance.

Losing quality control - milk testing

The provincial dairy lab has been closed and the Milk Control Board has been eliminated; raw milk will now be sent to Edmonton to be tested.

SASKATCHEWAN LIQUOR AND GAMING AUTHORITY (SLGA)

Our publicly-run liquor stores help keep our families and communities safe. SLGA is committed to selling alcohol in a socially-responsible manner. Public liquor store workers check IDs of anyone who looks 25 years or younger.

The government has recently licensed private wine stores in Regina and Saskatoon, opening the door to further privatization of liquor sales.

Keeping our kids safe

Mother's Against Drunk Driving -- MADD Canada -- is dedicated to reducing alcohol-related harm. It has concluded that private liquor retailers are more likely than public liquor store workers to sell alcohol to those who should not have it.

"A young clerk working in a convenience store is much more vulnerable to pressure to sell alcohol to an underage peer than a trained and experienced employee of a government liquor store.

"Similarly, a young clerk in a corner store is less likely to refuse service to a belligerent, intoxicated customer who demands that the clerk sell him alcohol."

From *Provincial Liquor Boards: Meeting the best interests of Canadians*, MADD Canada Policy Paper 2009

According to MADD - Small businesses have "a strong financial incentive not to refuse sales. "It's harder on a small business - that needs to make a profit to survive - to turn away a customer. It is much easier for a large, public institution to bear the financial burden of not selling liquor to someone who should not have it."

A Calgary Police Service report *Liquor Stores and Crime*, stated that the need to make a profit may pressure private store owners into "selling to underage youth."

Keeping our public services strong

Revenue generated by public liquor sales goes back to government to help fund valuable services like schools, hospitals and roads. Last year, liquor sales contributed \$196 million to the public purse.

Saskatchewan people will lose this revenue if liquor sales are privatized.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Many of the administrative and operational support services that public organizations rely on are quietly being contracted out to private firms.

The Government Services distribution centre in Regina has been eliminated. Office furniture is now purchased directly from private business. Security, surveillance, and maintenance services, as well as plumbing and electrical services, are increasingly being contracted out.

Private maintenance contracts are replacing public services in health care facilities.

SASKPOWER

The Brad Wall government is starting to chip away at one of our most valued crown corporations - SaskPower. It has signed a deal that protects a private company from rising fuel costs but passes increased costs onto Saskatchewan citizens.

SaskPower has entered into a 20-year power purchase agreement with Ontario-based Northland Power Income Fund.

A new plant, which will be built near North Battleford, will be up and running by 2013. Northland Power will produce 347 megawatts of base load power, representing nearly 10 per cent of the power generated in Saskatchewan.

The agreement "provides protection against changes in the market price of natural gas, as fuel costs are passed through SaskPower," according to a Northland Power news release.

So Northland Power is protected against increases in the price of natural gas, but the people of Saskatchewan are being told to expect annual rate increases.

Public-private partnerships (P3's) of this nature remove any risk for Northland Power and put it all on the backs of Saskatchewan people. Where residents of Saskatchewan should benefit from the success of SaskPower, we now assume the risk of a contract "designed to ensure predictable, stable, and sustainable cash flows over the entire 20-year term" for Northland Power.

The government is setting private companies up for success, while setting the hard working people of Saskatchewan up for failure. SaskPower is more than capable of building and successfully operating this type of facility, while ensuring the people of this province benefit from the economic returns.

From *Save Our Saskatchewan (SOS) Crowns*

SASKTEL

Despite claims by the Brad Wall government that it will not sell the crowns, it is quietly handing over bits and pieces of SaskTel to private corporations.

To date, DirectWest Canada and Navigata have been sold off. There are for sale signs on Hospitality Network (HospNet), AgDealer, and SaskTel's real estate investment in Saskatoon Square.

Operator services, relay service, email service, High Speed Internet, and inside installations for SaskTel services have also been contracted out to private firms, some of which are not even Saskatchewan-based companies.

The government says that our Crowns aren't for sale, so why are they selling off the pieces?

From *Save Our Saskatchewan (SOS) Crowns*

SASKATCHEWAN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK (SCN)

The government is shutting down SCN, our provincial broadcast crown corporation, and selling its broadcast assets to private firms.

With a commitment to the Saskatchewan people, nearly 70 per cent of SCN's 2009 broadcasting budget stayed in the province to support local productions. SCN supported our provincial film and television industry by investing in local content and encouraging viewers to create content for broadcasting.

SCN connected the people of Saskatchewan with educational broadcasting from non-violent, commercial-free children's programming to televised K-12 and post-secondary education courses. It also provided professional development and work place training for businesses, agencies, and community-based organizations.

For rural and remote schools and businesses in Saskatchewan, SCN provided satellite powered internet services. The destruction of SCN is yet another example of how our current government is stripping away the Saskatchewan identity by eliminating our crown corporations.

From *Save Our Saskatchewan (SOS) Crowns*, May 15, 2010