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## NEWS RELEASE

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# ***Nationwide road trip ignites demands to address provincial struggles***

A cross-country bus tour that began as a mission to educate Canadians about the effects of income inequality and unfair taxation in a grassroots effort evolved into a transformational mission calling for an immediate and broad-sweeping response to perils facing rural Saskatchewan, says one of the Saskatchewan reps who joined the national tour as it powered across the province.

The National Union of Public and General Employees' (NUPGE) *Fairness Express* bus endeavour completed its nationwide tour de force last week after some 40,000 kilometres of trekking from the shores of the Atlantic to the shores of the Pacific and hundreds of communities in between including a 6,000-kilometre stretch across Saskatchewan. While in the province, the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU) hosted its national union from one end of the province to the other in a three-week journey that left organizers with a whole new sense of the realities facing rural residents.

"I was surprised how unguarded and vocal and open people were with us about the issues they face in their communities," says SGEU's Mary Ann Harrison. "We spoke to many people who say the cost of housing and rising costs of basic living expenses are outpacing wage increases. Many heard from too many rural residents who confided in us they couldn't afford housing, let alone food, which took some of the *Fairness Express* team by surprise. People are looking for the basic necessities but with living costs going up, it's a major struggle to live; more people than we would have imagined simply have nowhere to go and can't seem to get ahead. They are unable to find the public services in their area that are very much needed to support the changes they will need to make to be successful and fight their way out of poverty."

The national union says it wanted the grand gesture of the colossal green bus to get an accurate understanding of what daily life was like for Canadians in a climate of ongoing national and international unease about the so-called one-percent economy of an increasing division between the high and low spectrums of society.

"Our goal was to go to where people live to find out how they are managing in this difficult economy and what their hopes are for the future," says James Clancy, president of the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). "We accomplished that goal





hundreds of times over. Our teams in every province engaged with Canadians like never before.”

Back in Saskatchewan, Harrison says the weightiness of the stories she heard is a call for local unions to renew their commitment to educating the public about the effects of provincial practices that have only escalated the problems surrounding income inequality and drastically-unbalanced taxation. The trend of eliminating public services from small towns and privatizing those remaining since 2008, she says, has taken a direct and irreversible hit on Saskatchewan. “This government is creating ghost towns with their centralization and privatization of services. Public service jobs have moved leaving most people in the small communities making minimum wage and are unable to afford to spend their money in the community they live. This is causing small businesses to close and the ones that are still there are unable to pay competitive wages. While the rich continue to get richer, we saw how the most vulnerable continue to struggle. We need to start better addressing and bringing solutions to this problem as a whole community.”

To arrange an interview with Mary Ann Harrison, please contact:

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To arrange interviews with James Clancy, please call:

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For photos from the tour, visit [fairnessexpress.ca](http://fairnessexpress.ca)

**Social media: @ATNcampaign #FairnessExpress Facebook: ATNcampaign/SGEU**

### **NUPGE**

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is one of Canada's largest labour organizations with over 340,000 members. NUPGE's mission is to improve the lives of working families and to build a stronger Canada by ensuring our common wealth is used for the common good.

### **SGEU**

The Saskatchewan Government and General Employees` Union (SGEU) represents nearly 20,000 members working in crown corporations, educational institutions, health regions, retail and regulatory industries, community service agencies and public service/government ministries in Saskatchewan. SGEU has been working for over a century to protect the rights of all working people in the province.

