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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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Contracting out highways work a costly mistake

Government should stop contracting out important public services, like engineering design work for the province's highways, because of mounting evidence that privatization is a costly mistake, according to SGEU.

"We have been expressing concerns about privatization and contracting out in the Ministry of Highways for years," says SGEU President Bob Bymo. "Recent reports and assessments by industry representatives suggest that our concerns were not unfounded."

According to a CBC investigation, costs for highways engineering services have doubled in recent years, and almost half of the province's highway contracts are behind schedule, leaving roads in conditions that put public safety at risk. A former Ministry official has attributed some of the delay to contractors opting to take on more lucrative work for the private sector.

Spokespersons for the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association say escalating costs and poor quality results for Saskatchewan highways projects are due to government using inexperienced private contractors instead of ministry engineering staff.

"Hundreds of public service jobs have disappeared over the last number of years in highways engineering and design. We've lost engineers, engineer technicians, lab technicians, project managers, and the provincial highways labs are being shut down or sold off," says Bymo.

"The result is that the public pays more for lower quality work, and the top priority is no longer ensuring the safety of the travelling public – it is making a profit," he adds.

"It's time to acknowledge that outsourcing and contracting out valuable public services is not cost effective, does not ensure quality work, and too often puts public safety at risk. We call on government to re-build engineering and design capacity within the Ministry of Highways, so we can get the work done on time and on budget," concludes Bymo.

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