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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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Privatizing hundreds of cleaning jobs will cost Saskatchewan people

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Government's decision to cut the jobs of hundreds of building cleaners across the province is an ideologically-driven, mean-spirited move that will hurt Saskatchewan families and local economies, according to SGEU.

"My heart goes out to these workers, and their loved ones, who are under enormous stress, wondering how they're going to pay their bills come June," says SGEU President Bob Bymoer. "It's shameful for government to be making its lowest-paid, most vulnerable employees pay the price for its own financial mismanagement."

On Jan. 12, the Ministry of Central Services requested proposals from private contractors to take over cleaning services in numerous government buildings across the province. Today, 230 workers in 17 communities across Saskatchewan were told they will be laid off at the end of June.

"We said back in January that it would come to this and, unfortunately, now it has," says Bymoer. "Government is using the deficit as an excuse to cut the public service and hire private contractors."

The facilities affected by these cuts include the Saskatchewan Polytechnic campuses, courthouses, the Saskatchewan Disease Control Laboratory, and the Legislative Building, where 41 jobs are being cut.

"Public sector workers didn't create the deficit, and yet this government is forcing them to pay for it," says Bymoer. "Cleaners deserve better than this. Now they'll be able to re-apply for their jobs at less pay. Where is the economic sense in that? Cutting these living-wage jobs will mean less money spent in local communities, more poverty-line wages, and more people having to rely on our social safety net."

Other costs to privatizing cleaning services include health and safety risks. Modern cleaning work has moved away from a focus on tidiness and toward an emphasis on health. Trained and skilled cleaners are essential for preventing the spread of disease and making sure that building occupants and the cleaners themselves are not harmed by cleaning chemicals/practices.

An independent study from 1995 found that in-house custodians with the Edmonton Public School Board consistently kept their schools in better condition, and had a much better understanding of safety procedures than contract cleaners.

“These job cuts will cost Saskatchewan more in the long run,” says Bymoer. “When will this government take responsibility for mismanaging the province’s finances and propose some fair and effective solutions?”

Bymoer says the government can be more fiscally responsible and should start with a review of all contracts with private companies hired to provide public services. Government could also 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, and costly megaprojects, like the Regina Bypass. It could save tens of millions each year by cancelling liquor privatization, instead of giving millions in annual profits away to out-of-province businesses like Sobeys.

“Close to 2,000 people from across the province rallied in front of the Legislature last week to say No to this government’s cuts and austerity agenda,” says Bymoer. “It’s time for government to listen to the people, and stop hurting Saskatchewan families by cutting public services and jobs.”

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