



**Submission of the  
Union of Northern Workers  
to the  
Government of the Northwest Territories**

**Budget Dialogue 2016**

**Protecting Workers and Residents**

**April 18, 2016**

The Union of Northern Workers places a high priority on protecting high quality, public service employees in the GNWT. When the territorial government is advocating another round of cuts to expenditures for the upcoming budget, we are fighting to ensure that any reductions do not include jobs. We are again asking the general public and MLAs to stand with us over the coming weeks in our battle to protect those working in the public service. It is also no secret that we are in the process of negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement where we are aiming to build on our legacy of creating an ever-improving, more attractive workforce in the public sector.

## **Jobs Affect Everyone**

We support the government's effort to find the best ways of spending tax dollars for the best value. Right now that should mean investing in our workers who are here spending money in our local economies and who are here contributing the human energy needed to support vibrant, spirited Northern communities. It means revenue for shops, restaurants and other businesses, and a more sociable, civic body. It also means that the North can remain an attractive destination for other Canadians and global citizens to seek. The government plans to attract more than 2,000 people by 2019 to the NWT to collect \$30,000 per person from the federal government through the Territorial Formula Financing Grant. How can this be achieved if they are contributing to job layoffs?

The impact of job losses also affects those left behind and creates what is known as "survivor's guilt." The ones who keep their jobs go to work, but see the empty desk and it negatively impacts their mental health. They feel badly for this lost coworker. They wonder who will be next. They have an increased workload. They cut back on discretionary spending (like leisure activities, gifts, going out) to save money which keeps more money out of the local economy.

## **Maintain Programs and Services to the Public**

The government says that it wants to find \$150 million worth of cuts to expenditures, but right now we don't know what that could mean for badly needed public services. There remain urgent demands for investments in such areas as daycare and junior kindergarten to support working mothers and families, homelessness and addictions issues spiraling out of control, climate change that needs a strong territorial voice and an aging population that needs new housing urgently. Now is not the time to cut and run from our overdue social obligations with severe cuts.

## **Roads or People?**

Of late, the government has focused its messaging on the need to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure projects with the hopes that heavy spending will stimulate the economy and provide long-term stability for the region. We believe this course of action can be compared to renovating your house when money is tight – your money can be better spent feeding your family and paying your bills. Similarly, is this really the time to pour money into new roads and physical infrastructure when the economy is slow? Should taxpayer money be put toward risky ventures as is being proposed with P3 highways and other massive projects?

## **Public Private Partnerships**

The union strongly opposes Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) where the government enters long-term contracts with private companies for large infrastructural projects. P3s have proven time and again to cost governments and taxpayers more money in the long-run and lack the openness and transparency that citizens enjoy through a public process. We remain very concerned that planned projects for highways or long-term senior care - if left to private interests driven by profit - will lead to continued cuts to quality public service positions, poorer service and a greater cost to the taxpayer.

## **Proceed with care**

All is not doom and gloom and as some MLAs have pointed out, the economic picture may be very different in a year's time. Presently the GNWT is paying less than five per cent of its general revenue on servicing its debt. This would be considered enviable to most residents typically have to pay up to 25 to 30 per cent of their income paying off a mortgage. The GNWT states on its Careers website: "We are committed to creating and maintaining a competent public service that is representative of the population we serve."

We appreciate the GNWT is reaching out to residents by asking for written input on the budget. We would also like to see public forums and roundtables, as has been done in previous years, to allow for open dialogue, brainstorming and informed two-way discussion.