

MEMBER UPDATE

UCP DOUBLES DOWN ON CRUEL PUBLIC SERVICES CUTS

The government released its latest job-killing fiscal update on Nov. 24., and AUPE members are furious.

Finance Minister Travis Toews targeted AUPE members with his November 24th fiscal update. Toews' report talks down to us, shaming public sector workers for not "creating jobs" or "generating wealth." To Toews and the UCP, public sector workers are a leech on society. AUPE members know that's a lie.

We know the public sector creates jobs, because we work them. We know that cuts to the public sector are killing jobs, because the UCP is trying to lay us off. Toews is trying to tell us not to believe the things that we see with our own eyes.

While Toews says that "we are starting to see signs of some economic recovery," his economic update is bleak—especially for AUPE members. This fiscal update shows that the government isn't interested in fixing Alberta's budget problem. Instead, the government is putting thousands of Albertans out of work so they can make their cruel, ideological cuts.

Here are the key features from the fiscal update and what they mean for AUPE members.

Three Anchors

Toews describes the UCP's economic policy as being held together by three anchors:

1. Putting spending in line with other provinces as reported by the MacKinnon panel.
2. Keeping Alberta's net debt to GDP ratio below 30 percent.
3. Balancing the provincial budget.

In reality, there is only one anchor here—austerity. These are three ways of saying the same thing: that the UCP is planning to continue its disastrous campaign of putting Albertans out of work and dismantling public services. Our jobs, if Kenney and Toews have their way, are facing a firing line.

The update's reference to the MacKinnon panel is telling. Janice MacKinnon's Blue Ribbon Panel recommended wage rollbacks for us, with billions in tax giveaways for profitable corporations. So on the one hand, the MacKinnon report

claimed that the Government of Alberta doesn't have enough revenue to support public services, but on the other hand recommended giving away billions to the wealthy.

We have a message for Travis Toews—if you want to balance the budget so badly, then you can start by reversing your \$4.5 billion tax giveaway to major corporations. Amazon doesn't need the extra money—working Albertans do.

Budget Cuts During COVID

Since COVID began, the UCP government cut its overall budget expenses by \$64 million! Many government ministries slashed their operating expenses since the pandemic started, and in fact, the UCP increased Health spending by only 0.5% during this unprecedented global health crisis, and that was only because of help from the federal government.

Here's how the government department budgets changed during the pandemic. Keep in mind here that the inflation rate for October is 0.7 per cent, making the increases smaller than they seem and the decreases even worse.

- Advanced Education budget increased by \$75 million (+1.5%).
- Agriculture and Forestry increased by \$27 million (+3.2%).
- Children Services decreased by \$8 million (-0.5%)
- Community and Social Services decreased by \$65 million (-1.7%)
- Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women decreased by \$26 million (-14.1%)
- Education decreased by \$132 million (-1.6%)
- Energy decreased by \$23 million (-4.5%)
- Environment and Parks increased by \$58 million (-10.9%)
- Health care expenses increased by \$100 million (+0.5%)
- Indigenous Relations decreased by \$55 million (-27.1%)
- Labour and Immigration decreased by \$5 million (-2.4%)
- Municipal affairs decreased by \$34 million (-14.1%)
- Treasury Board and Finance decreased by \$45 million (-2.7%)

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With the COVID Recovery Plan, the government made one-time investments to many of the ministries listed above. It's clear, though, that a one-time payment—even if it helps temporarily—is not nearly enough. This crisis is only accelerating, and the UCP has shown no signs of plans to start re-funding public services.

Time to Reinvest

The pandemic has made clear that a properly-funded and well-run public service is essential for the rest of the economy to function. If our healthcare system is overwhelmed, the economy suffers because people die.

What all Albertans need right now is for the UCP to finally put the brakes on their ideological crusade against public services. For us to be able to do our jobs properly—and for our public services to continue supporting the entire Albertan economy—we need the government to reverse course and commit to properly funding public services.

Minister Toews and Premier Kenney: Cancel your plan to lay off 11,000 frontline health care workers. Stop your destruction of post-secondary education. Stop trying to impose wage cutbacks for Government of Alberta workers at the bargaining table. End your ideological obsession with your bunk, zombie economics, and start working for Albertans.

AUPE members are Albertans, and we support Albertans every day. We are organizing to fight back against the UCP government's cruel cuts. Alberta's economy doesn't work without us and it's time the UCP recognized that. If they don't get us off this disastrous path they put us all on, we'll make them wish they never messed with us.