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Don't cut services, says union

PROVINCIAL BUDGET: Fears vulnerable will be affected

Posted By **ED VEILLEUX, FOR THE SUDBURY STAR**

Posted 1 day ago

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) hopes the economic downturn won't push the provincial government to cut funding to their members.

OPSEU held a press conference at their regional office in Sudbury yesterday to address their concerns over the 2009 Ontario Budget, which will be unveiled March 26 at 4 p. m.

"We're willing to partner with the government and business to form a summit meeting to try and get some sort of plan together to get Ontario back on the rails," Peter Wall, an executive board member of OPSEU, said.

OPSEU emphasized that the services their members provide are needed more in the hard times.

"We're asking the McGuinty government not to do what other governments have done in the past, which is basically eliminate government services in the hard times," Richard Larcher, a probation and parole officer and an executive member of OPSEU Local 629, said.

"Instead, we're asking them to either maintain or even increase those services because the demand will be there."

Larcher said there was an increase of inmates and overpopulated jails -- locally and across the province.

Jennifer Giroux, a child protection worker with the Children's Aid Society, agreed that funding is needed more than ever.

"We are seeing an increase in families living in poverty," Giroux said. "As a result of that, we are seeing an increase in issues like domestic violence."

"Some of our community's most vulnerable citizens, the women and the children, need more protection, not less, when families are dealing with these hard economic times."

Fran Kelly, who works for Community Living Greater Sudbury, said her members are feeling the effects of cutbacks.

"We are some of the lowest paid public servants in the province and most of our members now live hand-to-mouth."

OPSEU Local 655 President John Closs, who represents faculty members at Cambrian College, said that the college is feeling effects of the economic downturn.

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"Sudbury is a community that depends a lot on postsecondary education for employment," Closs said. "In the college sector, OPSEU

Jennifer Giroux, child protection worker, Children's Aid Society

represents about 800 workers between College Boreal and Cambrian College."

"We are a centre of education for the North, and we have to continue to be a centre of education for the North," he said.

Closs said that pressure on the workers at Cambrian College will increase due to the downturn.

"We need investment in the college system to ensure that our programs continue to have the quality they need."

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