

Government out of touch with New Brunswickers, poll says

(2012-02-17) Nine out of ten New Brunswickers say that the services delivered by the provincial government are important to their day-to-day lives, according to survey results released today. Seven out of ten New Brunswickers also believe it's possible for the government to reduce spending without reducing public services.

FREDERICTON: "New Brunswickers know the difference that public services make to their lives," said Daniel Légère, president of CUPE New Brunswick (CUPE NB). "Cabinet ministers are telling New Brunswick to expect less and to want less from their government. This survey clearly shows New Brunswickers won't accept that. They value their public services and the Alward government needs to preserve them by increasing its revenues."

"Quality public services are essential to our communities, in New Brunswick and across Canada," said Paul Moist, national president of CUPE. "We all depend on public services to be there when we need them most, and we need to protect them."

In the survey, 88 per cent New Brunswickers said public services were important in their day to day life. Continuum Research completed the survey in late November for the Canadian Union of Public Employees. It surveyed 800 New Brunswickers between November 12 and 22, 2011 with an error margin of +/- 3.4 per cent at a 95 per cent level of confidence.

For months, Finance Minister Blaine Higgs has been saying New Brunswickers "*need to want less, and big changes are coming to the New Brunswick Government.*"

"These results show that the government is out of touch with the priorities of New Brunswickers. They are telling the Alward government that before reducing the public services they 'need and want' they should put their own house in order," said Légère. "If the government wants to cut spending, they should begin with corporate welfare. In New Brunswick, the most successful companies are the ones receiving the most money from the government."

The province-wide survey shows that New Brunswickers are prepared to pay their fair share of taxes to maintain public services. Seventy-one per cent said they preferred a progressive tax system, where each individual pays according to their ability based on their income.

"When the former government introduced lower taxes for corporations and the wealthy, a reform supported by David Alward and his Conservative colleagues, we warned them that this would increase the deficit. They refused to listen," said Légère. "Since then, we have seen a lot of programs cut or abolished, especially those targeted to helping the working poor, seniors and those living in rural areas. These tax cuts for the wealthiest in our society are costing hundreds of millions in lost revenues, but the government is refusing to listen what they are being told by New Brunswickers."

In their effort to replace this lost income, the Alward government recently introduced a series of user fees, another form of regressive taxes where low-income earners pay the same as high income earners.

“When you find yourself in a hole, the first thing you do is to stop digging,” said Légère.. “They need to stop the corporate giveaways and bring some justice back into the taxation system. New Brunswickers will not accept tax cuts for the rich that result in program cuts for the rest of us.”

The survey also shows pensions are very important issue of concern for New Brunswickers. Ninety-four per cent said protecting employee pension plans should be a priority for the provincial government.

“All the talk about failing pension plans is worrisome to New Brunswickers, especially when it comes from the government that has the responsibility to supervise and regulate these plans,” said Légère. “Every worker should have access to a pension plan. Furthermore, it should be the pension plan that allows retirees to be able to live a decent life after retirement.”

CUPE represents 30,000 public sector workers across New Brunswick

CUPE/Consortium Research Public Services Poll

Key results summary

Please tell me if you believe that the following policies should be a high priority, a medium priority or a low priority for the Government of New Brunswick? How about...? Protecting pension plans

A high priority	75%
A medium priority	19%
A low priority.....	4%
DK/NA.....	2%

Would you say that the delivery of provincial public services is very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important to your day-to-day life?

Very important.....	45%
Somewhat important	43%
Not very important	7%
Not at all important.....	2%
DK/NA.....	3%

Is it very possible, somewhat possible, not very possible or not possible at all to reduce government spending without reducing public services?

Very possible	29%
Somewhat possible	44%
Not very possible	12%
Not at all possible.....	8%
DK/NA.....	7%

Some people say it is better to have a taxation system where those who earn more pay a higher percentage of their income and those who earn less pay a lower percentage of their income. Other people say it is better to have a taxation system where everyone pays the same percentage of their income regardless of how much they earn. Which view is closer to your own?

Everyone should pay the same percentage of income	26%
Those who earn more should pay a higher percentage and those who earn less should pay a lower percentage	71%
Neither	1%
DK/NA.....	2%