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BC budget misses crucial opportunities to help working people weather the storm

Today's provincial budget charts a course toward reducing the deficit while preserving some key public services, the BC Federation of Labour said today. But they warned British Columbians will feel the impact of cuts and program pauses, and the government left key revenue-generating opportunities on the table.

"It's good to see BC making a historic commitment to skills training, opening up great, well-paid careers in the trades for thousands of people. The $54 million lift for Skilled Trades BC will increase apprenticeship seats and build a stronger trades labour force," said BCFED President Sussanne Skidmore.

"But the budget lacks a defined strategy to address BC's struggling post-secondary sector — a key piece of economic infrastructure in building a stronger and more diverse economy — amid wide-spread program cuts and layoffs."

British Columbians expect public services to be there when we need them, said BCFED Secretary-Treasurer Hermender Singh Kailley, yet the government has announced staffing cuts.

"We need more clarity on where those 15,000 jobs will be cut, and that they won't have an impact on front-line delivery," he said. "The public wants services to be improved, and government should

reinvest management-level cuts back into front-line services."

An additional $300 million for childcare demonstrates an ongoing commitment to affordable spaces, and to the early childhood education workers who deliver for kids and families, Skidmore said. "This is one of the government's most important initiatives for working families," she said, "and the BCFED will continue to advocate for full access for all British Columbians."

The province's planned cut in funding for the Employment Standards Branch (ESB) represents "an unacceptable reduction in much needed support for BC's most vulnerable workers," said Kailley.

"We've been calling for more funding for the ESB for years. These cuts put low-income workers at risk of wage theft and mistreatment. In the midst of an affordability crisis, we must make sure workers aren't losing access to their paycheques or being taken advantage of. Cuts like this hurt."

The BC NDP government acknowledged the need to focus on revenue generation, not just belt tightening. "We support modest tax increases on those British Columbians who can afford to pay more," said Skidmore. "But with income inequality growing, the government should have focused its tax measures on our province's wealthiest, and done more to address affordability pressures on low- and middle-income British Columbians."

Acknowledging the government faced difficult choices in drawing up the budget, Skidmore added "It's a tough time to govern. But it's an even tougher time to make ends meet as a worker in BC. Working people need to know our government is there for them and this budget could have done more."