

# UPSE President Responds to Canadian Taxpayers Federation

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- KAREN JACKSON GUEST OPINION Karen Jackson is president of the P.E.I. Union of Public Sector Employees.



**The UPSE president says the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation agenda does not show any appreciation for the important work being carried out in both the private and public sectors during the pandemic.**

I am writing in response to an article (Taxpayers group proposes wage rollback, Feb. 18). In the article, the interim Atlantic director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Renaud Brossard, makes extremist proposals to our provincial government as part of the pre-budget consultation process. Brossard recommends that government should consider a 15 per cent compensation rollback for public service workers in P.E.I. His meanspirited notion also suggests cutting jobs and, therefore, public services that Islanders rely on every day.

Brossard suggests that public sector workers have not made sacrifices during the pandemic and, therefore, they deserve to have their wages and jobs cut. His extremist agenda does not show any appreciation for the important work being carried out in both the private and public sectors during this pandemic. As president of the P.E.I. Union of Public Sector Employees I can tell you that our members have been working hard to ensure the safety and health of all Islanders during these challenging times. Our members in both the private and public sectors across Prince Edward Island have bravely faced the pandemic on the frontlines while many Islanders were safe at home. In hospitals and long-term care homes these workers have provided vital health care for Islanders and have gone above and beyond not only in providing the physical care, but also the emotional support that vulnerable Islanders needed when contact with their families was limited or nonexistent. These workers have also had to work short staffed, and have had to cope with incidences of workplace violence.

Our correctional and enforcement officers are working in stressful conditions to keep Islanders safe. We have members delivering mental health, addiction and social services to Islanders who have been heavily impacted due to isolation and fear in the face of the pandemic. They have not only provided regular services to Islanders, but have also delivered the many programs that government initiated during the pandemic. We

have members administering COVID-19 tests at various sites across the Island. We have members screening people at entry points to the Island to ensure everyone's health and safety. Are these the educated and trained professionals Mr. Brossard would like to see cut? The pandemic is not over. The government and people of Prince Edward Island have done an amazing job in both the private and public sectors in containing the pandemic, and protecting Islanders, and the economy at large. We need to continue to work together to ensure everyone's health and safety.

Mr. Brossard is also interested in seeing the government sell its provincially owned golf courses at Brudenell, Dundarave and Crowbush Cove. These beautiful golf courses are the jewels of the Prince Edward Island landscape and they help bring in many tourists every golf season. These courses provide stable employment for rural Islanders that reinvest cash into the local economy. We saw what happened when the previous administration decided to sell the Mill River golf resort in the name of "profit." The course was sold at a fraction of the price it was worth and the province pledged millions of public dollars in financial support. This was not a good deal for Islanders.

It seems like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation would like Islanders to panic about the economy and the provincial government's financial position because of the pandemic. However, Brossard does not make a solid case in this regard. In fact, P.E.I. has made progress in improving its financial position. The provincial government recorded a surplus in 2019-20 and there was less financial damage from COVID-19 than anticipated. Further, a recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that 95 per cent of funding in P.E.I. for the COVID-19 pandemic came from the federal government, not the provincial government. P.E.I.'s Minister of Finance, Darlene Compton, does not dispute this claim. We also see that our economy is projected to grow significantly in 2021 with a 4.2 per cent expansion in GDP, and again in 2022 by 3.8 per cent, outstripping the rate of growth in the past 10 years.

The province has made good decisions for the public and for the economy since the arrival of the pandemic. P.E.I. is making decisions based on what is affordable and has maintained fiscal stability during the pandemic, without making cuts to vital services. This indicates we are on solid ground and are keeping the well being of all Islanders at the forefront. We do not need to panic or introduce the radical measures the Canadian Taxpayers Federation desires.

While Islanders have faced numerous challenges in 2020, the only people who have significantly benefited during the pandemic are those controlling the most profitable corporations in the country. A recent report by Canadians for Tax Fairness shows that record profits were made by many large corporations in Canada in 2020. In fact, 34 of these corporations added \$8 billion to their bottom lines. The list of these COVID profiteers also included some that cut pandemic pay for their own workers, while experiencing record profits. Income inequality in Canada remains a major issue in this Country and around the world. We need a tax regime that ensures the most well off and large corporations pay their fair share just like everybody else. We must resist the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's suggestion to cut taxes for selfish reasons. An equitable framework of taxation is required to maintain the quality of life and services we are proud of and depend on in Prince Edward Island and throughout this great country.

I want to congratulate our union members in both the private and public sectors, and all Island workers for their dedication and hard work during these challenging times. In a time when we should be working together to advocate for fair wages and benefits for all workers, we should not be in a "race to the bottom." We should be ensuring that everyone has a livable wage and remember who were deemed "essential workers" and the important role they play in our economy. Let's continue to fight the pandemic together by keeping each other safe and supporting workers and the essential services they provide for all Islanders.