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British Columbians still say ‘no’ to private water

Poll results should provide little comfort to pro-privatization lobby, says CUPE BC

BURNABY – Premier Gordon Campbell has his work cut out for him convincing British Columbians to accept private water and sewage treatment facilities, the B.C. division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees said today.

Commenting on a poll released by a pro-privatization group, the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (CCPPP), CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill said that B.C. has the lowest level of support in Canada for private operation of water treatment facilities and the second lowest, next to Ontario, for the private operation of public sewage treatment facilities.

“Even though this poll doesn’t ask crucial questions about transparency, oversight and public scrutiny of secret public-private partnership or P3 deals, the B.C. public still has real concerns about privatized water and sewage treatment,” said O’Neill.

O’Neill predicts a vigorous public debate in the Capital Regional District, given the BC Liberal government’s recent announcement that it will try to force a P3 on Greater Victoria residents in exchange for provincial funding of a proper sewage treatment facility.

“Residents of the CRD should have the right to make up their own minds, without this kind of interference. Sewage treatment is a basic public service. It’s time for it to happen, and my guess is that CRD residents want it to be publicly funded and operated,” he said.

“Governments are the custodians of our natural resources and public services. What gives them the right to compromise our children’s future by selling them off?”

The poll, performed by the Environics Research Group for the CCPPP, asked of respondents: “If your access to services remained the same, if the quality of services was the same or better and if the cost to you was no more than if the government was providing the service, would you support or oppose private sector involvement in the following areas: The operation of public water treatment facilities (Support in: B.C. – 44 per cent; Ontario – 47 per cent; Canada – 55 per cent); The operation of public sewage treatment facilities (Support in: B.C. – 58 per cent; Ontario – 52 per cent; Canada – 60 per cent).”

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