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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Winnipeg, Manitoba**

## **Manitoba Government can learn from Saskatchewan on how to get education taxes off the property tax bill.**

The province-wide coalition, that leads Manitoba's LetsPayFair campaign, says part of the solution for getting education taxes off the property tax bill can be seen next door in Saskatchewan.

The Manitoba government can get a few clues from the Saskatchewan budget released this week that made great strides in removing the burden of education taxes from ratepayers, says the President of Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP), and a member of the Manitoba Education Financing Coalition.

"The Saskatchewan solution comes just at the right time. Over one-third of Manitoba school divisions have told the Manitoba government that they intend on raising property taxes, despite the fact that the Minister of Education offered them a way to avoid increasing the tax burden on ratepayers," says Ian Wishart.

The Saskatchewan government has taken control of education financing by setting a province wide mill rate, effectively removing the power to raise taxes from the hands of school trustees. In turn the province bumped up education financing by \$241 million annually to \$990 million, drawing on general revenues.

For Lorne Weiss from the Manitoba Real Estate Association the Saskatchewan solution looks a lot like what the Manitoba Coalition members have been saying for years.

"We have a dual problem in Manitoba. First, 12 of 37 school divisions raised their taxes despite a specific request by the Province for them not to do that. And then we have the Province saying they'll think about what to do about that next year. We'd like to remind them that the public made it pretty clear during the last provincial election campaign; they want this thing resolved now. And the economic situation has made that all the more urgent," Weiss says.

The Manitoba government has said that last year it adjusted its funding formula to pay for 80 per cent of education costs, but the government reached that figure by rolling up both capital and operational costs to reach that number, says Manitoba Chamber President Graham Starmer.

"When we called on the province to take responsibility of education funding we said it should be 100% of operating costs and eliminate all the confusion on what gets counted and what doesn't," Starmer said.

Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce spokesperson Chuck Davidson says education is a priority like health care.

"It's been our position that education is a fundamental service and should be fairly and fully funded from general revenues, like health care is. Well now Saskatchewan has gone a long way towards that," says Davidson.

Dave Crabb, from the Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners (MACO), says shifting education taxes off cottage property is his group's #1 issue. Some of his members have property tax bills where 75 per cent goes to fund education, and yet his members are not eligible to vote for their school board members in the cottage ward.

The Manitoba Education Financing Coalition is a group of 40 organizations representing over 250,000 Manitobans. In calling on the Province of Manitoba to reduce its reliance on property tax to fund education, the Coalition recommends that education be supported through the province's general revenues. That way Manitobans can all pay a fair share to support the education of the next generation.

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