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Skewed Toronto Review Process to Set the Stage for Privatization

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TORONTO – Despite Mayor Ford's campaign assurances that "services will not be cut…guaranteed," the Toronto Service Review seems to be heading precisely in that direction. The rushed public consultation process seems to be setting the stage for cutting or privatizing city services to address the budget gap in 2012. The first of eight City-run "discussion sessions" was held yesterday at North York.

Identified by some as a "Trojan horse," the Toronto Service Review consists of a feedback process slanted toward privatizing city services. "It took generations to put together services – whether it's the TTC, libraries or recreation – that respond to public need and were built to be accountable and sustainable. It's unacceptable that they may be privatized or have user fees based on a skewed process" said John Cartwright, president of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council.

The review process asks which of the hundreds of services within 35 categories should be run by the city or privatized. On the question of how a city service should be funded, the options presented include increasing user fees or increasing property taxes. However, neither the survey form nor the discussion sessions provide information on the millions in revenue generated from city services such as hydro, recycling, and city parking. While the outline of the review states that the budget gap is $774 million, it fails to mention that the Ford administration has already reduced annual revenues by approximately $90 million through the Vehicle Registration Tax Credit and the Property Tax freeze.

"Every year the City goes through a budget exercise with big numbers thrown around at the start," said Cartwright. "But this is the first time that the stated goal of the leadership is to outsource everything that is not nailed down. It's no wonder that the options presented in the survey contain so many false choices, and that crucial information on city finances is missing in the feedback process."

"Torontonians are questioning the credibility of this process for good reasons. Everyone knows what the real agenda is," said Cartwright.

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