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Comments on the Throne Speech

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and enter into the debate on the Speech from the Throne 2016.

It's in the start of our new session and we're all back. And I do want to say to you, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to you. This is a very critical role that you play. It's not an easy one. It's one that you have to maintain balance and fairness and a little humour. I know we were just talking about some episodes that happened a while ago when I forgot to stand up for my member's statement, and I had the good fortune of being looked well upon. But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to wish you the very best. And it's not just in here that you serve your role, but also throughout Saskatchewan and our role within the Canadian parliamentarians association. So I look forward to working with you, and I do also want to thank the previous Speaker for his good work. He was a fine Speaker, and we appreciated his work as well.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to recognize that we are in Treaty 4 land, and I do want to recognize that a year ago, approximately a year ago in June, we did receive the final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And in that spirit I think that the work that we do forward — and I did feel that there was a lack of understanding or even a signal from the Throne Speech about the truth and reconciliation work that lies ahead — is very, very important. And I think the question we had today about the Sixties Scoop, and unfortunately . . . This is interesting that it's just a matter of a date. It's a hugely important issue to many, many people, and I hope that we hear quickly about that. But I also hope that we hear more from this government about their approach to truth and reconciliation because it is something.

I do want to recognize all the members who've been re-elected and the new ones who have been just elected. This is a huge honour to be in this House. And it's one that I know and has been mentioned earlier this week, only 800 people have sat in this Chamber over the course of 100-plus years, and so it's very much a real privilege. And so

congratulations to all, but a particular congratulations to the new members. And I just want to recognize our three new members that are bringing a new spirit to the caucus and want to thank them and congratulate them.

I want to say thanks as well, and that's part of this speech, to the many people who have supported me over the years. Of course, my own family: my wife, Dawn; my kids; and now, Mr. Speaker, my two grandkids. You know, when we launched the campaign we had the family picture. We had two new additions, two grandkids — Felix and Frances. Now they may not understand what we're doing hanging around this orange sign and taking pictures, but it was pretty special and I hope over the course of the years that they may come to appreciate that.

I do want to single out one person who has been a huge help to me over the past few years in my office, Erica Spracklin, who was my constituency assistant but who has left my employ. But she did work on my campaign; she was my campaign manager and was fantastic. She was last time and this time and did an incredible job of helping getting me back here. And I sure appreciated that.

[11:00]

And there were others. There were Bruce and Darren, the sign people; and of course David, who is just a fantastic door knocker and so many others, so many others. I just want to say a big thank you to all those who helped to get me re-elected, more importantly getting a New Democrat elected in Saskatoon Centre so that we can raise the issues and have our point of view, our set of values represented here in the House.

It's very, very important that when we have the party system that people do think about, what does it mean? What is a Conservative? What is a Sask Party? What is a Liberal party? What is a New Democratic Party? What are their values in making sure that the constituents say, yes I can align; I can think along those lines. Those are the kind of values and ideas and platforms they can identify with. So I'm happy to be here as a New Democrat.

I also want to single out my two main competitors, Brad Hoffman, who ran for the Sask Party. He owns a printing shop in the riding and, interestingly, I did some printing there. I have for many years. So it was interesting to see Brad running against me. I was wondering, Brad, what are you doing? But anyways, I guess I wasn't doing enough business there. I'll have to do more. But the other one was Roman Todos. I have to say a big shout-out to Roman, the Liberal in Saskatoon Centre. He ran a great campaign. But he's a good stand-up guy in Caswell, and both of these fellows I think of as good friends in the riding.

Yes, but you know, I just want to say that one of the things that I've found very interesting . . . This was my fifth campaign and it was very interesting, very different than the previous ones. You know, as you get a little older you do things a little differently but you still . . . Things are always the same. You get out and knock on doors, and that's what you've got to do. You've got to go up and down those streets.

And this time I just want to say that probably the most interesting door I knocked upon — when you knock on a door, you don't know what's behind the door — was a Syrian refugee family. And that was pretty neat. They were in a home. They were getting set up. They were being Canadian. And I felt like, this is great. This is wonderful. This is how we work. And it's very important that we do have Syrian refugees in all our ridings, I suppose, but it was very interesting to meet the mom and dad and the little one come to the door.

Now they weren't ready to vote, but we had a little discussion. And I said just, you're welcome. Welcome, welcome to Canada and I hope all things go well for you. And it was nice to know that, a nice reminder. We can read about refugees in the newspapers. We can go out to the airports welcoming them. We can do all those things we should be doing. But they are our neighbours. They live in our communities. Their kids go to our schools. And that's a super, wonderful thing.

So I do want to speak a bit about my riding, Saskatoon Centre. I think it's one of the most compact, most diverse. Now when I look across and I see a lot of the rural people, when I think I can walk from one end of my riding to the other — I think in two hours I can walk it, you know — and I know some of the folks over there, and over here, I look at the folks up north where they can't . . . I don't think you could fly from one end of your riding to the other in two hours. I don't know. But it's nice to have a pretty compact riding, and after the boundary changes to have some of the neighbourhoods.

And you know, I have 20th Street, and 20th Street in Saskatoon has had a very colourful reputation. But it's going through such a re-energization with the new people living there, the new infill, the condos that are just amazing, the designs. The farmers' market is a wonderful thing.

And some of the restaurants on 20th Street . . . Actually if you go down 20th Street and you go to a restaurant on Saturday night, it used to be you could get into any restaurant. Now you have to go earlier or phone for a reservation. That is so unusual. So I just have to say, you know, 20th Street . . . And you have to be kind of dressed up. That's kind of, for me, just out there in my jeans and my wife and we're just taking it easy, it's not what we used to think.

But I just wanted to give a shout-out. There's some wonderful places. The Underground Cafe has great coffee. The Park Cafe has been recognized a few times in this, in the legislature I've spoke about them. And they continue to do a great, great breakfast on Sunday morning. But if you . . . And I find sometimes my fellow colleague from Nutana comes over to have the odd breakfast. And The Hollows, have to give a shout-out to The Hollows. But I do have to say, you know, my colleague from Nutana and I have this big debate about which is the best riding, on one side of the river or the other side of the river.

But I have to say as well, the other . . . I mean there's wonderful streets, but the other one that's going to be coming up pretty soon on Spadina Crescent — a beautiful street, a beautiful street along the river to walk through by the Bessborough Hotel — the jazz

festival is coming up. And I have to give a shout-out. I think it's the 30th anniversary for the jazz festival. And I can remember I used to drive, I used to be the volunteer transportation coordinator back when it was I think 14, 15 years old. I remember those days. It was great. But it continues to be one of the best, if not the best festival in the province. But then there's others that may debate that: the Regina Folk Festival, Ness Creek. There's so many in this province in the summer. But check out the jazz festival. That's a wonderful thing.

But I have to say that I just want to give a shout-out to my neighbourhood, Caswell. Caswell is — and again my friend from Nutana may argue this — but Caswell is the original neighbourhood for Saskatoon. We did have three communities. There was Saskatoon Nutana, Riversdale, and way out there was Sutherland. But Saskatoon, the original community, was on our side of the river and Caswell was the original neighbourhood . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . So anyways, we won't get into that debate, Mr. Speaker. But anyways, Caswell's a great community, and it's undergoing again a real growth spurt with young families coming and moving in, and there's some wonderful things. And we're going to be looking forward to our own festival coming up in a few short weeks, Art in the Park, that I think it's celebrating its 11th anniversary, or could be 14th. Actually it's 14, 14 years old. And it's a wonderful thing if you get a chance to come.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to enter into the debate on the Throne Speech. And when I read it and when we listened to it a few short days ago, we were struck by how it was weak on vision and really short on anything meaningful that people in this time . . . And even the folks over there will recognize that we're in economic difficult times, really difficult times, and that people were looking for something more stronger, something they could really hang their hat on, something they could grab onto and say, hey this is a real plan going forward, a real plan going forward. And we see a government instead that really wants to deflect attention away from what's going on in Saskatchewan, how they should be working on that, but onto other issues, and we are really, really concerned about that.

And I was just struck, and I just want to refer to an article that was in the paper a couple of weeks ago that talked about really the spin that's coming from the government side and really what's happening in this province today. And it's Bruce Johnstone's column: "Stats show Saskies' strategy in a shambles." This is from May 14th, 2016: "Some recent statistics seem to show that the Sask. Party's economic development strategy is in a bit of a shambles."

Really, and this is from the economic, the business writer from the Leader-Post. It's not from us. But really it's interesting what he wrote about what's happening in Saskatchewan under the Sask Party. And he's talking . . . I want to quote this time. I say, and I quote:

During that time, oil-producing provinces have seen their economies shrink, unemployment rates rise, capital investment dry up and other economic indicators . . . stagnate or decline.

And 2016 looks to be more of the same. BMO forecasts the Saskatchewan economy to grow by a minuscule 0.5 per cent, which is pretty close to a recession . . .

And so he talks about some of the problems that they're having here. But he goes on, and he gives them a little slack. He says:

I wouldn't . . . mention it, except for the fact the Sask. Party government keeps harping about how much more diversified the provincial economy is today than it was [when they] . . . took office in 2007.

And they do. They just keep harping on it. And then they talk about when they're doing relatively well, and I'll quote:

Of course, "doing relatively well" is, well, relative to the provinces we're compared to. Compared with Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador, we're "doing relatively well." Compared with the other seven provinces . . . [not so much].

More importantly, there's no evidence to suggest Saskatchewan's economy is . . . more diversified than it was eight years ago. In fact, the energy sector currently represents 25 per cent of the provincial economy, the same as it did in 2007.

[And I'm quoting] What about Wall's claim the government doesn't "pick winners and losers?"

Yet another report from Statistics Canada this week showed that cultural industries made up only 1.3 per cent of GDP, the lowest share among the provinces and less than half of the national average of 3.0 per cent.

This is the same government that axed the Saskatchewan Film Employment Tax Credit in 2012. In an ill-advised, politically motivated decision to save about \$1.3 million a year, the government effectively killed the film and video industry in the province.

Hundreds if not thousands of jobs were lost and a foundational cultural industry gutted on an ideological whim.

So that's from Bruce Johnstone and he is neither Sask Party or NDP. He's just calling it as it is. And so we have some real concerns. And of course we're hearing . . . And this Minister of the Economy that the Premier continues to defend . . . And whether the issue is SkipTheDishes or GTH, we have a real problem.

And you know the other thing, we haven't forgotten about Enterprise Saskatchewan. Do you remember Enterprise Saskatchewan a few years ago? What happened to enterprise and Enterprise Saskatchewan, that plan? And now what we have from the Throne Speech, what we have from the Throne Speech is committing to helping small, home-based food businesses grow in Saskatchewan. This is where we're at now. What happened to Enterprise Saskatchewan? And now we're helping cookies by Kevin. That's incredible. Why are we doing that? Why are we doing that? Now there's nothing wrong with that, and we enjoy the farmers' market, and we understand people bring home

cooking and home baking to these local sales. But really this isn't where we've come from. Enterprise Saskatchewan to helping selling cookies. Incredible, incredible.

But the other thing I was struck by . . . And I'm the associate Education critic, and I know our Education critic will speak more about the education issue here. But how many times was education mentioned in the Throne Speech? Or schools? Schools was mentioned once under the infrastructure thing. That is it. That is it. Here we have a real need. This is the time. If there's ever a time when we should be investing in education, this is the time. This is the time. And we hear from a government that refuses to really step up and recognize what it has to do. And here we have just this one line about schools. That is incredible.

And, Mr. Speaker, you know . . . And the Minister of Finance, he just gets himself in a knot all the time when the critic on our side, critic of Finance gets up, and he loves to talk about Edmonton and all of that. But I have a question for him. He's talking about different documents. Where is the anti-poverty strategy in the Throne Speech? Where is the anti-poverty strategy in the Throne Speech? Not a mention about that and the Minister of Finance or the Premier doesn't want to talk about that. Where is the mental health strategy? Not a mention about that. Not a mention about that. Where is the disability strategy? Not a mention about that.

I think when he's talking about standing up for Saskatchewan, he should be standing up for Saskatchewan people. Those who are living in difficult times, those who are living in poverty, near poverty, and having to use the food banks — that's what he should be talking about. That's what he needs to be focusing, those people who are living with a disability, those people who really need more work to make sure our homes and our businesses are accessible and they have opportunities for jobs. That's what he needs to be talking about. And he needs to be really focusing on mental health as they've had the report, they've had the report for well over a year now. And instead the Minister of Finance wants to talk about other documents when he's got documents stacked high on his desk. He should. . .

An Hon. Member: — On the shelf.

[11:15]

Mr. Forbes: — On a shelf. On a shelf gathering dust. The anti-poverty strategy, the mental health strategy, the disability strategy, where are they talking about that?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know my time is coming close to an end, but I do want to talk about the issues around labour. And I am looking forward to . . . And I want to say to the Premier that I am glad to see that the compassionate leave is recognized and we'll be moving on that. That is a good, good move.

But I am very concerned about what's happening in occupational health and safety in Saskatchewan, and I am happy to see some recent statistics to show that there's been improvement in injury time loss due to injuries. That's a good thing. I think we're at fourth worst instead of being second worst. Now we're fourth. So we are moving up a bit and that's a good thing, and I congratulate all those who are involved in making Saskatchewan safer.

But we had a real opportunity this year, a real opportunity. There are now . . . The Workers' Compensation Board has reported out at their AGM [annual general meeting] that they have a surplus of over \$240 million, \$240 million. They had the same circumstance last year where they had a surplus of \$140 million and they refunded that money back to all the employers. And we said last year, and we're saying again this year that I've written the board to take some time to think about how they should be spending that money. I really urge them not to do a quick refund of all that money. You know, the occupational health and safety budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is about \$8 million, \$9 million. And if you think about since this government has taken office, the number of workers that have increased in Saskatchewan — that's great — but also the cost of living, the money that this, the dollars that this government is spending on occupational safety has actually fallen every year, fallen every year.

Here we have a wonderful opportunity to have a legacy around occupational health and safety. Now my colleague from Saskatoon Riversdale has been raising and will continue to raise every day the issue of PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. This is a critical issue. And we think about what's happening in, whether it's Fort McMurray or what happened in Moncton with the RCMP shootings, where people are in traumatic circumstances, and whether it's the police force or whether it's the firefighters or emergency rescue, we have a situation where we could do the right thing. And we have \$240 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$240 million. That's a lot of money. If we were to take some of that and put that towards PTSD, it would be a wonderful, wonderful thing. And we're going to be urging the government to tell WCB [Workers' Compensation Board], hold back on that money.

Now the other thing that's happening is the committee of review, and the Minister of Labour will be aware of this, should be reporting out anytime now, anytime, any day actually. And I'm sure they will be saying that there are things we could do in Saskatchewan to make sure our workplaces are more safe than they were the day before. We need to listen to that report. And we have the opportunity, with \$240 million, to make a big difference, to make a huge difference. So I would urge the Minister of Labour, with the spirit of this Throne Speech, keeping Saskatchewan strong, let's keep our workplaces safe and strong, and we have an opportunity to do that. So we should be standing up for Saskatchewan people, Saskatchewan people, and this is hugely, hugely important.

I also want to just talk about briefly that I was struck by the silence on this Throne Speech about Saskatchewan diversity. I think this is huge. This is huge. We have, as I've said, we've gone through a winter where we've brought in and welcomed many Syrian refugees, and we know the population and growth in Saskatchewan has been largely due to new immigrants coming into Saskatchewan, whether they be . . . whatever country from around the world. This is a significant thing. This is a significant thing and yet, and I will every day stand up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and present petitions calling for the restoration of funding for the heritage language program that's operated by some 17 schools, 17 communities in Saskatchewan. And we have a government . . . I mean, today we had people in the legislature from Mexico, and they were being welcomed and we

were saying great things about them. But here for a small amount of money, \$225,000 that has been cut by this government, we're doing more damage. We have people in communities that are calling for this to be restored. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a significant, significant issue.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say . . . And in case you're curious, you know, this is . . . *The Globe and Mail* this last week talked about this. This is a piece by Adrienne Clarkson, a special to *The Globe and Mail* on Friday, May 13th. In the 2011 census, there were more than 200 languages regarded as home languages. Can you believe that in Canada? Two hundred languages reported as a home language. Nearly six million Canadians reported speaking at least two languages at home and seven million speak French at home. Interestingly, the rate of bilingualism in Quebec among immigrants is higher than the rate for those born in Canada. And, Mr. Speaker, that speaks to how important heritage languages are. This is huge, 200 languages, and we're turning our back and the minister is turning his back on this.

And so when I think about this Throne Speech, I think about talking about keeping Saskatchewan strong, and yet they're ignoring some very important sectors of Saskatchewan. And our motto is from many hands, strength. And that's significant because we are all immigrants to this province. We were all immigrants at one time except for the indigenous folks. And this is a very, very important issue.

So it shows that this government has been engaged in a lot of small thinking. They're getting their . . . As I say, the Minister of Finance and other ministers in the front row seem to be all bent out of shape about some things that . . . They should be just taking, you know, not paying so much attention to, but thinking about the things at home like the anti-poverty strategy report, the mental health report, the disabilities report, but also some of the other cuts that are coming up in the budget. And our questions about the budget really show that in fact we need to be moving on that as quickly as possible.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I definitely not, I cannot support the main motion but I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you very much.