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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 101 – *The University of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 2013*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today this afternoon to enter into the debate on Bill No. 101, *An Act to Amend The University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995*. And it is of interest to reflect on how our higher education is organized in this province and the universities play a major, major role and particularly . . . well both have, over the course of time, the University of Regina . . . But it is a newer university and the University of Saskatchewan, I think, in the minds of many people in Saskatchewan play a unique and special role because of its age and it's one that many of us have attended. Myself, I have a degree from the University of Saskatchewan, have one as well from the University of Regina, and so I feel like I can speak both . . .

An Hon. Member: Both languages.

Mr. Forbes: Both languages of both cities. They're both fine, fine institutions. But this afternoon we're talking about the University of Saskatchewan. And to many families, the U of S has a special place in their heart because it's a place where many kids went to school and got their degrees and represented the first degrees that some families, family members attained.

And they both have a unique role in Saskatchewan, and of course now we have other institutions that can grant degrees, and this is part of the place before us now. But I think I just wanted to reflect on the University of Saskatchewan and, you know, the role it plays in the province or in the city of Saskatoon. The architecture, the incredible knowledge that has come out of the U of S, and the role it plays across Saskatchewan, across Canada. And whether it be in the typical areas you would think of, whether that be agriculture or where you think of the synchrotron or where you think of the arts, it's a fine, fine institution. It's one that deserves a lot of support and recognition, and I hope that the province can continue to do that. And of course that means that there's always the tweaking of the original legislation, and this is what we're here to do is to amend *The University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995*.

So I was taking a look back through that Act and it is interesting when you think about how the university in so many ways . . . You know, you would think things could be simpler, but it has thought of a unique process of how they do their business. And of course we have the convocation and that's what we all strive to actually be part of, that day of convocation where as graduands we are entered into that and come out of that day with our diplomas and recognized and become alumni and all the things that are before us.

And then you have the chancellor, the senate, the board, and all of these have their duties and responsibilities and processes of becoming members of and that's all very, very important. And of course there's the council, the university council, how do you ... what's it made of and what do they do and who is the secretary and who's the chairperson and how do you get elected to the council and what do they do? And of course then you have the assembly, the assembly, and what do they do and who's the secretary and who's the chairperson? And this is all . . . And then you have the officers of the university, of course the president and the deans and the heads and the secretary there as well and the controller. So it's all very interesting how this, how something . . . You know, I think it's maybe a thing of beauty. Other people may think it's a thing of bureaucracy. I don't know.

I'm trying to read through this and get a sense. I don't have a chart in front of me that makes the flow of this. But it comes from a tradition many, many years, hundreds of years old — not this university hundreds, but it is getting on in age. But the university tradition is one around the world that is . . . you know, speaks to independence, speaks to academic excellence, and speaks to a larger role within the community and within the province and within our country.

And clearly this university strives to do that and has done a fantastic job in the past, and I'm really confident it will do so in the future. It's one that has a high level of integrity, and it meets the challenges of the times and has done that in the past and will continue to do that. And whether it's at the individual level of hoping to contribute more to society, have a more meaningful job because you have a degree, and now you can have a diploma . . . And that's what we're talking about is the ability to have a diploma. And that will be interesting to see how that . . .

Well in fact I have from the University of Saskatchewan a post-graduate diploma and then moved that up to a master's. I'm not sure what the exact term of what that . . . Master's of administration I think it is. I don't know. I should know. I have it, but it's been a while now. So at any rate it's a very important, it's a very important institution. And this is the debate that we're having here today.

And I know many, many of us in this Chamber have a degree or diploma probably from the . . . or a certificate. I remember when my brother got his voc ag. I think it was a one-year certificate program, vocational agricultural certificate from the U of S. It was a big deal. It was a very big deal. And for him, particularly as a farmer, that meant an awful lot as particularly . . . And I think that was back in the late '70s that my brother went, got the voc ag papers. But as you know, farming has changed so much in this province and

particularly through the '70s, '80s, '90s, and on, and you really had to become much more technically adept.

And it was the beginning . . . Even at that time I think in the late '70s or mid-'70s, computers were not quite, you know, in everybody's home yet. That happened more in the '80s but right, very close to that time period.

And of course I remember in the mid-'80s is when the Agriculture Building got built at the U of S, and there was some controversy in terms of some of the funding that happened from the corporate sector and what that all meant. That was not a, you know, straightforward thing. There was a lot of discussion about the independence of the university. And of course the universities more than ever now — and it's an unfortunate circumstance but maybe it's part of the world we live in now — have to go out and do a lot more fundraising than they ever did before. It's a reality, and much of that is through the corporate world. And the corporate world is stepping up, and of course they see it as their role as a good corporate citizen.

We see that, whether it be in the commerce area, whether that be in the business, the law area. There is a lot of that now happening in universities and in post-secondary, and that is to a certain extent a good thing. The problem arises when they start to impinge or influence the independence of the university and expect certain things to be done. And we hope that doesn't happen, or particularly that it can influence scholarly work and research, because this is where that kind of work gets done, at the universities, and we want to make sure that . . . It is so important that that research is left at an arm's length from undue influence.

And I know that the academic world strives to make sure that is the case. And we have to make sure that there are the proper checks and balances. So perhaps this is why we have so much governance at the university level, whether it be the senate, the board, the council, the assembly, and the roles that they play, you know, to make the wheels of the university move forward. But having said that, this is why we are here today, to talk about that.

But as I said, it's a critically important piece for us because if we don't get this right then that influence can, you know, creep its way into places where it ought not to be. And that's why it's important that universities and anything that receives public funding and purports to be neutral and not biased, has to have that level of transparency and accountability.

And that's why it's really important when we talk about, how do people get onto these places of decision making within the university? It's not just as straightforward as filling the seats. That's probably the least of the issues. We want to make sure there's good, credible people making decisions of the places that we hold in such high regard because of the role within our communities.

And it's hugely important, whether it be health care . . . and you know, the university has done so much work in terms of that. And we can talk about the different kind of things

that they've done, whether it be nuclear medicine and how the University of Saskatchewan has done so much in that area, or other areas as well, whether it be in agriculture and whether, you know . . . And I know that there is a huge debate, a huge debate in terms of the role of GMOs [genetically modified organism] versus organic farming, all of that kind of thing. The efficiency of equipment, machinery, all of that, that's a debate that needs to happen. But it must be done in an appropriate way that lends credibility to the university.

Of course, engineering is another one, and today we'll go meet with a lot of people from the APEGS [Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan], many of whom are graduates of the University of Saskatchewan. I know my oldest brother actually and two of his children — might be three; I think it's two — are actually graduates of the engineering department at the University of Saskatchewan. So a huge impact in terms of our province, and whether that be mining engineering . . . And that was what my brother graduated from. He was one of the last graduates from the . . . that offered the mining engineering degree. I'm not sure if it's come back into play.

An Hon. Member: It's started up again.

Mr. Forbes: Has it started up again? Right on. But it went out for a while. It went out for a while which was really unusual for a province that has done so much in terms of mining. I appreciate the correction because it just didn't make any sense to have a university that didn't have a mining engineer degree.

Of course, civil engineering and all of that kind of thing is there. And of course, you know, in the work that it's done in terms of the oil fields is so hugely important, and probably of any of the brain drain that we've experienced in this province, the number of people who got their engineering degrees here and went to Calgary . . . And of course there was always that famous sign on the side of the bus that says something about how your boss is from Saskatchewan because so many of the people had engineering degrees.

And so that's really important, whether it be nursing and the medical area of doctors and the whole range there, and of course teaching. Now this is where I do have to admit that I did get my first degree of . . . my B.Ed. [Bachelor of Education] from the University of Regina. And there was always this big controversy where the best teachers came from, whether they came from Saskatoon, the U of S, or did they come from the U of R [University of Regina]? You know, this is where my loyalty gets really kind of dicey because I do have to say the U of R has a pretty good program when it comes to B. Eds. Now for a master's, I think that the U of S is pretty darn good. But this is something we can debate at another time because right now that's not the debate before us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it? It's not Bill 101, which has the best teaching program, the U of R or the U of S?

But we kind of moved away from that as well. And I think for many of the bills that we have before us today, we're seeing . . . And it would be interesting to hear more from the other side about this because there used to be such a debate — and I never really supported this — about how we should have just one big university here in

Saskatchewan. I really valued the idea that when you have two or more, you had a real opportunity for different approaches to how you taught, how you did research. And you really met the needs of students. And we see this now with SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and Briercrest and other institutions being able to offer degrees.

So I think it's important, and I think this is a very worthwhile debate that we have around our post-secondary education and what does that mean. And you know, the wonderful thing of it and the amazing thing we're going to be debating today is in terms of the fact that the universities do have some . . . The alumni have some input into the decision making at the university level.

I'm not sure, and this is something that we can find out more, but I don't think that's happening in the SIAST area, the technical area, that they don't have that same kind of board. They don't have the same kind of senate, that kind of thing, that's made up. It's a very different kind of governance model. And this is something that we really have to guard in terms of the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina, that we don't lose that input both from the alumni and as well the students. That's critically, critically important.

So having said that, I do want to take a minute to review the comments of the Minister of Advanced Education when he introduced this bill back on November 12th. And he wanted to talk about the proposed amendments and what they're all about, and I think he identifies about six of them. Of course the sixth one would be the housekeeping ones, and I don't need to go through that.

First there'll be “. . . help to clarify the awarding of diplomas in the list of powers of convocation.” And of course the current legislation calls for the ability for the convocation to award degrees and certificates and not diplomas. But you know I have to say, I guess this is just catching up with what practice is because I did get a postgraduate diploma. It wasn't a certificate, so I better make sure that's what it was because I did pay something for it. But at any rate, it adds that in and is clarifying that, and that's an important piece.

Next, they'll help to ensure that individuals elected to represent the senate, most specifically and especially outside [of student] members of the senate, they will work to ensure that they represent the senate, will be graduates of the university.

And I assume that that makes a lot of sense. I think that's important. Now it's interesting that we do have members of the senate that aren't necessarily from Saskatchewan, and I think that was done intentionally, so we would have a broader experience across Canada or in particularly Western Canada. Now I could be wrong on this, and this is why we'll have questions in committee about this, that they have to have degrees from the U of S, or I guess diplomas or certificates. And that's very, very important. That's very, very important.

But I think that we'll have to ask some more questions about that because I know that

there . . . I'm pretty confident there are members of the senate who are not residents of Saskatchewan. Now they wouldn't be the ones who were . . . Now this is maybe the catch. They weren't elected, but I think the senate can have appointments on it. And so that will be . . . We'll have to find out more about that, but maybe it's the board that you have people appointed to. But we'll have to clarify that. Do they have to be a resident of Saskatchewan as well? And so that'll be very, very interesting to talk about that.

And they talked about . . . The third point is the process by which student members of the senate are elected and this is carried out in sections 29 and 32. And then it talks about this one, and this is one that I know I think that my colleague, the member from Nutana, talked about: the terms of office for the senate nominees to the board to allow them to serve a three-year third term, but how inconsistent that is with the faculty. And that's stuck at two years. And we'll talk a little bit about this because I went back and looked at the Act. I thought that was very, very interesting and a good catch. Why is it the faculty members are limited to two years and the other ones from the senate are for three years? But I'll talk more about that because I want to hold up the Act and talk a little bit about that.

And of course the fourth one is about student members on hearing boards and how they'll work through that. Requirements of corporate seal, and I think that's an important issue; and I really appreciated reading about that. And that was an interesting conversation about that. The fifth one is allowing a senator to serve a third three-year term to bring parity, that type of thing. And that's straightforward, and as I said, housekeeping.

I do want to talk a bit and go . . . And this'll be interesting because we've had this same discussion prior to when this government did away with the visitor part of the legislation. The member from Greystone, the Minister of Advanced Education, talked about how he had got a letter from the University of Saskatchewan requesting these amendments to the legislation. So that's who asked for it. That's fair enough. We know that. And then he talked about how the ministry then consulted with the University of Saskatchewan and the U of R on the proposed amendments. So they got the two letters from them in support, and that was good. And then they went back out and worked through the discussions with the university's secretary's office. And they also consulted with the University of Saskatchewan's Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Association, and they both have provided letters of support.

At least one letter that's missing I think here would be from the Faculty Association, particularly when they're the ones who are diminished in terms of their role on the board, I would assume, from how I'm reading that. And if I go to section 45 . . . Well, let's just go to section 41. I'm looking back at *The University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995*, and section 41, the Board of Governors, who are also known as the board. And of course they have quite a role of responsibilities, their powers, that type of thing, but I want to talk about . . . So the Board of Governors is composed of the chancellor, the president, president of the students' union, five members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council — so that's by cabinet, essentially — two members elected by the senate, and one faculty member selected by members of the assembly who are faculty members, secretary, secretary to the board.

44 talks about the chairperson, who that is. And that is critically important because the member, the minister talked about how the reason they're doing this is to provide for some sort of continuity so you can develop leadership. So he's talking about the five, or the two members elected by the senate as special, that they should be considered for leadership roles. But what about the faculty member? They seem to be able to be the chairperson. There's not any limitation saying you cannot be a faculty member and a board member, not on this role, not on this, not in this section anyways.

So what we're really talking about is members of the board, in clauses 42(c) and 42(d), may be re-elected to the board but may not serve more than two consecutive terms. And I think that they're actually saying you can now serve three consecutive terms, so that's fair enough. That's what they want to do. But then they change the one to say that the senate nominees who are elected get to be three years and not two years. So essentially saying you can go three years times three, that's nine years. But if you're a faculty member, you can now go three terms times two, so you go six years. So there's a limitation of that, and I wonder why, why would that be?

And the letter from the faculty association is not part of the consultation. So maybe I'm missing something. But I would think that if you're singling out a group, the faculty member who is elected by members of the assembly, why is that person not elected to a three-year term as well?

And so now it may be a straightforward answer, and that's why we have committees because we don't get a lot of time on this. But I do think it's somewhat ironic that the faculty association has not been part of the discussions here today, and so that's interesting.

And I just want to make sure as I review this that I ... Well those will be questions that we have when we have this in committee. And of course we'll be talking to the faculty association over the winter months and say, so how do you feel about that? Is this correct? Are we reading this right, or are we misreading this? And were you consulted in this? Because clearly the minister has not identified them as one of the groups who was consulted.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that we always want to make the legislation as best as we can, and so our job is to do the due diligence on it, the scrutiny. The unintended consequence . . . We don't want to see a bill back here next year, you know, An Act to amend *the University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995* with one line . . . Oh we forgot the faculty, and there was no good reason for that. So why don't we find out the reason now?

So I know that there will be many of my colleagues who will want to also speak to this. We hope this wasn't just an oversight, that there was a real reason. Or maybe I'm reading this wrong. Because you know, I got to tell you when I started reviewing the original legislation, I saw you have the convocation. You have the senate. You have the board of governors. You have the council. You have the assembly. It's quite an interesting thing to keep track of.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know others will want to speak to this, and I think it's appropriate at this point to move adjournment of Bill No. 101, *An Act to amend the University of Saskatchewan Act, 1995*. Thank you.