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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 122 – *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Amendment Act, 2013*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to enter into the debate on Bill No. 122, *An Act to amend The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997*. And I think this is one that people pay an awful lot of attention to.

And I want to just say one thing before I get into the main body of my comments, about how a bill like this is so important, important to our Canadian identity, our Saskatchewan identity. I think about the Olympics and just how the big controversy about how we wanted the public houses open on that Sunday morning so we could watch the Olympic, the men's hockey final at 6 o'clock in the morning. And I do want to acknowledge the government. It's unfortunate that not every house or bar or establishment could be open, but Regina and Saskatoon, I know people were appreciative of it. And it's a bit of the sign of the times. You know, I don't know whether 20 years ago or 30 years ago, whether we could have been watching a hockey game like that in the morning, period, or the quality of that. So it's about keeping up with the times and I know that people were very appreciative of it, and in fact they were lining up.

And I think that somebody said there were three things that make Canadians patriotic, and one of them of course is the Olympic hockey. And both the women and the men did us so proud, and a little add-on like being able to do this is a very, very, very good thing. So I think that in some small way it might be an unusual thing for me to acknowledge the good work of the government for that thing, but I know that I join I think a lot of people in acknowledging that.

But having said that, having said that, now that I want to get back to the main body of my comments on this important piece of legislation and how important it is because it really does affect the fabric of our communities. And we've seen that. And I will in a minute talk a bit about the minister's comments, and we'll go through them very carefully and parse them out to really understand the ramifications. This is one piece of legislation . . . I mean they all are, but this is one in particular where you want to make sure there are no

unintended consequences and that it is not completely driven by the ability to raise money.

And while we are . . . And particularly at this time we are thinking about the provincial budget that's about to come down in a few days, and government resources. We're hearing a lot about the challenges the government is facing, and well they may be looking at different pots of money and wondering how can we expand income from this pot or from that pot, how can we get more resources. This is one where the unintended consequences are huge.

And just earlier in the day we were debating and I entered into the debate — I believe it was Bill 127, the mental health amendment Act — where we talked about the unintended consequences there in the issues around addictions. And we'll talk about that and talk about the comments the minister has made about that. And I have some grave, grave concerns that we are not doing enough to deal with gaming addictions. And I think we need to do more. In fact and I just recall a story in the paper, and I don't know if you've heard this.

The news story out of Los Angeles, but based in Las Vegas where a fellow and his girlfriend travelled to Las Vegas as part of the Super Bowl weekend, and after the game — I think it was after the game; it could have been before the game — where the fellow decided to partake in some gambling activities. And the law of Nevada is that you cannot, you have to make sure that the person who is gambling is in full capacity of their abilities to gamble. They can't be too intoxicated.

Well this fellow had gambled for 17 hours straight, had numerous drinks — unbelievably intoxicated — and couldn't remember himself gambling and lost half a million dollars. And of course the casino has come after him to pay up on his bill. But his line of defence is he was too drunk; he doesn't remember this. And well we'll see how this plays out in the court. But I do say that we need to, we need to have strong regulations, strong regulations when it comes to that kind of thing.

We see that in our communities. And it's great when we can, in our establishments, celebrate the great things in life like Canada winning the gold medal and allowing that to happen. That's a common sense thing and we support that kind of common sense activity.

Except for in P.A. [Prince Albert], and I will get to P.A. in a minute. But . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, I will get to Prince Albert; that's on my list of topics to hit here. But at the other hand, I do want to say that when we have situations where people have issues, have real problems with addictions and whether they be alcohol, whether they be, you know, illegal substances, or whether they be gambling or any of the other addictions, we need to make sure we have the proper regulations in play here. And so I think that's critically important.

Now and I was reminded, and rightfully so, by the members opposite, about who should be consulted, and we know that's a common concern that we raise over here in terms of who has been consulted with these regulations. What did those consultations look like?

What was the input?

We know for example the minister — and I'll talk about this in a minute — has gone on at length about cutting red tape. And we know that's an important initiative of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. It's one that in many instances, particularly as governments evolve over time, you see doubling up of regulations, things that just don't make any sense. So it's only reasonable that we continually examine our regulations and our legislation to make sure they are current and they're not doubling up, that they make sense. But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, at the same time, we have to make sure we protect the vulnerable in our society. And often those aren't just people who we often may think in stereotypical ways, but those who actually do need some help with their addictions. And so this is really important.

And I know the minister has referred to public safety, that there's a balance between cutting red tape and public safety. And of course we see in some communities and we think of — and we've heard about this a lot in the media — communities like Prince Albert who wrestle a lot with this. And it'd be interesting to hear what the members, the two members from Prince Albert have to say about this. Of course we won't, unfortunately, hear their comments. We might hear their questions in committee. But it is deeply, deeply unfortunate when we don't see the proper consultation with communities at stake.

So what makes sense? What is giving too much power to local businesses that make sure we don't have a consistent business community . . . playing field across the province? Why is it that some of our communities seem to wrestle with this issue, particularly with alcoholism and gambling, to a larger extent than others? What is it that makes that difference? And what can we do as a province to support them to make sure that people are healthy, that they are able to make choices and be able to go out for a night, have some entertainment, have some fun, but at the same time not put themselves at risk either through accidents or whether through long-term situations?

And so this is deeply a concern of mine. I think it's an important one. But I do want to take a minute here to review what the minister has to say about this. I always find it insightful and helpful to review back on the minister's comments. And again she doesn't . . . And it seems to be the style of this government to not talk about their consultations. And we don't know whether that's because they don't have anything to talk about, that's it's not one that they've gone out and done a lot of consultation on. And again as I say, in opposition, those changes that make sense, we'll be there. We'll support. Those that we have and I think the public has some questions about, we will raise those questions and hold this government to account.

So this again this was introduced just before the dying days of the Christmas session before we rose and went home for Christmas. But she talks about this Act, the Act to amend *The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997*, establishes the foundations and regulation of licensing alcohol and gaming products in Saskatchewan.

And so she talks about having four primary themes. And I mean this seems to be vague,

but this is what I'm quoting the minister saying: "The first is providing authority for a First Nations gaming licensing authority to register on-reserve charitable gaming employees and suppliers." That sounds like a worthwhile theme. "The second is allowing Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority to establish a subsidiary corporation through an order in council. The third is ensuring effective regulation." Now that's the one I do have . . . I don't know exactly what that means, but when we get to it, we'll pull at that a bit and find out more about what she's really aiming to do. And the last, Mr. Speaker, is the housekeeping amendments which often seems to be an awful lot of work that this government does.

But I want to take a look at the first one, and this is about the First Nations gaming and licensing authority. And what's happening now, we understand, that there's been more . . . This is, you know, a continuation of the 2002 agreement which was started with the 1995 Gaming Framework Agreement that talked about respecting the regulation of on-reserve charitable gaming by First Nations. So to facilitate this, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations created Indigenous Gaming Regulators or what's known as IGR. Since 2007 they have been responsible for the licensing and registration of on-reserve charitable gaming, including bingos, break-open tickets, raffles, Texas hold'ems, Monte Carlo, table games, and so forth.

During that time, they fulfilled, they've done a good job, according to the minister, and that's good. I would believe that would be the case. We have a lot of faith. And we think the SIGA [Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority Inc.] and IGR, they have done good work, and it's good to see that they have a co-operative relationship that's beneficial to both. That's an important thing.

So it's important to have this registration. It's a tool that is used to make sure that there is integrity and accountability within the gaming industry, and that's very, very important.

And so apparently, come my understanding from what the minister is talking about, SIGA and IGR began discussions, talking about IGR's authority to register on-reserve charitable gaming employees and suppliers. And there we are, here we are later, and this sounds to be the part that fulfils that discussion. And I think that sounds like a reasonable thing. So as a result, she's proposing amendments that will authorize a First Nations gaming license authority such as IGR to register on-reserve charitable gaming employees and suppliers, and that it will be only exercised by a First Nations gaming licensing authority that has an agreement with SIGA. So that's very, very important. So that's good. That's pretty well straightforward.

And in addition, amendments to the Act will enable the Liquor and Gaming Licensing Commission to review the decisions of IGR. So this talks like a very productive, very co-operative relationship, and an important tool is talking about registration and the decisions that flow from that. So this will resemble those already in place respecting commission views of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority. So that's really pretty well straightforward.

And I think, you know, at this point, I would say that we would have questions about that

to help us understand it further. But we would think that's straightforward, and it's really important to see a good working relationship between the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, SIGA, and the IGRs, very important that that has that happening. And this is an important tool to ensure appropriate accounting and management.

She does go on to talk about the red tape committee review of liquor regulations in Saskatchewan. And she talks about just a short time ago, November 2012, she wanted to take a longer look, continue to look for ways to reduce red tape and remove redundant regulations for business. And that continues on with this bill. And so it takes out apparently the irritants that no longer have relevance for an effective regulation of alcohol in this province. She's getting rid of the requirement for medical use, non-consumptive use and educational use liquor permits, and removing provisions that grant Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority to demand explanations from permittees when a person has been refused entry. So that's an interesting thing and we might have questions about that. It sounds like there's a story there that, when people have been refused entry, that we don't have to ask why.

And I automatically go to my human rights aspect and say, who is doing the checking up on their permittees? And now if they've been refused entry, we automatically go to the place — and I would — that maybe it's because of intoxication. And that's fair enough. And that's good.

But I have questions, you know, because we've seen just in Saskatoon a tragic, tragic story of a bouncer where apparently there was conflict with a fellow in a bar, and now we understand there may be charges laid. But a young man lost his life apparently. His body has not been found in Saskatoon but he had been on some of the buses that cruise from bar to bar. It was his stag night.

And we want to make sure that there's not an unintended consequence here of not having, you know, appropriate records or information for what happened that evening. I know that in fact we are hearing calls, we're hearing calls from the woman who is engaged to this fellow saying that there has to be better and stronger training of bouncers. What happened that night in Saskatoon that apparently led to the passing, the untimely death of this young man? I think there's a lot of questions we have.

And can we learn from that, a tragic incident, to say, so here is a really happy story — you know, a stag where you're celebrating the wedding, the marriage of a young man — that went tragically wrong, that went tragically wrong. That he went missing so quickly. His friends lost track of him. He apparently may have got onto a bus, got to a different part of the city. We don't know all the details, and that'll be uncovered in the courts. But clearly alcohol was involved. Clearly public safety was involved, clearly some decisions that we need more background on.

So I think that this is a real question about red tape, and this one about refusing entry just causes me to think right away, are we creating a problem here? What's the unintended consequence of that? I mean on one hand it seems relatively straightforward, but there is a responsibility for the community that when this kind of thing happens we want to make

sure people are safe, that they're not just . . . And especially, Mr. Speaker, as we know how cold this past winter was, if somebody's had too much to drink and they're at the door of the bar and you say you can't come in, I think that it's incumbent on all of us as a community to think, so can this person get home safely that night?

I don't know what happened in that situation, all the details, but I do know that it's something that we should be learning from and so that kind of thing doesn't happen. And we know the young woman who was engaged to be married thinks that there should be something. Whenever a tragedy happens we always hope that (a) it won't happen again, and (b) that we can learn something from it. And if we can from this situation that happened in Saskatoon just a few short weeks ago, I think that we really need to take that opportunity.

So the minister talks about taking the opportunity to remove outdated legislation, for example eliminating the discretionary ability of Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority to require a permittee to stock beer manufactured in Saskatchewan. It's not been enforced in recent memory, and there is no need to regulate in this area.

And you know, I'm not sure what the implications of that is, and she talks about recent memory. I don't know what the definition . . . and I looked in the Act to see if there was a definition of recent memory. It's not defined. And so I'm curious to know what the implications are. I mean we can remember the days when most beer was actually manufactured in the province, and that was a big deal. We had a much more vigorous, lively industry, but that seems to have gone by the wayside. But we still have some, some fantastic beer in Saskatchewan, and I think that those producers may appreciate having some home team advantage. And I don't know if this comes out of the New West deal and you know, it will be interesting to know. And I am thinking of Great Western. They are, I think, our last larger manufacturer even though — of beer — even though that they are not in the big leagues as say Molson or Coors or Labatt's. But still, has there been some consultation with Great Western on this?

It would be interesting, seeing we're on the topic of beer, whether or not there's been changes to allow more craft beer in. And what are the regulations around craft beer, particularly in terms of safety, but also in terms of promotion? I think that's really important.

So and she does go on. She says, and I quote, "We continue to recognize the government has a role in the effective regulation of alcohol in order to maintain public safety." And that's where I just want to stop for a minute and say, so we've heard concerns from communities across the province, as have members from across the way. And I'm glad they recognize that Prince Albert, but there are other communities have concerns. What are their thoughts on this and do they think that this is the appropriate way to be going? Do they have some comments and what were they? And did the government listen to them or did they push them off to the side?

She goes on to say:

As a result, Bill 122 contains an amendment that places increased responsibility on permittees to not only refuse to serve alcohol to persons who appear to be intoxicated but to ensure that those persons are not in possession of beverage alcohol.

And so that's a good safety thing as well.

But again in Saskatchewan, and I think, you know, it would be interesting to know if — and we'll talk about this in committee — some sort of sense of responsibility so people get home safely or are not just pushed out the door. When we've seen the kinds of winters that we've had just . . . I shouldn't say as if it's in past tense. We're not quite finished winter even like today may feel like it's the end of winter. We could be back into really cold weather. And you know, whether it's the incident that I talk about where we had the young fellow die in Saskatoon earlier this year or in Prince Albert where we had four people die because of exposure and we know . . . We see the Minister of Social Services have a cold-weather strategy, but what do bars have in terms of cold weather? It would be interesting to know if there's been any research or any data done on this. I don't know, but I think in a province like ours, it's critically important that we don't have people . . . that same sort of scenario that played out in Saskatoon or in Prince Albert the year before.

So she talks about doing some housekeeping amendments. Again as I said, it's important to keep current. It's important that we have legislation that's in plain English that people can read, they can follow, and they do the right thing. We want to make sure that Saskatchewan has a great hospitality reputation. It's a safe one, but it's a lot of fun. And I think about the summers in our cities and our communities. They're absolutely wonderful. And I think about, for example, the jazz festival that's about to come up and how much fun people have at that, or our different communities.

So we want to be a real tourist attraction. We don't want to be sort of outside what's happening across Canada. I remember a few years ago. My wife and I were touring Quebec, and we were in a beautiful old hotel, and we were able to purchase a bottle of wine and go out onto the lawn and have wine out on this grand lawn looking across the St. Lawrence River. And so that's a kind of thing; it's really important that we have those kind of initiatives.

And I think one of the best initiatives that I've seen from . . . And you know, I'm not sure what side of the House started this, was the fact that you now can not finish a bottle of wine but have it recorked and take it home with you. But it would be interesting to hear, we want to . . . Mr. Speaker, it's important that we have people drink responsibly and not overdo it, not feel that they have to drink a whole bottle of wine that, in fact, they can cork it and take it home. I have not yet myself taken advantage of the ability to bring my own wine to a restaurant. I look forward to that occasion. I think that's going to be really interesting.

I'm not sure; I understand there's issues around corkage and different things like that. But I know, Mr. Speaker, that we all want to make sure that our province truly is, as I say, a

place people want to come to and that we are part of the 21st century. But I do want to say that there are some challenges that we have. And when it comes to addictions . . . and I do want to say I don't understand why we can't do more to work on regulations that help protect people from overdoing it when it comes to gambling.

I think and I know that many on this side, and I would bet on that side too, think that gambling can be a real problem. We know people in our own communities where it's unfortunate when we hear the stories of it having gone too far and lost homes, lost savings. Things have gone too far and there was . . . We would all hope that there would have been some way that the establishment, whether it would be a local bar with VLTs [video lottery terminals] or whether it be casinos, would have stronger powers to do that. In fact actually, I think casinos probably do have, and I understand they have the training. But it is some of the other smaller places that may not.

And so it's curious that we do a lot to reduce regulation. But sometimes I think it is important that we in fact strengthen regulation because as new challenges come up, we think about new innovations, but we also think of new challenges. It's important that we have the ability to do the right thing. You know, on one hand we're going to be dealing, we hope in the near future, with a mental health and addictions strategy, and it'll be interesting to see what recommendations come out of that and whether there'll be recommendations that deal with the gaming Act. And I would encourage government to be really thinking that completely through.

You know, I'll go back to where I started. There is a lot of positives. I think about the Olympic hockey game where we could all celebrate, and we all feel very good about being Canadian, and that's a kind of thing when you should be innovative and on the spot and flexible, but at the same time, you know, we've seen it, as I say, in our community in Saskatoon where we lost a young man because of things that went awry, went horribly awry in the bars early this year. If there was some way that we could have done something to protect him and the family, that would have been great.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll wrap up my comments, and I think it's important that we get more people into this, and I would like to adjourn debate now on Bill 122, *An Act to amend The Alcohol and Gaming Regulation Act, 1997*. I do so move. Thank you.

