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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 141 – *The Archives and Public Records Management Act, 2014*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to rise with such an applause. It's a kind thing of the government side.

This is an interesting bill though, Bill No. 141, *An Act respecting the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Public Records Management and making consequential amendment to other Acts and Regulations.*

I just think of yesterday. We think of Remembrance Day. And we think of not only the service that those who went to protect our country, protect our democratic values and freedom, the work they did. But I also have to say that the work of people who work in the archives, the public archives, whether it's the War Museum in Canada or our own archives here in Saskatchewan, our archives in different public libraries, really brought home the message yesterday and leading up to it — the rue story, the context of what was happening in Canada, Saskatchewan, our communities that led to the situation where we have and we mark Remembrance Day.

Without them, all the work that would've gone into making sure that that memory is not lost, that we shall remember, takes on a whole new meaning when you talk about archives. They truly do the good work of what often some may say as, it may seem to be dry. It may seem to be mundane. It may not seem to have a lot of value in the here and now. But clearly in the future, when generations look back and say how do we understand the story of what happened then, public archives plays a huge, huge role.

And I have to say that our thanks should go out to them and it's very, very important work that they do. And it's an honourable occupation and good work that is done to make sure that our story, our unique story of Saskatchewan is recorded and can be understood by those in the future.

And whether, you know . . . As I said, the record of the world wars, the Afghanistan war, past wars that Saskatchewan people have been part of, clearly are much more

understandable. And people appreciate the dedication, the commitment, the soldiers, the people who were involved in making those difficult decisions, the climate of the day.

It's hard to fathom. It's hard to fathom some of the events that happened in our world. But public archives makes it come alive, which is so incredible, because you think of the records that they keep and they must catalogue and organize them in a way that is understandable. Because, as the minister has said, the number of requests that they get is truly impressive.

So how does one look into the future to say, how can I put together records that will be understandable and comprehensible and appreciated by those in the future? Because you know, it's one thing to have a piece of paper in front of you, but it's another thing for somebody to really appreciate what was happening around that piece of paper or around that document.

You know, whether it's a . . . And I see that school records may be part of it, you know, a simple attendance record. And I remember those sheets that we used to do, and I remember, most will remember the teachers who did the diagonal lines in their attendance books. Relatively mundane work that is done but hugely, hugely important when it comes to records of Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has an incredible history. When we talk about the First Nations, the treaties that were negotiated here and the fact that we're all children of the treaties, how that record is kept and kept alive. So the meaning of that. And of course so much of that was oral tradition. But how do you keep that in a way that can have meaning for future generations? It's important, and it's more than just important in the sense of nice to have. It's critical in terms of who we are as a culture, who the First Nations are as a culture, who are the Métis as a culture. And you know, we take a lot of pride in Saskatchewan because we say, "from many peoples, strength" and from . . . So we're a community of diversity, and we have to appreciate that and how do we have those records.

The fact now that we have so many languages that are spoken in our communities and so many cultures, it's a wonderful thing. It's a wondrous thing. But the fact is, how do we keep that in a way that has meaning for generations, generations to come so they'll understand this province from its earliest days of before being a province, before being a territory, to how it's evolved through those states, through being a territory, through being a province, to the cities that we have now? How do we do that?

And so this is an important piece of legislation before us, and we have to consider it fully. And there's a lot of questions we have about who was consulted in this because this is not a small piece of legislation. It's 20 pages long, and it's one that could have a huge impact, a huge impact on how we gather and organize and keep our records.

And so there are a lot of considerations we have, and we have a lot of considerations about how those records are, whether they're paper records, whether they're electronic records. You know, it's interesting. We thought everything . . . And we've had this debate as well in terms of how the records were kept in this legislature, whether they

were tape recordings and then they've evolved into DVDs [digital versatile disc] from paper and pencil and all of those things. So what will be the record of 10 years from now? And how will we make sure . . . Well we will know for sure, we won't know what it is. We know that.

But what we need to know is how can we ensure that the records can be transferred more easily. And that's an important, an important issue. And so we have a lot of questions about this. And of course it's one thing to put together this legislation, and of course we ask, who's been consulted and what did they have to say about this?

But of course the other big issue will be the costs. And we know this government, when it can have its pet projects like lean, there are no bounds to what they will spend and who will they press into service, as we've seen with the Health Quality Council who will be pressed into service. But archives are a little bit different, as I've said. It's a huge job but often left to a very few people and often underfunded. And with this kind of new legislation, will there be more funding? How will we make sure? If we're taking this kind of a leap forward, you can't do it . . . [inaudible] . . . resources. You can't say, jump forward, when you're asking people and organizations to jump forward into the great unknown.

What are they going to do? What are the resources going to be for them? And we also have questions about, what does this mean for other archives, you know, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina? You have huge collections of important public records. How is that coordinated into this?

Of course it does talk a little about school records. That's important. How is that coordinated into this? You know, and the wonderful thing about Saskatchewan, when you look around the province, you know, you have all these museums and people gathering important documents and whether they make the grade of what is a public record and who gets to decide, and I have some questions about that. For example when I look at one of the questions around the public records committee and who it consisted of — the Provincial Archivist which I think is obviously a great choice, the Legislative Librarian, deputy minister of Finance or his or her designate, deputy minister of Justice or his or her delegate, and the head of any other government institution that may be designated in the regulations or her or his delegate — and I'm wondering where is Culture in this? Where is Culture in this?

To me, the public records really serves a much deeper cultural purpose than any other purpose really. You would think Culture would be one of the key members of the public records committee because they're the people who do the archaeology. They do all the kind of works with Royal Saskatchewan Museum is under the Minister of Culture's management. And I'm, you know, I'm not sure who the archives report to, whether they report directly to Finance or who they report to directly. I would almost think it should be Culture. It might be . . . I don't know. That's a question we have . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay. I've just heard the answer. I'm glad that I posed that. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

So I think that's why there should be somebody from the Ministry of Culture on this public records committee. Because I think if the public archives reports to Culture, why is Culture not there? I'm not sure. This is something we have for committee. I'm just saying public archives is a very important cultural activity, and I would like to see more profile for the Ministry of Culture in that because it's much more than finances. It's much more than justice records. It's who we are.

And when I think of days like yesterday when we celebrate and mark world wars and service of people, it's more than just a numeric thing. It's more than just a recording. It's who we are. And so I would like to see the ministry take or be given the opportunity. We'll find out more about that through questions, but we'll be asking the questions to make sure that they are.

And I do see and I do want to take a few minutes to reflect on the minister's comments. And actually he did give quite . . . And this was very good to see, and I know my colleague has commented on this, that usually the minister's comments are shorter, but actually this time the minister gave quite extensive comments. And that was very good to see because it's an archival document and it's very important to see the record. The public record is clear about the intent of this bill before us. So it's very important.

And we're going to be seeing and asking a lot of questions. He did talk about providing a framework for effective delivery of the archives mandate, particularly in the electronic records environment and of course what all does that entail, right from film and audio to now with emails and texts. This is a brand new world, and I think this will be very, very important to see what is it that that means. And I do appreciate the comment of, will distinguish the role of the institution as the custodian of Saskatchewan's documentary history.

But also it's the leader. It's the leader. It sets the bar for how do we act as custodians of our history? And clearly how the government acts, the Provincial Archivist acts, so will many others take their cue from the province.

The minister goes on and talks about how the Archives responded to over 5,000 inquiries in 2013-14. That's almost . . . That would be in the ballpark of 200 requests a day. That is pretty impressive — 200 a day. You know, you're talking about 20 or 30 an hour. It really does show that people are interested in the history of our province. We're a phenomenal province when it comes to diversity and I think our records are strong, but we need to be able to provide the resources so that people can have access to our archival records. They're very, very important. It's a critical, important service that we provide to the people of Saskatchewan.

I do find this always interesting, how the archives provide some of the data. And when the minister talks about, since April 1st of this year, Saskatchewan Archives has reviewed 656 disposal requests involving over 6,000 boxes of material. Imagine what that would look like in the warehouse, 6,000 boxes. You could get lost in 6,000 boxes. I know it would be quite a thing.

Eighteen hundred metres of public record for disposal and identified 146 metres of record for transfer to archives for a historic preservation. So I'd be interested in getting to hear more about, so does that mean they're sending out 1,800 boxes or metres that's not worthy of anything? One hundred and forty-six is. And so what will happen to those, all that material? And how do we keep it, effectively? You know, as a province grows, we have that challenge of how do you store this material? Because clearly the warehouses could fill pretty quickly if you don't have a management process of keeping this in some sort of effective way.

And of course the minister does talk about the role of the board in updating the responsibility of the board and setting a strategic direction for the institution. Now it must be strategic in some sense. I hope it's not always short term because, you know, governments do change, and we should anticipate that governments change. I know governments hope they don't change, but clearly this should be above that kind of short-term thinking, and that this is a long-term process where we celebrate, in fact, we celebrate our politics and the fact that we have a rigorous kind of province, that it's been diverse from many political parties and it is worth managing, but that the archives can be most effectively delivered. And the type of long-term planning in areas of accommodation and operating budgets are not political footballs but in fact they have that long-term stability, that they can do their job without interference or political manipulation. And so this is something that we'll be looking for in the new year.

How is this legislation supported in the budget? I mean it's one thing to say yes, we want to do these new things when we think they're very, very important, but the second part of it is, is there any support for actually doing it? And that's the key thing. Because we've known in the past where we've seen this government say one thing but do another thing. And it's very important when you are putting legislation forward that you are sending messages that you are supporting this area, very interested in doing the right thing. But the question will be, will you support it?

We are also very . . . And I'll be asking more questions about this in committee and as we discuss this further, about the whole question around who has been consulted, that is the one thing the minister did not talk about. And, as we've said, his comments were fairly lengthy but he did not talk about who was consulted in this new legislation. I think there's a group of archivists. I know that the U of S . . .

The Speaker: It now being after the hour of 5 o'clock, this House stands adjourned to 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

