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# DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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### **Bill No. 170 – The Fire Safety Act**

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this debate. It's a very important one. The short title, *The Fire Safety Act*, but the long title is *An Act respecting Fire Safety, Fire Prevention and Emergency Response Services and making consequential amendments to other Acts*. And of course just recently, in the last few weeks, our province was caught in a news story about a fire up in Loon Lake, the Makwa Sahgaiehan Reserve and in the tragedy when young lives were lost.

It really doesn't matter whether it's young or old. And we think of the stories from Quebec of a seniors' home with lives lost of course, or the train derailment disaster in Quebec, again where we're seeing regulations coming out of the federal government around that, just how critically, critically important this kind of legislation is and how we have to make sure we get it right, that there are no unintended consequences, that in fact what we value in our community is safety.

And number one among that is fire safety. And I think of other issues like water quality, that type of thing, but nothing really, from the beginning of time, really, in terms of fire, has always made us really fearful. And this is really important to make sure that we get this right.

So tonight we are talking about this bill, and I think that it really reaches many corners. But I do have lots of comments, and I know there'll be lots of questions about this bill in terms of the kind of priorities that this kind of government is making. It can bring forward legislation like this, and that's fair enough. But will it have the resources to make sure it really works?

My colleague just talked about the 15 per cent reduction of staffing. I'd be curious to know if there is enough staff to really enforce this kind of legislation. And I think that's really important because we can do one thing. We can make a piece of legislation, and we can dress it all up we want to, but if nobody's inspecting it, nobody's putting teeth in it,

then we have a real, real problem.

And so we think it's timely that in fact you can have . . . this is updated. It's been some 20-some years I guess since the last piece of legislation, and much, much has changed. But are we really dealing with the kind of changes?

Now we all, both sides of the House had a successful lobby day with the firefighters I think was back in November, late November, 23rd I believe. They made their case about some very important issues. And really how they framed it is, it's not just about loss, but in fact having good fire protection and all the regulations and codes that come along with it is more of an investment in our people and in our communities.

The wonderful thing about Saskatchewan is how it's growing, and we're seeing many signs of that in terms of new homes, new workplaces, that kind of thing. But the problem is that it's all susceptible to fire if it's not looked after. And so it's very important that we make sure that our legislation speaks to that.

Now we see some of the changes, and it's kind of unique — the appointment of a fire chief for park land or a regional park and how you appoint fire chiefs for hamlets and that type of thing. But we really do have some questions to make sure that there will be teeth to this, that in fact it means what it says, and people will feel that and they will feel safer in their homes because of this legislation. It won't be a piece of legislation that the odd inspector will refer to because we want to make sure there is enough inspectors out there to do the work.

So I just want to take a minute and refer to the minister's comments because really he talks about three things that this bill will do and accomplish: “. . . update the powers, definitions, and other terminology to better reflect the current realities and requirements . . .” And that's fair enough. As I had said and he referred to the fact that the bill that it replaces is from 1992, so that's been a while. “Second, it will provide local authorities, their firefighters and fire inspectors with more transparent rules regarding entry in situations involving fire, along with additional measures to prevent the risk of fires and other emergencies.”

Interestingly it doesn't speak to two in and two out, which I know those folks have been lobbied with, and particularly the Minister of Labour. It's an occupational health and safety regulation that the firefighters have lobbied for many years they get the kind of protection that when two firefighters go into a burning building, there are two outside to support them in case something goes wrong. And in fact many of the municipalities, many of the cities now actually do that as a practice but they don't have it in regulation. It's best practice and it's a safe practice, and I think that it's time that we deal with that. So it's interesting they talked about fire entry or entry into situations while on fire but they won't talk about the two in and two out. And that's very, very important and I think this would be the time to ensure that's in place.

And third, the new Act will provide the province, through the fire commissioner, with clear authority and greater ability to assist and support communities and

local fire departments when requested or required by a fire situation or emergency event.

Now I just want to go towards the end of his comments, about halfway through when he talks about:

The proposed new Act maintains the autonomy municipalities currently have to pass bylaws regarding fire service levels and any other fire safety and prevention matters. Most importantly, it maintains the autonomy municipalities currently have to decide what fire services they will provide and how best to provide them. Whether volunteer or paid departments or shared services and mutual aid agreements with other municipalities and First Nations, the new Act ensures these are accommodated and are not limited in any way by legislation. In fact, the new Act will better facilitate inclusion of First Nations, regional entities, and private industries in fire service agreements.

So it recognizes the challenges that are out there and whether it's regional entities, private industry, municipalities, but it does recognize First Nations and service agreements with them and how they have to be handled. And so we will be talking, we'll be asking questions specifically about how can we ensure that a situation that happened up in Loon Lake doesn't happen again, you know. We want to make sure that everybody's interests are recognized and protected. But at the end of the day I think we all recognize the fact that any loss of life is too much and we don't want to see any of that kind of stuff happening. And we can all learn. And it will be interesting to hear more about what the fire commissioner has in mind in terms of fire inspections and really fire prevention.

This is a huge, huge issue. As I said earlier in the afternoon, in my riding of Saskatoon Centre we have an older housing stock. What's interesting about that, it's maybe more at risk to burn because of wiring and different things like that, but it takes longer to burn compared to new houses that, once they catch on fire, they tend to burn more quickly. We all have the different challenges in our own communities. But it is a sad day when you recognize that fires do happen in all our communities and it really doesn't matter whether it's a smart meter that caused the fire or whether it was some other error in judgment that caused the fire — an accident, an electrical thing.

These are potentials that we need to make sure we're on top of and we have the supports, and the fire chief or the fire commissioner feels that they have the support of the province, both in terms of the resources and the legislation to make sure that communities, and whether they be municipalities, First Nations, or private interests, that they actually are getting the support quickly. You know, I mean we see this and I'm not sure what the minister had in mind in terms of private entities, but we could think of NGOs [non-governmental organization] that might be in terms of tire recycling. We've seen fires start with tires that can be long lasting and the fumes that come out from that can be really, really deadly. So we want to make sure that this bill is all-inclusive and meets the needs of everyone, and it's not just something that people want to say is done and now we're all good. No, we're not all good. Fire prevention is a 24-7 issue and constantly has to be updated. And hopefully this legislation looks into the future and

provides those people who are charged with providing safety, fire safety in our communities, all the tools we have.

Now we know that for example the firefighters came here and they talked about additional funding for fire safety. This is important. And as they said — and I agree with this — it's an investment. It's an investment when we talk about protecting our infrastructure, our homes, and our families. This is not just a reduction in cost. This is actually something that makes our communities even stronger, and I think firefighters are really part of that safety network that we feel we have to have in our communities.

You know, we've done a lot of work in terms of recognizing the different illnesses that are caused by firefighters fighting fires, particularly with the new kind of smoke that can come out of the different synthetic materials that we're using now. It's not the same kind of challenge it used to be. It's much more hazardous, and it can be really quite traumatic. And so I think we need to make sure we listen to people who are in the field, who are fighting fires, who are preventing fires every day. And I think this is a huge, huge issue.

And so I think it's important to make sure that we do and the government does recognize staffing both within the fire commissioner's office but also to make sure communities have the resources to make sure they have the right resources, the right mix so they can make a difference and make sure people feel safe as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we can also make sure that firefighters feel like they have . . . And this goes right across the board. I actually feel this is one that we're going to have to deal with with some especially rural areas where they can be caught in very traumatic situations with fire and the effect of post-traumatic effects among firefighters, but specifically around professional firefighters.

I can only imagine the stress that many folks feel up in Loon Lake just because of the way that it's all played out. And while our hearts and sympathy go out to all involved, these folks live with the aftermath of the fire for a long, long time. And you think about that, and I come back to the train derailment, the post-traumatic stress that happens after a major explosion like that and how it affects the community there as well.

I think there's lots that we can be looking at here as well. It's a very important issue and of course I think we need to listen to our firefighters. They do talk about Bill 85 that really set back the professionalism of firefighters, particularly when it changed the threshold of communities in which the bargaining process now does not apply to and moving it up from 10,000 to 20,000, moving eight communities out of that. And I think that was a shame to do that, especially the way it was done by the government of the day, that people were really caught off guard, didn't have time to explain to the minister the impact of taking some eight communities out of the bargaining process that professional firefighters have enjoyed in our province.

Having said that, I think that this is important that we take a look at this. We have some real clear priorities of the fact that we need to make sure firefighting is properly resourced throughout the province. And we know that in fact there will be some

interjurisdictional issues but, at the end of the day, what we want to make sure is that people are safe in their communities. And that's an important . . . underlining all of our province, that no matter where you live in Saskatchewan you should be safe, whether it be from fire, whatever.

But today we are talking about fire, and I think this is important that we take a real hard look at this. And of course we'll be looking to see, how is this legislation backed up in the budget? Because as I said, it can be a priority on legislation, but is it a priority when it comes to resourcing? And that's the question that will be before us.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move adjournment of Bill No. 170, *The Fire Safety Act*. Thank you very much.