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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Bill No. 177 – *The Insurance Act*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to rise in the House and enter in the debate about *The Insurance Act*, No. 177. It's an important piece of legislation. It's a thorough piece of legislation. It's comprehensive, and it's one that has a huge impact on security of mind.

And of course in our Saskatchewan society we really value strong, strong insurance. And whether that be flood, fire, accident, or life, and the list actually goes on, it's amazing what you can insure these days, but those are the basic ones. And you know, I don't want to give the impression or . . . I think when you get into this kind of legislation, it is very technical and it's very thorough. And of course it obviously has to be, because the unintentional consequences of getting it not quite right could have the dire consequences for people when they're in an unfortunate circumstance where they may find themselves whether it be, as I said, in one of those fire, floods, an accident, or, God forbid, a loss of life prematurely. And so we want to make sure the legislation is good.

I do think it's quite . . . I want to thank the ministry for the technical briefing. I couldn't partake in it, but I understand it was very thorough and it answered a lot of questions that we had. You know, when we get this kind of legislation, as I said, it is very technical, and we need the people who have put a lot of energy and expertise into this, and we appreciate that. It will be interesting when we get into committee whether we will have that same access to experts within Justice, but perhaps maybe even if we could have people outside Justice give us their points of view of this.

This is a thing that, you know, when we've had the committee structure, we've only had it a couple of times where we've actually had experts come in and tell us what they've thought of legislation. One that comes to mind, the other one, is the asbestos registry, where we had the Cancer Society — of whom we're going to go visit in just a short little while — we had them come and give us their thoughts on the legislation. We had the heart and lung people come and tell us what they thought. We had the electrical workers,

who have a real experience with asbestos, come and tell us what they thought about how good it is to be proactive on registries such as the asbestos registry.

So I think it would be something for the committee to be considering when we look at this bill in committee, that not only will we have the folks from Justice come but perhaps some of the folks from industry come and give their two cents too. This would be really worthwhile. I mean, it would be . . . We could ask questions ourselves but we maybe need to dig into that.

And you know just, I think it's tomorrow that we're going to be visiting with the IBAS folks, the Insurance Brokers' Association. This'll be, I'm sure, a topic of what they might want to talk about with us, who knows. But it is an important one, that this is why we have people come and visit with us, to have their points of view. They've probably been following this along the way, I would imagine. I would hope that would be, if they happen . . . that would be quite appropriate for them to be included in some of the conversations. They're very, very important stakeholders.

But I think it's important for us to avail ourselves of some of that expertise and actually get it on record. Get it on record of what the intention is. Because I know we love to give the government gears about, the gears about this because we'll probably see the amended, the insurance amendment Act here next year. You know, I'll make that prediction right now, that I bet a dollar we'll see that Act before the House next year.

An Hon. Member: Which one?

Mr. Forbes: The insurance amendment Act. I bet that'll be before the House next year because there will be a couple of things. I know in this bill, it's 293 pages . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . We're on. Okay, we'll take it from there.

And it is just what happens. When you have such a comprehensive piece of legislation, how can you not . . . The odds are that something will be either overlooked or the potential for misinterpretation will happen. And the case will be made to the ministry officials that, you know, you really need to tighten this up, or is this what you really meant to say? And so that'll happen.

But we may save ourselves a bit by having some expert witnesses come in and talk a bit about this. And of course at the end of the day, at the end of the day, we all want to make sure that we have good strong insurance legislation and regulations in Saskatchewan.

And of course it only makes sense that as much as possible, but considering the unique qualities of Saskatchewan, but as much as possible they can be consistent across the country. And so that when you get, when you . . . We know people move a fair bit. They may move for school; they may move for university. They may move for training, a very good job but then they come back, or we might entice them to come to Saskatchewan as newcomers. But they're used to insurance in other provinces. And so we want to try to make it as consistent as much as possible but not giving up on the good things that we have here in Saskatchewan. If we've got a superior product or a superior regulation or

statute here, we want to make sure that that is maintained. And we don't want to lose that and take a step backwards actually because of what's happening in other parts of the country.

So we know some are calling this a good piece of legislation because it protects a consumer. I think of the real estate agent or the real estate market . . . When house prices are high and the market is tight, it's a really good thing for sellers. When markets are a little looser, it's a really good thing for buyers. So it's all good for the consumer whether you're buying or selling, so I like to know more about why it is good for consumers.

One particular area that I'd be interested in hearing more about — and this is something that happened a few years ago and I'll be maybe raising this in committee — was what happened was a fire in an apartment block in Saskatoon. It was owned by, it is owned by Quint and operated by Quint, a community-based organization, well-known organization in the city and has done an awful lot of good work for low-income folk. And what happened in their apartment block, there was a fire. Fortunately no one was hurt, but there was a lot of damage to personal goods in the apartment block.

And really what happened was that it made us all become very aware, very aware of how tenants don't often get insurance. They feel that they don't have enough. It's just not part of their financial thinking. And this is something that I explored with some of the insurance brokers and companies about, what are the barriers to have more access to good tenant insurance? Because here you have a situation where people, for what would be a relatively small amount, it might be you would want to have insurance for maybe 10,000 or 20, maybe \$50,000, but you're not insuring a brand new home. And so what would be the value of that?

And so it's interesting when you have a circumstance that drives a little bit of learning. We understand that it's just not taken up. Some people do, particularly in condos or in circumstances where you might have a significant amount of personal property, whether that be jewellery or art or clothing, but for low-income people, it's not a priority.

Now interestingly what'll happen tomorrow night, Mr. Speaker . . . And I'm not sure if you've ever had the good fortune of winning, but I've won the IBAS purple blankets where you get 50 blankets. You get to donate it to whoever, whatever cause. And that year I did donate it to — it just so happened that was the year of the fire — I donated it to the tenants, and they were quite appreciative of the fact that they all got purple blankets. Now I wonder how many of those purple blankets are still in that building. But IBAS makes a real good point about how insurance is like a blanket, and it's like a security thing, and it's what keeps us, gives us peace of mind. It really made me think about insurance, and this will be one set of questions that I hope that the minister can help us be more proactive.

Because as we see, our society changes. The minister referred to the fact that the first insurance Act was 1913. Now I don't think this is a rewrite of a 1913 piece of legislation. It's probably been rewritten since then. The fact is that insurance goes a long way back in our legislature, but I think it's important for us to be looking forward for innovation.

Where are the challenges for us in terms of insurance, that piece of mind that we want? Because things that we hold near and dear or have a lot of value, we don't want to have something disappear suddenly, whether it be by accident or something else. We want to make sure that we're all covered and that we have that piece of mind.

And so with this piece of legislation, I think it's important that we take a look at it. We thoroughly understand the pros and cons of each of the different sections. I don't intend to go on today with each section, but if there are comments I think that I can make that will be helpful, that would be a very good thing.

But as I said, here in Saskatchewan we see circumstances that are kind of unique, I know particularly with flood. It was very interesting that already we're starting to see and hear issues about flooded basements. Someone in my own neighbourhood over the weekend did major renovations on the basement. And this may be something that we should all think about when we do renovations in our basement — make sure you fix the eaves first. The problem was the contractor said, we'll fix the eaves in the spring. You should do it the other way around. First things first. Fix the eaves so that you don't have any damage, and this is going to . . . You'll solve a lot of problems later on.

And so here we have a situation of making sure you get things right, but flooding can happen any time, any time. You know, we're all looking forward, especially this weekend that's coming up, and we're having double-digit, warm weather. We're all thinking this is going to be great, but we're going to have some repercussions of it. And it will be interesting to see what happens in our basements and that type of thing. So weather can play an amazing part in how we live our lives here in Saskatchewan. We can get pretty pumped up about the warm weather, and then all of a sudden we have issues around flooding, so this can be a real problem.

Mr. Speaker, I hope in terms of the legislation here today that we have before us that we think about this carefully and make sure that there are no unintended consequences, that in fact we can be innovative. In fact when people have called this good for the consumer, what does that really mean? What does that really mean?

And I know that there are pieces in this, and I don't mean to get into some of the technical language, whether it's unsolicited insurance, whether it's a trafficking or anti-trafficking aspects of buying and selling of insurance. These are things that sound very foreign to the regular consumer or the regular buyer of insurance. But the fact of the matter is that we all need to make sure that those who have the responsibility, and in this case the Ministry of Justice, are looking carefully at the pros and cons and making sure the legislation is completely well written and that when we have questions from people who want us to make sure that we are doing the right thing, we're not seeing the bill come back year after year with amendments, maybe only just once, but the fact is that we will have done our job here and that Bill 177 is a thorough piece of legislation, a very good piece of legislation, and one that we can all be proud of. But of course the proof will be in the pudding, but we need to make sure that we have a full understanding of it.

So there are parts of it that, you know, the language, whether it's reverse mortgage, the

trafficking provisions, all of that, you know, leaves us sometimes scratching our heads. What does that really mean? But we hope. And we do appreciate the side-by-side, the meeting with the ministry officials the other day to help us understand. Unfortunately we couldn't all be there, but I do appreciate that, and it leads to a lot more confidence, a lot more confidence in this piece of legislation.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I know that there'll be many more people who will want to stand and talk about this piece of legislation. I know that, as I said, the fact is that in Saskatchewan we do have a lot of natural challenges, whether that be fire, flood, all of that kind of thing. Of course the big ones are personal life insurance, accidental insurance, all of that. We want to make sure we get it right, that in fact consumers are truly protected, that they're getting a fair deal, a deal that's struck in English, plain English, or in French if that's what it's required to be. We want to make sure that the people, the consumers fully understand and really get the benefit of good consumer insurance.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I think that it would be time and quite appropriate for me to move adjournment of Bill No. 177, *The Insurance Act*. I do so move. Thank you.