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# DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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### **Bill No. 609 – *The Residents-in-Care Bill of Rights Act***

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in this House today and enter into the debate on this very important bill, Bill No. 609, *An Act respecting the Rights of Residents in Special Care Facilities and Personal Care Homes*. And I truly wish and I hope that at some point we can have a vote on this.

This is something that when you think about seniors and how much they've contributed to this province, and the fact that it's wholly unfortunate that the situation we find now in terms of long-term care . . . And it is a good thing that the Ombudsman is doing her investigation into long-term care because you know for sure it's something that we need to understand more fully.

But a good first step, a very good first step would be to pass Bill 609. It would be a signal, a powerful signal to the people of this province that we value our seniors and those who are living in personal care homes and special care facilities, that they are valued and they have respect and they have dignity. And by us not passing this, the message is murky at best.

And obviously, especially when this government on their side, and they get their spin doctors working and we know that, we see this continually day after day in the House where they can really make a . . . It's amazing what they can say is . . . [inaudible] . . . I guess the word is, the phrase is often silk out of a sow's ear, you know. And I really am worried why these folks cannot get behind this. You know, we have had opportunities where it just is common sense for us to work together, and we've seen good rules, good laws made when we both understand fully and completely that this is the right thing to do. This is the right thing to do.

But these folks are digging their heels in, digging a hole, saying that everything's okay, that the situations that have come forward are just one-offs. And truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that doesn't seem to be the case at all. And so this Act really makes a lot of

sense, and I want to congratulate my colleague from Saskatoon Riversdale for bringing this forward because I think it's one that we should fully consider and get into committee and get it back here and pass it before the end of session. We just have a couple of weeks to go. So I am very happy to rise in the House to speak.

But you know, we have a government that has put its blinders on, put its blinders on and they're ramming through situations where they know . . . And they know. They've had their information. They've had their special reports about the situation in personal care homes and special care facilities, and they should be, they should be more reflective of what they're hearing, of what they're hearing, what people are telling them about the concerns that are happening. And while we get the numbers trotted out . . . And this government is really famous for the numbers. They just keep popping them out.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that they are the government. They have a responsibility, and they have to accept that. And they have to understand that it's just not the reality of what's happening on their front lines, what's happening in our special care facilities and our personal care homes. That is not the reality. They may comfort themselves by saying so much that they've done this and they've done that, but the reality is it's not showing up in our homes for too many people.

I want to just take a moment here to reflect on the preamble because it's a very important way to set the tone for the debate. And I think that again the first preamble clause is "WHEREAS residents in care have the right to dignity, respect and safety," and that's so true. That's so true. But we hear time after time after time where the fact the people, the residents do not have, have not been treated with dignity or in a dignified way. And that's really tragic because in situations that we all would hope we don't find ourselves in, but here they are. And they're, you know, still with us, and we really want to make sure that their lives have value, that in fact . . . They are not being treated with dignity, and that's a real problem . . . and respect.

And respect is an important concept because, you know, if people are treated with respect . . . And we often use that word fairly loosely. And to me, you know, as a teacher, we would often talk about that in the classroom. Respect is around the basis that people have value. They have worth. And every resident in our long-term care facilities, special care facilities, or personal care homes have value. They are with us, and we value that they are, and it's important. That's why we must treat them with respect.

And of course safety is . . . It goes without saying really because it's so important, that we can look across the world and we have certain safety standards. And I think about the situation just a few short years ago with a fire in a long-term care home, that they were not up to standards. And we have to make sure we have the best standards, the best standards that we can possibly have in our facilities, our special care facilities and our personal care homes, and so that's really, truly the case.

The next clause talks about, "WHEREAS residents in care deserve basic guarantees of the quality of care they ought to receive." That really speaks to the minimum standards that they will have, certain levels of care, and they can expect that. Their family members

can expect that. And it's not something that's general and that has no real meaning, but that really is a guarantee.

You know, we often think about guarantees that we have, particularly when we might buy a new house, might be a guarantee on the quality of the home we've bought, might be a guarantee on our car, vehicles. The guarantee really has to have meaning. Sometimes we get guarantees where we go, what does that really mean? Is that really a guarantee, or are we being not told the complete picture here? And so this is why they deserve basic guarantees of the quality that they ought to receive, and that's so, so true. So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that's a really important clause to have in the preamble.

The next preamble talks about, "WHEREAS residents in care have the right to individualized care that meets or exceeds minimum . . . care standards." And of course this is also very, very important because everyone who is in a personal care home or a special care facility has unique situations, unique challenges. And it's really important that those unique challenges and circumstances are reflected in their care and that individualized care and how it's prescribed has to at least meet or exceed the minimum quality of care standards so we all know what the benchmark is for good care in special care facilities and for personal care homes. We all know what those minimum standards are. But the key word there is that it's a minimum. The expectation is that in fact, actually, people would be receiving more than that but depending on their own unique set of circumstances. And so that's a very, very important clause to have in.

Then it goes on to talk about, "WHEREAS it is the responsibility of the provincial government to ensure consistent standards of care in facilities throughout Saskatchewan." This is the best or most important part of it all because you could have all the whereases and the best wishes you want but, if nobody's tagged with the responsibility, then it really doesn't matter much. And this is where the provincial government has to take ownership of it and has to say, you know, that they will ensure that there are consistent standards of care in facilities right throughout the province, and that it doesn't matter whether you're in Moose Jaw or Saskatoon or in North Battleford, Meadow Lake, Estevan, wherever. You will have the consistent standard of care, and it was the same throughout, and that there will be the inspections and the work done to ensure that that is the case at hand.

If it's not the case, then the whole point is, why are we doing this? Well we're doing this because we want to make sure the residents in the special care facilities, personal care homes, have a basic level of care but also that basic level embraces their unique circumstances, and in fact it will be the best care possible.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've seen record revenues over the last eight years in this province. It's been a phenomenal eight years of financial growth when it comes to the province of Saskatchewan. The question is: where did the money go, and what are the priorities of this government? Clearly this helps set those priorities, and this is an important aspect of it. It's important. It's really critically important, and when we look across Canada, we should be the very best.

We've had an opportunity, that unfortunately this government has chosen not to take

advantage of, to really invest in our facilities and in our standards for those patients in special care facilities and personal care homes. They decided not to do that. They've largely ignored the circumstances. They put some money in, but not nearly enough, and particularly after the minister had a chance to really make some breakthrough opportunities a year or so ago when he had a report done but instead chose to fund a very small part of that. And so this is an important bill.

I want to take a minute here to read into the record the letter that our Health critic talked about, in terms of the residents in care bill of rights, that said the NDP tabled . . . Now she was referring to the previous bill, Bill 606:

*The Residents in care Bill of Rights Act*, if passed, will require the government to establish minimum quality of care standards that apply to seniors' care homes throughout the province that guarantees respect, dignity, and safety for seniors.

I've reflected on that and how important that is, how important that truly is, those key three cornerstones: respect, dignity, and safety for seniors and residents in our special care homes.

Saskatchewan has a seniors' care crisis. I'm quoting here:

Saskatchewan has a seniors' care crisis, and a significant part of the problem is the government's elimination of minimum standards that has led to understaffing, underfunding, and absolutely unacceptable treatment of people.

And we've seen the impact of that, when they got rid of the minimum standards and they have a general statement that really doesn't really mean very much at all but has led to understaffing, underfunding, and absolutely unacceptable treatment of people. And she wraps up by saying:

The bill is a clear way to address the problems with seniors' care in Saskatchewan, and it would be common sense for this government to pass it because what they are doing now isn't working.

Truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see that. We see the evidence of this government failing the seniors and the residents of special care homes and long-term facilities, and it's really tragic because these folks really deserve so much more, deserve so much more with that.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to now move adjournment of Bill 609, *An Act respecting the Rights of Residents in Special Care Facilities and Personal Care Homes*. I do so adjourn. Thanks.

