

THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

N.S. VOL. 56 NO. 16A WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013, 13:30

Bill No. 98 – The Child Care Act, 2013

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill No. 98, *An Act to Promote the Growth and Development of Children and to Support the Provision of Child Care Services, and to make a consequential amendment to another Act*.

Mr. Speaker, right off the bat I want to say that's an odd title. I think that if it's only one other Act, why don't they name what that Act is in the title, because to say make a consequential amendment to another Act and not name it, that's odd. But I understand this is a pretty straightforward bill.

But it's more than that though because I think, as we've come to appreciate how much child care means to families and to children and what a good part of social growth for our kids, and as the title says, to support and promote the growth and development of children, clearly child care does that.

Now I just want to refer to the minister's second reading comments. And he just says that this really is repealing the old child care Act, which is only in English, and replacing it with a bilingual legislation. And he states that this came about as a request from the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, the CÉF, and Association des parents fransaskois, AFP, for The Child Care Act to be made available in French. And apparently it was difficult, and I can appreciate that, to follow the regulations, especially when you're in charge of the care of children, young children, that it's important that you understand fully the obligations and responsibilities that are laid out in the Act. And if you're not following it, then it's a problem.

But I think it's important that we have a conversation about this because I am concerned. And you know, one of the things we really want to make sure is that we don't have unintended consequences when we pass legislation. And so if you have now a bilingual Act but hope... And I have a lot of faith in the translators, the government

translators, but if there's a chance that it's been not translated appropriately, then we have an issue.

But I think my main point though is that if there is bad legislation, it doesn't matter whether it's in English or in French, it still remains bad legislation. Making it bilingual doesn't improve the quality of legislation.

So I want to know, has this government, has the Minister of Education in his responsibilities to make sure that we have the best legislation possible, has he gone out and talked to all the stakeholders in Saskatchewan about this legislation? This is a time to say, you know, we're opening up the Act. We are translating the Act. And if there are problems with any of the parts of the legislation, this is the time to correct it. This is the time to correct it. You know what? There is no point in having bad legislation in both French and English. That makes no sense. Let's improve it first and then have it in a bilingual form. This is the time to improve the legislation.

In fact we know, we know for example and, Mr. Speaker, you may remember that a few years ago I had put forward a private member's bill about the R-word. And we found out actually that most legislation had been improved and the R-word wasn't in much of Saskatchewan's legislation. And the reason for that was because about 10 years prior, the government had undertaken an initiative to improve the language of the bills in terms of making it both bilingual if appropriate, making sure it was gender-neutral if appropriate, and those kind of things. And at that time they took out terminology that was offensive. And so therefore, at that point I think the only piece of legislation that I could find that used the R-word was something from 1927. And we had to do a search, but it was still there. Interestingly, though, the problem really was, for the R-word, was not in legislation, but it was in the regulations and different documents that this government produced. And there was quite a few examples of the R-word.

And so here you have a situation where when we're doing something to improve the language here in legislation, are they doing the same to make sure that actually the legislation is the very best it can be?

So we'll have that question: who did you consult with? Did you listen to them? And I know the APF and the CÉF, very outstanding organizations, would have a lot of expertise in terms of their experience of child care. But I think it's important that the net be cast much broader because it's important to get a broad input into any of these pieces of legislation, especially when they are so important to the people of Saskatchewan, the families of Saskatchewan. So there's that question we have.

And we also understand that one of the main points is that this will also give the government more powers to do investigations into offences that they see in child cares throughout the province. And we don't really understand, and the Act is not clear, and the minister wasn't really clear in his comments about what was meant about this. But this may mean people running unlicensed child care, and of course that's important that we do . . . We've seen cases in the media over the last year or so — and I don't believe there were any in Saskatchewan; I think it was more Ontario — where we saw overcrowding

or kids being left unattended. And this is very, very important that all child care providers are accountable, and particularly when they're running child care centres.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation, and we will have lots of comments and lots of questions about it. And not only because if it turns out to be a missed opportunity, when we could be talking about the real needs of families in Saskatchewan around child care spaces, availability, and the fact that not only do these spaces need to be announced . . . This government takes a lot of care to make sure that the spaces are announced. In fact they may announce them several times. But then the question is, are they actually there? Are they actually there? Are they provided for? And is there a capacity issue? You know, we often hear that it's really tough to find spaces for families because they are just not available. It doesn't make a lot of sense. And we've seen that in our own communities where we have child care providers talking about the unbelievable waiting lists that parents are facing.

And again the costs, the cost. And I know this is something that the member from Riversdale has raised several times and probably will continue to raise, the issue around the child care subsidy that the Ministry of Education provides and the bizarre nature of how that has been set and has not been raised. And I don't know what the current numbers are, but for many years they weren't spending their full amount because people were not qualifying because they were making too much money. But in fact the amount, the numbers that, the benchmarks that were in the program just didn't match the reality of what families make or single parents make. And it's really, really a shame that we can do this in a time when we have a booming economy in Saskatchewan, but we don't really have a government that is supporting parents to participate in this economy.

We know we talk about a labour shortage, and in many ways I know, and we all know, that parents want to participate, whether they're male or female, but they have parental obligations with their children. And we have to provide more child care at a reasonable cost and reasonable locations, but it has to be quality child care. So this is an important issue.

So parents are doing their part. They want to participate. They're going to school. They're getting their training and they're ready to do their job. But the government has been failing in the area of child care because while they're very good at making announcements, we're not actually seeing the spot, the child care spots, and we're not seeing them where they need to be.

So this is an issue and we will continue to raise this. This is important that we tackle child care. This government has made a lot of noise about this, but when it comes to clear answers about why is it that there's a mismatch between what they say they're doing and the reality that we're seeing with our constituents, something isn't just not . . . it's just not clicking.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, you know I have to tell you that one time I had the most, and it wasn't one of the most powerful experiences I had out door knocking. It was a hot August night, and I was just walking up to a step of a house, and it was a family arguing. And you

could tell that these were young parents, probably in their 20s, and they had one or two children, and they were arguing about how they were going to make ends meet. And it was no point of me knocking on the door. The screen was there. I could hear everything. And it's just really sad when you knew, you knew what the story was. And it really stuck with me.

And so we all hope that our kids don't have that experience. You know I have three kids, not yet a grandparent, but we all hope that our kids don't have those experiences where they can't afford to go to work because child care's expensive, or giving up meaningful careers. Where you really hope that your children as young adults can land meaningful work but we also want them to have families because really in so many ways that's such a critical part of who we are as a society and who we are as communities.

So child care is critical and as both sides of this House will agree that it takes a village to raise a child, and child care clearly, clearly is part of that, Mr. Speaker. So I think that, I know that we haven't had a good, long, full debate about this, and it's just unfortunate that there's not more to this bill. And we know that child care across Canada is being examined because we have many, many things happening, many things happening. We have problems with the fact that the income equality gap is growing in Canada.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's good to see you in the chair. But I will continue. I don't know if you need me to repeat the points that I've made but I may anyways. But we know there's many challenges for young families, and whether it's housing and the extreme costs of housing. And I could talk a bit about that because there is a lot of families who are deeply concerned about the costs of rent and what it means. And I think of communities in Saskatchewan, whether it be Estevan, where you have a vacancy rate of zero and there's absolutely no chance of finding any suitable housing for a young family. But yet Estevan is a wonderful community in the sense of, talk about, work opportunities. It's a great place. And I think that it really is. And it really is. And it's a great place with meaningful work in the energy sector and well-paying jobs.

And well we have some questions about representation, but what can we say. That is not what we're here to debate for today . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . There you go. But we really have issues. And you know, last year, or it was in the spring, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I brought up a petition from the folks of Estevan concerned about the cost of housing and even the cost of renting trailer spots because it's such a hot market in Estevan, such a hot market in Estevan. And you know, I appreciate the comments from the member from Estevan, but I do really think this is a challenge for Estevan in having an appropriate housing strategy. But this is what young families are facing. So they're facing that in Estevan.

But you go to Prince Albert where you have a vacancy rate of some . . . over 6 per cent, over 6 per cent. And things in Estevan, well we hope things go well in Estevan. I mean . . . Or Prince Albert, not quite as hot as the economy as Estevan. I know, I understand there's some setbacks. And we could talk about the representation from Prince Albert. We could talk about that, and there's some real issues there.

I've got to tell you, you know, it was interesting. Today in question period, we had some comments about CETA. And I was reading the *Prince Albert Herald*. That story, that story was very interesting. And there was comments made, a member statement, about comments by Erin Weir and CETA. In fact we had the same debate about the Canadian-European trade agreement. And of course in principle we all see a lot of potential benefits, a lot of potential benefits there. But we want to see the details. We believe you need to see the details.

Now it was interesting. The Premier even made that comment. When he talked about the federal bill when it came to cyberbullying, he wants to see the details. But a Canadian-European trade agreement? We don't need to see the details. How is it for cyberbullying, you want to see the details? The trade agreement, no worry about the details. And what the member from Prince Albert said, and I couldn't believe it, he said, it goes without saying that we're going to do due diligence. I don't know about that. I've got to tell you, when he uses, it goes without saying, it goes without saying, I've got to tell you. And if that's the approach they're taking to child care, it goes without saying I have some questions. I have some questions. Because child care is . . . Well child care is so critically important.

We've all, you know, as we've raised our own kids, and we've all worked and whether it's working on a farm, working in schools, working in nursing homes, or in hospitals, this is a real, real important issue to our economy. And you know, we're looking to have this sustainable growth. And we don't want to see a situation where we say child care is just not possible or it's too expensive or the inspections aren't happening, you know. And we don't want to have any tragic incidences happening around child care. So when the bill is open like this, of course we'll have comments on this.

And you know, one of the areas I would want to see, and we haven't had a real chance to talk about this, but when my kids were growing up and I was going to school and my wife was working here in Regina, I was attending the University of Regina to get my education degree. And that was back in 1980 it would have been, the year my daughter was born, 1980-81, and it was the first 24-hour daycare in Saskatchewan, a 24-hour daycare. And I was on the board at the time. Now I would have been, I guess I would have been in my 20s at the time, Mr. Speaker. So it was very interesting. And of course the issue of fundraising and having appropriate funds for this . . . But it was interesting that you would have a 24-hour daycare.

But the reality is we have a lot of shift workers in this province. I didn't realize how many shift workers . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, and those who work out of the nine-to-five traditional hours of work. And we're going to see more of that because of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* because now we've seen this government allow the 10-hour workday.

Now we have said, and this government has, you know, has pointed out to particularly me as a former minister of Labour, that when we were in power we authorized over 1,000 permits allowing workplaces to have that. And fair enough. That's true. But we knew who those 1,000 workplaces were so we could have some knowledge of what was the

social implications for our communities and our society where you have 10-hour workdays. We thought, as I recall this, that a lot of these places were in the North. They were either people who would go into work sites like remote work sites and that kind of thing. Surveying companies would be a good example. And I could talk a little about surveying companies. I don't have my book with me right now though.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these kind of changes are important when we're talking about our society, that now we don't know, we don't know what workplaces are going to have 10-hour workdays. They don't have to register with the Ministry of Labour. They did before.

We understand that no workplace was actually turned down for a permit. The company was worked with in terms of understanding the implications of a 10-hour workday. If they felt it was necessary, that was fair enough. And it was all fair and it was reasonable. But the challenge was, or the good thing was that we knew where that workplace was. We knew how many workers were, what the impact it would have on society. Now we have no idea. And of course one of the unintended consequences of that are children who are going to be without their parents for up to 11 hours a day because of going to work, the travel back and forth, that type of thing. What's the impact of that? I think it's not going to be great.

Now I know the minister and I had great debates about this. He would say, nurses and firefighters love it; can't see why a teacher wouldn't love it, you know. And I don't know, you know, when you have a teacher working a 10-hour workday with kids, that's not quite the same as a nurse in a 12-hour shift or a firefighter, is it? So you know, this is an important issue, and we need to understand the societal impacts of these kind of changes that this government has kind of brought forward.

And we, you know, while the minister . . . And it is ironic. Now the Minister of Labour has taken on another job. I mean it sort of represents a sign of times in Saskatchewan where everybody has to have a second job, and the Minister of Labour has taken on a second job. And I don't know if he has a hard time making ends meet or he's got too much free time, but it's the same minister who has got child care added to his portfolio. So we had a good discussion about that, and we will continue to have that because those things fit like hand in glove — where you work and child care. And I think that's important that we have the kind of conversations about.

So is this the kind of Saskatchewan we want? You know, we want people to have good families, good homes, good work. We want this province to grow, but we don't want it to be reckless. And I think we can all agree that we don't want kind of an out-of-control, reckless type of growth. We want it to be safe. We want to make sure that people can make ends meet and actually put a little away.

We know this government . . . Now hats off to the Minister of Finance for the work a couple of weeks ago. And I don't know if he's here or not. It doesn't really matter. But I do want to say the recognition that we should be looking at CPP [Canada Pension Plan] and the increases in CPP as a way to make sure people have a decent retirement is good.

Now I know they have to work out the details. But there was a bit of a logjam where people were really reluctant to talk about CPP as a potential for making sure, particularly the lower income folks when they retired . . . You know, in Saskatchewan, in Canada we have done a fair amount of work in terms of the very lowest income seniors. And that's about 16,000, I think the province is saying now, that both get the Saskatchewan Income Plan, the guaranteed annual income, or guaranteed allowance, and CPP and the old age security.

So that's one group of people. But, Mr. Speaker, as we've talked, and we talked about seniors today in question period, the fact that this government has chosen not to have a seniors' advocate is a real problem. But we know there's a group of seniors who are at the low income level, a little bit above the SIP [seniors' income plan] cut-offs, who will be having a hard time making ends meet.

And you know, I've got to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the toughest stories I often hear and I have to say, well that's the way these programs are designed, is where somebody's put away 50,000 or \$75,000 and that's what they've saved. They may have worked minimum wage or a couple of dollars above that, you know, making maybe 30,000, or let's say 30, \$40,000 a year. So they weren't making a lot of money a year but they were putting away a little bit because they believed . . . And it's a good thing to do, to save money. So they did save money. But they found out they would have been further ahead to have bought a car or something with their money because having that savings of \$50,000 disqualifies them for other benefits that they rightly deserve.

Now some people say that you should actually save over \$100,000 and then you're kind of in the game when it comes to pension plans. And this is a debate we've had in this House before with the government about the Saskatchewan Pension Plan, which in and of itself is not a bad thing, but you have to make sure you're saving enough. But it really does have a problem for those people who are not quite at the bottom but who are working, making not a bad wage but not a great wage and putting some money aside.

So, Mr. Speaker, what does this have to do with child care? Well this is a reality that young people are facing today when they're making choices about where do they spend their money. Do they spend it on housing when we've seen rents go out of control? And they must have housing. They must have food. All right. And we all encourage them to put money aside for their retirement. But it's hard to tell families when they're in the 20-some-year-olds, just like I was saying when I was on that board for 24-hour daycare and I was 20-something at the time, hard for me to relate to putting money aside for a pension plan. But I was having money put aside through the CPP [Canada Pension Plan]. But then child care is an important part of that decision. It's hugely important.

And so I know that many of my friends, my colleagues want to get in on this topic, you know, but I could go on about this because this is really near and dear to my heart. I've got to tell you, we have to talk about child care whenever we get the opportunity. It's hugely, hugely important. So as I said, we'll probably have questions in committee. It's an important issue, and we hope that we're not translating bad legislation and wasting time doing that. If it's bad, it's bad; whether it's French or English, it doesn't make any

difference. We want to make sure it's good legislation. So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move adjournment of Bill No. 98. Thank you very much.