

FOURTH 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. 57 NO. 84A TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2015, 13:30

Firefighters and Workers' Compensation Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Professional Fire Fighters Association is here today to push for much needed changes. Firefighters are at a greater risk for contracting many types of cancers, so they want this government to amend *The Workers' Compensation Act* to include more types of cancers, recognize occupational diseases for firefighters.

They also want the government to take a lead role in firefighter health and safety by developing legislation and regulations that ensure they have appropriate access to early detection and treatment. Other provinces have already done so, and this opposition wants Saskatchewan to do so as well. Will the Labour minister commit to doing this today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education and Labour Relations.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the firefighters for the good work that they do. They are people that routinely put their lives at risk. They put their health at risk on behalf of the safety and well-being of all of us. For that, we thank them very much.

Mr. Speaker, we're a government that has in the past added esophageal cancer to the list of presumptive cancers that are treated and, Mr. Speaker, it's something that this government will continue to look at.

I can tell the members opposite and I can tell the firefighters that are here today, the committee of review is currently reviewing the workers' compensation legislation. And, Mr. Speaker, we will look at those recommendations, and we may well do something that would be appropriate in advance of or in support of the things that will come out of that review, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan professional firefighters also want post-traumatic stress disorder added to the list of illnesses presumed to be work related for firefighters under *The Workers' Compensation Act*, and the opposition fully supports that change as well.

The government can't argue that it doesn't have the money to fund this additional coverage. This year the Workers' Compensation Board paid out \$141 million in excess investment income to employers. That's more than enough money in the workers' compensation system to provide for proper coverage for firefighters who face workplace injuries and illnesses. So why won't the Labour minister just commit to these changes today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has had this file during his term in government. He knows that we don't interfere with the direct operations of the Workers' Compensation Board. We don't go in and tell them what they should or should not pay out. What we do, Mr. Speaker, is we create a legislative framework around which they work. We would do that through a process of review, coordination, and some consultation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've met earlier with the firefighters. They've raised the issues of cancers that should be treated in a presumptive manner and, Mr. Speaker, they've raised the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder.

We have forwarded those things to the Workers' Compensation with a request that they review them and that they be considered in consultation and in concert with the committee of review. That process is under way, Mr. Speaker, and we look forward to that process completing because, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the workers that are here, we value the hard work, we value the commitment that they do, and we want to ensure that we do everything for their health and their safety, Mr. Speaker.