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Bill No. 49 – The Forestry Professions Amendment Act, 2012

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill No. 49, An Act to amend The Forestry Professions Act.

And I think this is a very serious Act, but I just do want to say a couple of things before I start. It reminded me of a cartoon I saw, and I think it was in *The Globe and Mail*, about the fall is the time when we see lots of professional foresters out trying to sell wet wood under the guise of saying, this wood is much better because it burns much slower.

But I was struck, I was struck by the minister's speech. I was struck by the minister's speech. He was leading us to believe that he crafts every one of his, every one of his speeches that he has ever put into words. Well, every word, he thinks about every word. And I was struck by this when he says and I quote, in his speech of November 5th, just a few, couple of days ago, and I quote, "Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments are a concrete demonstration of our government's confidence in the Saskatchewan Forestry Professionals and their association."

These folks are foresters. They deal in wood, not concrete. So I would think, I'm not sure the minister really knows what he's talking about here. And I think he should think about better ways of describing his relationships with these professionals other than concrete or pavement or whatever. I think, really I think we really need to think more carefully about every word and especially a minister who takes a lot of pride, a lot of pride on every word he says — a concrete relationship.

Now I would think, I would think when we talk about our desks here, we consider them a solid wood desk, a solid relationship, or maybe if we're talking about a beam, you think about a clear beam, one without knots. And so, Mr. Speaker, I would think that, that the minister when he's talking about as important things as relationships with professionals, that he really should think of words that are more appropriate. But to describe them as concrete certainly reminds of the Joni Mitchell, the Joni Mitchell song when you cut

down all the trees and you pave the parking lot with concrete. That's what he's talking about. That's how he views the world of forestry. It's good to cut them all down. Cut them all down and pave it with concrete.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that we have some questions about this bill. We'll certainly have questions for the minister when we get into estimates or into committee to talk about these bills. So I really, I do have a lot of questions about this. And I think that we'll have to talk extensively about this because clearly, and the minister did allude to it, that the people have a lot of questions about what's happening in our forests these days, particularly since the downturn in the world markets. And the minister alluded to that.

You know, our forestry sector was doing so well, doing so well. And of course so many reasons, particularly dealing with global markets, have seen pressures in our forestry sector. But still this government has made some commitments, and they seem to be unable to carry through those commitments to restart that sector.

And so we'll have a lot of questions about that because forestry here, particularly in the northern part of the province, but, you know, in the parkland, but also when we talk about Moose Mountain and Cypress Hills, there is some really interesting areas around forestry that the public is very interested in. And so when we talk about The Forestry Professions Amendment Act we want to make sure we're having the very best people doing the kind of work, the kind of work that our public expects.

And particularly now, when we see, when we see as well the minister, who is talking about the environmental code. And, you know, it is interesting because he talks a lot about consultation in that one. We compare what happened with the environmental code, say, to the labour, this new labour code that they're talking about where there's a 90 day mail-in ballot. This environmental code, we see, will come into effect sometime this fall.

And so if you're outsourcing some of the work to folks who have the qualifications that . . . We have a fair number of questions about what their work will be doing. As he said:

The code will be a cornerstone of our ministry's continuing shift to a results-based regulatory framework that will provide client-centred service and foster innovation while enhancing the protection we offer our environment.

And I think that's really critical, and I know people in Saskatchewan will have a lot of questions about that. We have a lot of expectations. People in Saskatchewan have high expectations when it comes to forestry. And so this is important, and this is not some small matter that we're talking about here.

And so we will be interested to know who were the people that the ministry consulted on, and what is the impact and how this will all play out. And he talks about, particularly the New West Partnership provinces, how does that all relate. And how does this strengthen our communities where the forestry sector provided jobs and provided, as we talked today even, just the recreation parks. And parks, the ability to enjoy our natural environments and protection of biodiversity, and this will be an important part of that.

And so when you have this type of thing, this is really critical.

And so there's a real public interest when we have organizations like this that will self-regulate and have certain abilities and powers that we're leaving up to the professional organizations. In many ways it's the right thing to do, but we have to make sure we protect the public interest, particularly when we know that there's so much potential here in Saskatchewan when it comes to forestry, on so many different levels.

Clearly of course when we talk about the economic contributions that forestry can provide to our communities, particularly the ones who are in the rural areas who are looking for opportunities to diversify, this is hugely, hugely important. But it's also hugely important in terms of environmental protection. And it's hugely important when we talk about protecting our water sources, the watershed, that type of thing.

So this is one that we'll have to make sure that we follow up with and we talk to the people in the different sectors to say, so what do you think about this? I think it's interesting that the minister talked about some of the reasons that he raised around public safety. We would have liked to have more information about that because we get . . . You know, it's seems apparent right off the bat when we . . . the connection between forestry professionals and the environment. And of course there is a clear connection, too, with public safety, particularly when you're talking about fire management, road construction, that type of thing.

But some of the language in the bill, particularly when we talk about the new section 23.01(2)(d) when it talks about limiting liability around loss of life, harm, or damage to safety and health or welfare of people, we'd be curious to know what that is all about. As well the issue around members of Canadian Forces performing his or her duties in the Forces, that's one that we need a little bit more clarity about why that has to be enunciated in the legislation.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we often talk about unintended consequences, so when there's certain things that are alluded to, it's only reasonable that we actually ask for more details about why that particular issue is part of the question. Of course the minister did give some examples about what kind of things these folks do, whether he talks about significant safety environmental risks where they're designing a resource road, developing or building a water course crossing, or handling hazardous material such as herbicides and pesticides. And some of these carry financial and legal risks as well. So we will ask for more specific information on this.

And of course, he did talk a little bit about the First Nations and Métis communities, making sure obligations are met to them. And I'm sure hoping that they have spent time working with the First Nations and Métis communities to make sure that there is capacity for understanding what this means. They may be looking for what typically in the past worked, and I'm not sure because I need to ask these questions. Maybe work was done by a conservation officer but will now be done by these folks as a private company.

So we've got questions about this because if this is outsourcing work that would normally

be done by the public sector, and people know and understand the folks that are working through this, that all of a sudden you see somebody from a private company, the confidence may not be there. And they wonder, how do we have recourse? How do we make complaints about whether they're coming onto your land and doing things that maybe they have the right-of-way to do. Maybe they have the clear passage to do that, but people don't really understand why they do as a private company. I don't know. I'm just drawing out scenarios because what we do on our side is make sure we think this completely all the way through, think about the different scenarios that may happen that may cause some concerns. And we want to make sure that we understand this completely.

And then as well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be curious to know whether The Forestry Professions Act and the amendment Act allows some sort of advocacy aspect to their organization. Are they a professional group that will come to the legislature to meet with us as the real estate folks did today, meet with certain government officials? Can we hold them accountable? What are the processes for holding them accountable? So these are questions that we have.

As I said before, clearly it's one that's very, very important. And of course, you know, when we . . . I think about this a lot as the Labour critic, the role of safety, particularly within forestry. You know, we think about tree planting, all of that kind of thing, what this all means for that. We have a lot of questions about how does that play out into that and, of course, what are the specific requirements that will allow people into the practice.

It seems pretty thorough on some sections. It talks about their stamp. They get a stamp so that when they can give the seal of approval to a plan, that it's recognized and has a stamp of approval, I guess, is what we're looking for. And when they're not doing the work that they should be doing, whether they've been suspended or for whatever reasons they cannot use that seal, they have to return it. So that's relatively straightforward.

But we need to go through this so that we completely, completely understand this. And I think that as well, in terms of the public interest, again I go back to what is the public's obligation to be using these folks? And that's very important. When we think of . . . We take a lot of pride in our natural forests, as I said, in the North or in the South around Moose Mountain or Cypress Hills, but also our urban forests. Urban forests are critically important, and we've seen weather now where I know our own trees in Saskatoon took quite a beating last weekend through the wind storms. So how this plays out . . . And what are the cost implications for ordinary citizens and the obligations to do that?

So again, Mr. Speaker, I think that we do have some concerns about this, but it seems relatively straightforward. I would think that on our side of the House, we would describe our relationship with many of these folks as a clear relationship, one that is a solid relationship, not so much a concrete relationship. I think we should ask the minister to rethink his standing with the folks.

With that though, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to now move adjournment of reading Bill No. 49, The Forestry Professions Amendment Act, 2012. Thank you.

