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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Potential Changes to Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's now been several months since the government introduced an alarming discussion paper on a topic nobody voted for in the last election. And, Mr. Speaker, we've now sat through three full weeks of session. Several pieces of legislation have been introduced but funny enough we haven't seen, they haven't tabled the labour legislation.

People in Saskatchewan want to know what the Sask Party has in mind because they certainly didn't vote for massive overhaul of labour laws in the last election. Mr. Speaker, people are very concerned when the minister says he's bringing in the most changes to labour laws in the country. To the minister: where's the legislation?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I can advise the members opposite and would like to advise the citizens of the province that the officials at the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety have been working on this project since the consultation finished during the summer. It is moving along quite well. And our original timeline was to have the bill introduced sometime in the fall session and, Mr. Speaker, that is still the plan and the process is coming along as it should. And to the member opposite I'd just say, a few more sleeps and we'll have something for him.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an interesting answer but not very helpful because the minister seems to have a lot to say about his labour law to groups, for example the North Saskatoon Business Association. And this wouldn't be the first time the Sask Party introduces what they bill as a big idea in front of a paying crowd. The last time this happened it was a \$100 a plate dinner to hear about the Premier's little booklet. And I'm not sure what's being charged tomorrow for the minister.

Mr. Speaker, why is the minister talking about his labour laws at yet another private function instead of here at the legislature?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I think both he and I attended the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] convention not that long ago. I didn't pay to attend there. I don't know whether he paid or not. But we spoke about things there, including labour legislation, changes to occupational health and safety. And, Mr. Speaker, we had I think a good, open, and frank discussion.

So when I speak to the NSBA [North Saskatoon Business Association], I don't know what their charge is tomorrow, but I don't intend to ask them . . . or don't intend to be asked tomorrow how much that I paid for SFL or one way or the other.

Mr. Speaker, we are quite prepared to provide the information as we go forward, to a variety of groups through the province and intend to continue doing that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to add that, you know, we have a good record with labour relations in our province. Mr. Speaker, I have a quote I'd like to read, and it is, "Our economy has been moving along quite well with relative labour peace for many, many years." Mr. Speaker, that is a quote from the Leader of the Opposition during a scrum that he had on October 23rd.

So, Mr. Speaker, even the Leader of the Opposition acknowledges the labour . . .

The Speaker: — Next question, please.

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, that's the key part of our argument when they talk about this massive overhaul. Things have been working, so to get it right you don't need to do the massive overhaul.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, they put out this massive discussion, or this discussion paper on May 2nd, and they didn't hold a single public, open public meeting to get their feedback by July 31st. Clearly they had a pretty good idea that people in Saskatchewan want to see this new labour law introduced as quickly as possible. But a lot of people, quite frankly, think it's been sitting already written in a drawer somewhere since the Sask Party first started talking about it.

Mr. Speaker, there has been several pieces of legislation tabled this session but not one of them is the new labour law that this Premier touted in his Throne Speech or mused about in his little booklet. Mr. Speaker, why won't the minister table his legislation and we can start the debate?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has made comments before that the legislation was pre-written. I think perhaps you'd like to tell that to some of the

officials over at the ministry that have been working long hours and often some 16- and 18-hour days, on weekends and well into the evenings, Mr. Speaker. There was not pre-written bills or anything else and they are still working and we are getting very close to finalizing.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the consultation process, we received over 3,800 responses that went into the new legislation. I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone that made a submission.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to consultation, in 1999 the members opposite introduced and passed The Special Payment (Dependent Spouses) Act ex gratia payment to widows — no consultation; 2001, amended The Labour Standards Act to extend parental leave benefits, no consultation; 2004, trade union Act, no consultation; 2006, labour standards Act for family, no consultation.