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Potential Changes to Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. People in Saskatchewan were surprised once again by the Sask Party when the Minister of Labour started talking about policies they didn't vote for on Friday.

At a private, paid event with the North Saskatoon Business Association on Friday, the minister announced his ideas for the massive overhaul of the province's labour legislation. Mr. Speaker, then the minister went to an unprecedented step of holding another news conference on Saturday where he tried to backpedal and said he was open to hearing new views.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: in light of the minister's eleventh hour pledge to actually listen to the public, is the Sask Party government now scrapping their plans and launching a full public consultation on its massive labour bill?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. We've had a number of points over the last year where I've said and the Premier has said that we're open for discussion; we're open for consultation. We had a consultation process through the summer with some 3,800 submissions to it. We indicated during the earlier comments that were made that we were prepared to have submissions that would go right through the House and into the spring session if there was appropriate reason to make a House amendment. Mr. Speaker, we're working and we're well on in that process of getting the bill drafted and, Mr. Speaker, I'd urge the members to stay tuned and watch when that gets introduced. We're hoping that we're going to have a very good product, Mr. Speaker, and I'd urge the members to watch for it.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister said on Saturday in his rushed scrum that

the legislation is nearly complete. But by the sounds of what he told the NSBA [North Saskatoon Business Association], it's already written and the ink is already dry.

The Sask Party has ignored what hundreds of Saskatchewan people have said to the government. The people want a fair and balanced labour environment in this province. And the changes the minister's already revealed are out of step with what the people are talking about and are just not common sense. The minister won't seem to listen to what working people have called for when they've called for public consultations, for better workplace standards, and for balanced labour law.

Mr. Speaker, since the bill is drafted, why hasn't the government tabled it in this House today? Will the government table their massive labour law overall today?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I have two quotes I'd like to read. The first one is:

In May when we saw this coming forward there didn't seem to be a reason why this was coming forward. That was the big gap in this. There was no common sense reason for this.

Mr. Speaker, that's a quote from the member for Saskatoon Centre, the member opposite, October 31st, 2012. Mr. Speaker, I'd read the second quote:

Governments should always be ready to improve labour legislation. That readiness is an important part of a common sense commitment to a better future for the province.

That was from the first NDP submission on labour review, dated July 31st, 2012. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure which common sense approach the member opposite is going to take or wants us to take, but, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this government is going to take a common sense approach. We are going to move the legislation so that it is consistent with other provinces. And, Mr. Speaker, it will move the province forward.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister quoting me and quoting our consultation, our reply on July 31st. It's too bad it's not on the website along with the other consultations. He should put it up there with the rest of them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, people in Saskatchewan are worried about tipping the balance when it comes to labour legislation, yet that is exactly what the Sask Party wants to do. This labour legislation is an attack on collective rights. They know from Justice Ball they should consult with people instead of going through expensive, costly court decisions

And on Friday, the minister finally shot down the Premier's pet project of ending the Rand formula. Now the Premier has talked about this since May 2nd, about doing away with that court-tested means of participating in unions. But that's just the thing, Mr.

Speaker. The Sask Party will only talk about these very important policies if the crowd is paying. Why would the Sask Party require people to pay to hear the new legislation that affects them?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, over the last number of months I've spoken at a number of events including the building trades council, Sask. Federation of Labour convention, minister's advisory committee, and in this House. Mr. Speaker, it was not until last week that I spoke to any kind of a business group whatsoever in any kind of a formal setting. The matter was publicized in the House. The member opposite raised it last week.

Mr. Speaker, it's the intention of this government to speak to people on both sides of the issue, from the labour side and from the business side. And, Mr. Speaker, it's surprising how many consistencies and how much common ground there is.

Mr. Speaker, I'd say to the members opposite, just point out a few things to them. When we brought in secret ballots and freedom of speech in the workplace, they said it was an attack on unionization. Well, Mr. Speaker, the sky did not fall in. When we brought in Bill 80, they said it would destabilize the construction industry. Mr. Speaker, construction industry has gone on and progressed as it never has before in this province.