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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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

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Potential Sale of Information Services Corporation

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to get up on this very important motion, because people out in the province are deeply concerned about the mixed messages that we're getting from this government. They can't seem to quite get their story straight on their position on the Crowns. Now they want to deflect and they want to spin and they want to create a lot of other stories out there, but they don't want people to be taking a look at what their plan is.

You know, ever since their former leader Elwin Hermanson was caught in the election of 2003 musing about the potential for Crowns, this party, the Sask Party, has learned to be very careful about message management when it comes to Crowns. They don't want to be too clear. They can wrap themselves around the Crown flag, like we're seeing some of the backbenchers do today, just trying to say, oh we're there for the Crowns. But we heard earlier in question period the minister in fact be kind of vague about, is it just the 13 Crowns that are listed in the Act, The Crown Corporations Public Ownership Act, that they're really committed to? Those 13? And the other 57 are really up for sale? We're hearing mixed messages.

And that's what we're hearing when we're out on the doorsteps or at different events. People aren't sure, aren't sure what this government's plans are when it comes to Crowns. Are they truly like what they said in their election brochure? And I have it here, that they're going to keep their Crowns publicly owned to provide high quality utility services for Saskatchewan people at the lowest cost. So does that mean just the utility Crowns that are the 13 or are they talking about the other 57 could be up on the auction block?

And I think my colleague from Athabasca said it very well when he talked about it. It seems this government's position is, if it isn't bolted down, if it's not bolted down it for sure is for sale. We're going to take a look at it. We're going to take a look at it because when you look at their document, and this is it right here. I've got the whole thing right

here. Now if they want to refer me to the page but I've got the whole piece, but it says, "Keeping our Crowns publicly owned to provide high quality utility services to Saskatchewan people at the lowest cost." So was that just the utility Crowns they are talking about? Are they just talking about the 13? It's kind of vague. It's a message that's not clear. They do acknowledge in their election platform that they did vote for the 2004 piece of legislation that we had put forward, but they're not talking about whether they're going to honour that or not; they're just acknowledging that they did vote for it.

You know, so there's some real questions we have here, and I think when we're out talking to people, they have questions. They want to know what's happening with this government, because when they were in campaign mode they seemed to be wrapping themselves up around the publicly owned Crowns, and don't worry about anything because we're going to be there for all 70 Crowns. And now they're saying something kind of different. They're kind of hedging their bets, and I think that it's completely right to be worried about it and I think this motion is completely in order, that this Assembly condemn this government for planning to sell the profitable Information Services Corporation.

And we've outlined the fact that this Crown is doing a really good job of the work that people expect, that it's had a strong turnaround. And we remember the early days when things weren't going as well as they might for this Crown, but with good management, it's brought it around and now we see, just for example, that this government transferred over to ISC just a few short years ago, the whole vital statistics from Health. You know, and so what a switch to say, now we might bring it back. How does this fit in to their . . . Does this make common sense? How does this fit into their lean approach to be moving things around like this from one place to another? I mean, I think with a lean approach or maybe a common sense approach, that these folks should take a real common sense approach, is that once you make a plan you kind of stick to it. And when you're moving different departments or different services around, people get used to it. They don't want things sort of shifted here, shifted there, back and forth.

This is critical. You know, we've talked a lot about vital statistics on this side, particularly when we've seen the new initiatives from this government around voter suppression when it comes to photo ID [identification], that they want to do picture ID. That's a big issue. And now you're involving ISC, and how can this be appropriate? And I think that we have some real concerns.

You know when I talk to people that they're very concerned about what this may mean if we transfer this over to a private corporation, if we sell it to a private corporation. It would now . . . People accept that land titles and that type of thing really is appropriate for government service that we understand a monopoly, and in theory we should be having the lowest cost services there. People understand that if you do make a profit in this case, 100 million is very decent, but at least it's going to the people of Saskatchewan in terms of health care, education, highways, those things that we think are very important.

Of course this government is talking about, you know, opening up private liquor board

stores because of the concern around costs. Well we know that one of the things around when you have government services like liquor board stores, that the costs at least go back to pay for services for people. And we think this is really, really important.

So there's a real question around the unintended consequences, the unintended consequences of what may happen if this government goes through with its plan to sell ISC. What will happen? What will happen to the business community, to ordinary people when they buy and sell homes, that type of thing, and all the other services that ISC does? So is this a bit of testing the waters, raising the flag, see what happens, and they got caught? And now we're going to have that conversation, because what does their promise really mean? Does it really mean that many of the Crowns are up for sale, that there's over 50 Crowns that are up for sale, that that's the . . . this is the first of a few that's going to be coming down the tubes? Is this really common sense? We have some questions here, you know, and of course we hear from the other side.

And I think my colleague here from Athabasca was very, very good in terms of charting out the past history of where our province has come and where it's going. And we think there's a real potential for this province in terms of demand that's there for our resources, the way that our economy is going right now.

And the question is, and we've seen this — I've raised this many times, particularly around labour law — if it ain't broke, why fix it? And this government seems to be intent on fixing things that aren't broke and they're testing waters here, and this is going to have a real problem. So in many ways this government really does rewrite history. They want to portray things as being broken when in fact they are not broken at all. And we see that the people of Saskatchewan want to have that stability and predictability of a government service that they can count on, that they can count on and not have things be up for the auction block. And you know, we see a catchy title there, Sask builds. Whether we'll see one in the near future, Sask sells . . . You know, when we come to things like the Crowns, the ones, the other 50 or so that this government may consider because they're not in those significant top 13 or so.

But I have some real concerns about it and I know they're shared on our side. And so that's why we think this is a very important motion that we bring forward right off the bat as we enter our fall sitting here. So we have some real concerns and I really want to emphasize that when you see the inconsistency here, the inconsistency between what the backbenchers are saying, that all Crowns are protected. All the Crowns are protected. The campaign really implies that it's only the utility Crowns that are protected. And we have the minister today alluding to the fact that it's really only the 13 that are protected in The Crown Corporations Public Ownership Act.

So which is it? Which is it? I think the government is obligated to come clean with the people of Saskatchewan to say, this is our policy on Crowns. Are all 70 protected? Is it just the utilities? Or is it the ones that are in The Crown Corporations Public Ownership Act? And this government should stop deflecting, should stop spinning, and come clean with the people of Saskatchewan. This government is notorious, notorious for message management. They want to confuse the public around what a former government may or

may not have been doing and what this government is obligated to do, which is to keep its promises and to be clear with the people of Saskatchewan on what they really mean when we talk about the Crowns which people of Saskatchewan hold near and dear and don't want to see changes to. Thank you.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question for the other side, you know, this morning we've heard three different versions of what their promise is. We've heard the minister allude to just protecting the ones under the Act. We've heard other backbenchers saying they're protecting every Crown. And then we hear and we read from their campaign booklet that they're protecting the utility Crowns. To the member from Walsh Acres: which is it? Which Crowns are you protecting? Come clean on this.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Mr. Steinley: — Mr. Speaker, I love getting up. And thank you

for the question to the member from Saskatoon Centre. And I love getting up and talking about what our government promises to do because we promised to do . . . is we do what we say we'll do. And, Mr. Speaker, you can obviously see if you read our campaign platform is that we promised to protect the Crown protection Act, Mr. Speaker.

Read the campaign platform; you'll figure it out, Mr. Speaker. I'd say that a lot of people in Saskatchewan read our campaign platform and really, really enjoyed what they read as you can tell by the configuration of this Legislative Assembly. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I mean the real question today is, why is this government flip-flopping? They want to get into message management. They know this isn't going the place they want it to go. They're sending out mixed messages. The people of Saskatchewan want to know, what is their position on the Crowns today? That's the question of the day. They're not interested in the spin and deflection that this government is engaged in. It's absolutely the wrong thing for the people of Saskatchewan to be exposed to. Come clean. What is your position?

