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Safety for Late-Night Workers

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the minister for sharing a copy of the statement with me in advance and for the many conversations we've had over the past year leading up to today's statement.

I do want to congratulate the government for their work in passing these regulations. The NDP [New Democratic Party] is pleased that a year of advocacy for Jimmy's law has led to an increase in safety regulations for late-night retail workers. And although they fall short of the measures we were proposing in our private member's bill named Jimmy's law, I believe it's a positive step forward and will be a welcome improvement for workers and their families.

Following the introduction of my private member's bill, I conducted a late-night tour of workplaces around the province and visited with workers on the night shift in eight different cities. What I heard is that they felt vulnerable and anxious. Everyone working a night shift is keenly aware of those tragic cases where an employee has become a victim. I want to as well acknowledge the pain faced by the families and friends of these victims. Survivors continue to live on with the memory of what has happened, and the healing is difficult.

One of these victims was Jimmy Wiebe, the namesake for our private member's bill. Jimmy deserved better protection. All workers deserve better protection, therefore steps to increase security and workplace safety are needed and welcome. And as I said, the new regulations are a good first step, but enforcement of the new regulations will be critical. According to a hazard alert released by the ministry's own occupational health and safety division in May, non-compliance with the existing lower safety requirements was only 80 per cent. Making sure that business owners and workers are aware of and following the rules is an important part, ongoing part of governing.

I too want to thank several people who helped contribute to the success of our campaign

to bring safer working conditions to late-night workers. And they include in our own caucus staff, in helping produce the petition, the bill, our researcher Rod Scansen; the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour], Lori Johb, Heath Smith and Larry Hubich, amongst others; Darren Kaytor, a survivor of two late night robberies this past spring in Saskatoon who came out with us on our tour and was very eloquent; and of course Aaron Nagy who really was the driving force behind this all. And I too want to acknowledge the Wiebe family for their support.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I want to acknowledge the human face of workplace safety and in particular the clerks who work in vulnerable at-risk situations such as late-night retail. It is so personal because almost all of us know someone who works a late shift. These people are often young, perhaps their first job. Sometimes they are retirees just trying to make ends meet or students working in order to afford a higher education. These are people with dreams, and they are people with families and friends who have connections to our community. They are people who deserve to be safe in their workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I've read into the record over the course of the past year names of clerks and others across Canada who've died violently in their workplace, not to mention the untold number of near misses of dangerous occurrences. Now on a personal note, I want to, I'd like to thank the minister for his thoughtful words, as our own family has experienced first-hand last month the harsh reality of a late-night robbery. Fortunately our daughter wasn't harmed, and for that we are thankful.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that today our actions are an important first step in making our province a safer place to work. That is our job as legislators, and I am encouraged by the progress on our journey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.