

SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 23A TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2012 1:30 p.m.

Bill No. 79 – *The Representation Act, 2012*

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand and enter into the debate on No. 79, An Act respecting Representation in the Legislative Assembly. And of course we've talked at length about this.

This has been a major issue in the past session and of course we're here tonight talking about the next step — the actual boundaries, the constituencies that we have — and it's an important one. It really is a short Act, but it really means a big fundamental shift in what we've done as a legislature.

And of course this is a bill that we have severe concerns about. Not so much about the work that has been done ... And I do want to say that we do appreciate the good work that has been done by the committee in the circumstances that they were given. Clearly we want to acknowledge that. And I think in Saskatchewan we have a unique approach to making sure that there is fairness. And I think that we can see that the work that was done by the three folks who made up the committee clearly represented the best interests and struggle to make sure that the interests of the people of Saskatchewan were represented, considering the circumstances that they found themselves in. And so I do also want to, along with the minister, acknowledge the leadership of the Honourable Mr. Justice Neil Gabrielson who served his people in the province exceedingly well. I agree with that and of course, the representatives from both sides of the House to make sure the job is done as well as it can be, considering that we have some difficult choices to make.

So having said that, we are here now with seeing three more MLAs, and we find this an ironic situation because clearly in this government's move to be accountable to every election promise they make, this was not an election promise that they made. In fact there was not a word about it, and it is truly ironic because, you know, we all share in the pride of the growing population of Saskatchewan. That is a good thing, and we think that's an important part of our economy. But it's also important that people see and feel that we do good work in the Chamber and that we're effective and that we're efficient and that when

we're scrutinizing the budget that we're, in fact, not taking advantage of it ourselves.

And this really flies in the face of it where you have now a swelling of from 58 to 61 MLAs — no campaign, no work on the election trail on that — and I'm not sure if these folks . . . And we've said it before and we'll say it again and frankly we will keep saying it, and this'll be a major issue when we go forward in the years and months ahead that we'll be talking about, how do you have a government on one hand talk about lean efficiency government but yet they are wanting three more MLAs?

And when you take a look at where we stand among other provinces — and we've reflected on this and, you know, if I have the time today maybe we'll talk more about this — when you compare Ontario that has nearly 100,000 people per riding and here we are with much fewer. And so we have some real problems with this.

I have to disagree with the minister when he spoke about noting “that there was absolutely no direction provided in the legislation as to where these three new constituencies were to be situated.” So it may be splitting hairs that it was not in the legislation but clearly we heard a lot of talk through media and other ways where the Premier had seen where these three new MLAs would go because of the population. So it wasn't quite as independent as it's made out to be because there was some direction, perhaps not in the legislation but in other ways that clearly the message was loud and clear as to how this should be done, you know.

And as well I have to take exception to the minister's comments, “It's the voters who elect the members of the Legislative Assembly, and in our view it is the voters who should . . . be the focus of the constituency boundaries process.” And what he's referring to in that, now he doesn't say it but the implied reference is to the fact that for the first time in many years those young people, those younger than 18, are now left out of the equation, left out of the formula.

And I think everyone in this province, it's their business who is representing them in their riding. I serve everyone in my riding. I just don't say, are you a voter? I serve absolutely everyone. And so I think that's a key element. And we've had this discussion. We've gone around, and we will continue to raise this as unfair, especially for young people, because we want to make sure and we want to send a clear message to young people that their presence counts, you know. And I've said this. We have them come to the House and we introduce them and we say, welcome to your legislature. But by this bill we're exactly doing the opposite. And the minister was very clear. He says we're here really to focus on, and he says that should be the focus in terms of voters. And we think that's fundamentally wrong. We represent everyone. Everyone. And that's why we think they should have been included in the formula.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think there is some real questions about this, and we have some real concerns about what this means and what kind of message this sends at the primary level of not campaigning. Everybody knew that the province was growing. The population just didn't happen in the last little while since the election. It's been growing for several years now. And so it was no surprise, no surprise at all, that we have more people in the

province. And why they didn't raise this during the campaign, we have some questions. And I think that clearly that we need to address that because people expect more. They expect more from their elected officials, of which I am one, and we think this is inappropriate.

We could do the work with 58. Clearly that means more people in each riding but that's okay. I think we have the technology to resolve that issue. And if we don't think that is, then we should have campaigned on that. And I just want to make sure that that goes on the record, that still we have a problem with unannounced, with unannouncing or making sure we don't talk about those kind of changes. You know, we've seen what other areas do, what . . . They have task forces or public hearings. And of course when we get into consultations, we know this government has some real issues about that. But we should address the public concerns about that.

But I know that there's many other issues that people want to speak to, and I will wrap up my comments. But I do want to once again acknowledge the good work by Honourable Mr. Justice Neil Gabrielson serving as chairperson, and with the two commission members, Stuart Pollon and Mr. Harry Van Mulligen serving as members. They've done a great job, as I said, within the circumstances that they found themselves in and that is what we find ourselves in. But we will not forget, we will not forget how this all came about because we do think this a problem, and we should have done better. We could have done better.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I want to now adjourn the second readings on Bill No. 79, An Act respecting Representation in the Legislative Assembly. Thank you very much.