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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Changes to Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Finally after a wait of over six months, the Sask Party trotted out a massive overhaul of workplace laws that nobody voted for, and today we will see the Sask Party's legislation. In the spring, the Premier launched this labour review that contained not a single public consultation meeting and the little discussion booklet that had outlandish and fearmongering questions.

Mr. Speaker, no one in this province voted for upsetting the balance of our province's labour laws. Will the minister today table legislation that keeps Saskatchewan fair and balanced when it comes to labour legislation?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Yes.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, on the second last day of the 2007 fall session, the Sask Party introduced its unconstitutional essential services bill. Yes, it's unconstitutional, and that is a fact. The court threw it out, and five years and two Labour ministers later, the people of Saskatchewan still don't know what will happen.

Mr. Speaker, now the province is sitting again with two days left of the session, and the public still has no answers about what will happen about essential services. The Premier was asked about the legislation in the spring, and acknowledged that he had led a government that didn't take consultation seriously. Mr. Speaker, to the minister: will today's labour legislation solve the essential services fiasco this Sask Party created five years ago? Yes or no?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the goal of this legislation is to modernize our labour legislation and to bring it so that it is consistent with what takes place in a variety of other jurisdictions across Canada. Some of the Acts have not been substantively reviewed for almost 20 years. Others have not been reviewed for more than two generations.

Mr. Speaker, during the process we received over 3,800 responses. I would like to thank everybody that participated by submitting a response and, Mr. Speaker, to the members opposite, they will see the bill very shortly, and they will have the opportunity to see what is included in the bill and be able to make comments on it at that point in time.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, workers in Saskatchewan have progressively better legislation protecting the workplace for over 100 years. People have made great strides to win the right to an eight-hour workday. It's rooted in the 19th century fight for a middle class for workers. It comes from a commitment across Canada for eight hours for work, eight hours for leisure, and eight hours for rest. But the minister leaked details at his paid luncheon speech that he'd like to do away with the fairness of an eight-hour workday.

Mr. Speaker, it's common sense that across the province that an eight-hour workday is the appropriate balance for working families. To the minister: will today's legislation do away with the eight-hour workday and what other important labour standards that we've come to appreciate?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've indicated to people before that our province has got a permitting system that allows people to deviate from the eight-hour day. Nurses do it with regard to a 12-hour days. Firefighters have got longer hours. British Columbia allows up to 12 hours in a day. We've talked about the possibility of having four 10's or five 8's. That would make us consistent with what takes place in other jurisdictions and, Mr. Speaker, some workers wish to do that. What is absolutely sacred, Mr. Speaker, is when you work in excess of 40 hours in a week, that you should be entitled to time and a half.

Mr. Speaker, workers and employers wish to have some degree of flexibility to plan things so the people can spend more time with their families to adjust for changes in workload. We want to ensure that workers are protected. We value and respect the contributions of the working women and men in our province and want to ensure that their rights are adequately protected on an ongoing basis.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the minister's raised the idea of overtime. You know, the principle of overtime means that if workers are asked to stay longer than a regular workday and a work week, they're paid extra for

that time. To do away with overtime would be an abuse of workers, Mr. Speaker. Right now all workers, especially those who are not in the union, receive overtime for those hours above and beyond 40 hours every week.

Now, Mr. Speaker, overtime exists because if workers are not guaranteed that extra pay, employers could force a 60-hour work week on people, returning us to the dark ages of labour relations. To the minister: will today's legislation do away with overtime to allow any other system of paying out overtime hours?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we have a long-settled practice in our province which is enshrined in legislation, that you are required to work up to 40 hours at a regular rate. Beyond that, you are entitled to time and a half. The employer can require up to 44 hours. That's well settled, Mr. Speaker.

We value the work that people do in our province. We want to make sure that they are adequately and appropriately compensated. We want to make sure that they have a safe environment to carry out their employment duties. Mr. Speaker, we work hard to ensure that that happens through our occupational health and safety workers, and those are things that will continue.

We also, Mr. Speaker, want to ensure that we have people that are paid adequately. Earlier this year we raised the minimum wage to \$10 per hour and increased the amount of payment for a call-out time. Mr. Speaker, those are the type of things that this government does for the working women and men in our province.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, this whole sham process has been ridiculous from the start because the Sask Party refused to hold a single public meeting to show that they take consultation seriously.

Now not only did the Sask Party surprise the people of Saskatchewan with this overhaul; they promised the whole process wouldn't cost the public a dime. The minister committed to that in committee. But now the taxpayers are being asked for more than a half a million dollars extra. And there has been a clear indication from the minister the process isn't finished. In fact he said more work needs to be done at further cost to the taxpayer. To the minister: how has the Sask Party spent over a half a million dollars on a process without a single public meeting?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, last week when the member opposite was not quoting himself, he was in fact quoting me. And I appreciate him quoting me, and would like to urge him to quote me correctly and accurately when he does so, and would like to urge him to finish the quotes. Right after the comment that I made, I went on to say, "As the matter . . . progresses further, there will be other costs that we will either absorb or

else we will cross as they come.”

So, Mr. Speaker, we indicated earlier that there would be some additional costs. I can advise the member opposite the money was used to hire three temporary policy analysts, to hire a contract lawyer to assist with the development of the legislation, and a temporary director of strategic communications; publish advertisements and public awareness, and expenses that were incurred for the advisory committee. People travelled from across the province and participated. And, Mr. Speaker, we thank them for their contributions.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, I find that a very interesting answer, that somehow half a million dollars seems to be spare change to this minister. When we were asking in committee he said, and I will quote him, this is, “We will add, during the process, four temporary persons that will be, the cost of which will be absorbed with the existing budget.” Now he says it sounds like a half a million dollars is a bit of a rounding error. What else could he do? Well, Mr. Speaker, to the minister I have this question: why weren’t the costs absorbed in his budget? Weren’t they planned for? And why is he expecting the taxpayers of this province to pick up the tab for his costly massive overhaul of our labour legislation?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite can’t have it both ways. He sat in his chair for most of this session criticizing us for not doing more to communicate with people, not doing enough to have the information out there. When we do spend the time and the money to do this — and I’m not minimizing the cost of it, Mr. Speaker; there is a cost and it’s a significant cost and it’s money well spent — but, Mr. Speaker, this is something he shouldn’t be able to criticize us for and then say you should absorb it at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, we want to have a common sense approach to this. Mr. Speaker, October of 2012 the member opposite said, “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 it.” But in the NDP submission which was July of this year, it said, “Governments should be always ready to improve labour legislation. That readiness is an important part of a common sense commitment to a better future for the province.” Mr. Speaker, we’re going with the NDP submission.