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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Changes to Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been two weeks since the Minister of Labour told a paid luncheon audience of friends what's in his massive overhaul to our labour laws. People were surprised about what he talked about because they weren't the ideas that the Sask Party campaigned on, and they certainly weren't the things that people voted for. Now people are still left waiting as to when they'll hear about the bill, and they're wondering if they should have bought a lunch ticket because that's the only way the Sask Party lets the province know what it's doing these days.

Mr. Speaker, after a summer of no public consultations, many people are wondering what exactly the minister's planned because his first leaks of the bill to his friendly crowd weren't reflective of the needs of Saskatchewan people. Mr. Speaker, there's only six more sitting days of this session. When is the minister going to table the massive overhaul to Saskatchewan labour laws?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. We've talked about this piece of legislation as we've gone through the summer months. There was over 3,800 responses to the call for consultation. A lot of those papers were very substantive and detailed. And we've taken those, we've incorporated them. And, Mr. Speaker, I can advise the member opposite that it will not be long and there will be a bill being introduced. We've indicated it was going to be introduced this session. That in fact is going to take place.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member opposite that he was the one that said:

In May when we saw this [this is a direct quote] 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.

But the NDP's submission said exactly the opposite:

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.

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

Mr. Forbes: — I always appreciate being quoted in the House here, Mr. Speaker. The minister has told the reporters he's working his staff on overtime to get the bill complete. After he spilled the beans to his paying audience on the bill, he showed that respect for workers and fairness and overtime hours could be a thing of the past. And that's the opposite of progressive labour legislation that this province needs, and it tips the balance away from working people and erases the 40-hour work week with 8-hour work days as we now know it.

Mr. Speaker, these policies deserve to see the light of day for they certainly weren't what the people voted for in the last election. Mr. Speaker, why did the minister reveal these controversial changes to a paid luncheon instead of defending them in the public eye?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, we've raised these issues in a variety of different formats and forums including the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, including the minister's advisory committee which includes the president of the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] and executive members from CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees]. Mr. Speaker, we've gone through an extensive consultation.

We think that we've got a bill that's going to address a lot of concerns that are there. Mr. Speaker, we have in the past had a very good relationship with labour in the province. And I want to quote the Leader of the Opposition, who said in a October 23 scum: "Our economy has been moving along quite well with relative labour peace for many, many years."

Mr. Speaker, we want to continue that. Even the Leader of the Opposition acknowledged the labour peace we've had. When we brought in essential services, they said it would end collective bargaining as we know it. Well it didn't. When we brought in secret ballots and freedom of speech, they said it was an attack on unionization. Well it didn't change the world, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Mr. Speaker, one of Justice Ball's requirements in the last time the Sask Party's labour legislation was thrown out and declared unconstitutional was for this government to hold actual consultations, real public consultations with the real . . . with people when it comes to labour law. But now his government's laws are sitting before the courts once again. And the minister says he's already drafting essential services language into this new massive overhaul of labour legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the courts have already ruled on the last time the Sask Party passed essential services legislation. And the Justice was quite clear that the Sask Party's one-sided approach was one of the key reasons their legislation was completely unconstitutional.

Now, Mr. Speaker, why would the Sask Party ram ahead with the new massive labour law overhaul without public consultation? And why won't he bring this bill to the legislature for us to debate?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, one of the commitments that we made to the people of this province was that we would have essential services legislation in our province. We want to ensure that when there's a blizzard or unfavourable weather that highways get cleared. We want to make sure that when operating rooms continue to operate during periods of labour strife that we are able to continue to provide those services. That's a commitment that we made, Mr. Speaker, and that is a commitment we intend to keep.

Mr. Speaker, I can add as well, we value and respect the contribution and hard work that the women and men in our province make. We want to ensure that this piece of legislation respects and values that. And, Mr. Speaker, to the people in our province we want to say that this piece of legislation will protect and enshrine the rights that they have.

Mr. Speaker, neither members on this side of the House or on that side . . . [inaudible] . . . ought to be commenting on something that's before the courts as we speak.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Athabasca.