

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. 21A THURSDAY NOVEMBER 29 2012 10:00 am

Changes to Labour Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Court of Appeal may not return a ruling on the challenge to Justice Ball's decision on the essential services Act before next week. But the Sask Party's version of that law was ruled unconstitutional. Now, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party government let their ideology trump common sense in writing that law because their idea of essential services is a violation of human rights, according to the courts.

Now my question to the Minister of Labour is, if the court does not rule before next week, how will the Sask Party's omnibus labour bill amend The Public Service Essential Services Act?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is aware that the matter is being argued in the courts actually as we speak. It would be inappropriate for either he or I to make any comment on what is taking place in the courts.

Mr. Speaker, I have indicated in the House that we will be introducing a bill before the end of the session. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, I gave notice of introduction earlier today so I think that sets the timeline where we're going on it.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to add as well that on Saturday, which is December 1st, we are raising minimum wage from 9.75 to \$10 an hour, which will offer significant benefit for low-income people in our province, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, people were surprised two weeks ago to hear a leak from the minister's paid luncheon about the content of the bill that we're about to see next week. And he appears to be tabling it next week and we look

forward to it. But what was tabled this week shows yet another surprise for the people of Saskatchewan. In the government's mid-term report the minister says he needs another \$500,000 for the cost of developing this bill, but, Mr. Speaker, in committee on May 7th the minister said there wouldn't be any extra costs.

Mr. Speaker, why did the minister say the labour bill's development wouldn't cost the taxpayer and now we see exactly the opposite?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I can advise the member that we try to do things in the most cost-effective method possible. We chose, following the month of May, to have a fairly extensive consultation. It required a significant amount of advertising, and in fact the advertising was very successful. It generated some 3,800 responses.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we held a number of minister's advisory committee meetings. I think there was six or seven of those meetings. Mr. Speaker, the people that attended those meetings had their costs, their travel and hotel . . . [inaudible] . . . They were all-day meetings. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the people who have participated in that process.

The information that was gleaned at that was valuable and was productive. And a lot of things that were there will, when the members see the bill next week, were things that found their way into the bill. So I would like to thank them for it. And the money that was spent was very good value, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well you know, Mr. Speaker, let's review Hansard. This minister earlier this week loved to quote me and I found that interesting, but let's go back to Hansard again. On May 7th I asked the minister very clearly — and I quote, I quote myself — I say, "I'm wondering, what are the costs? What are the staffing implications for this?" To which the minister replied, the minister opposite, and I quote, "We will add, during the process, four temporary persons that will be, the cost of which will be absorbed within the existing budget."

Mr. Speaker, that doesn't sound like good planning, doesn't sound like spending \$500,000 more taxpayer dollars to me. Why did the minister say the costs would be absorbed, and now he needs over a half a million dollars, taxpayer dollars, to be spent on his most extreme and now expensive labour legislation?

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

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend the member opposite for his ability to quote himself in the House. I think if he looks about and casts about, there may be other members he wishes to quote, but I leave it to him to pick who he wishes to make his quotes from. And I'm pleased that he's looking through Hansard and looking at the different things that were said, the representations that were made.

I would like to advise the House and the member opposite that the bill will be introduced next week. We've gone through a very extensive consultation. We've received some 3,800 responses to that. People made written responses. People contacted us. I've met with a number of people, and, Mr. Speaker, there is some costs incurred in that, but the money is money well-spent. And we believe when the bill is presented next week that the member opposite, I'm sure, will look at it and he may want to quote himself again, but he'll be very pleased with the result.

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister opposite would talk about the consultation meetings with his advisory group, but not one single public consultation meeting was held. And a single public consultation meeting might have cost the province money, but the minister refused time and time again to hold these meetings. And the minister might have spent money paying overtime for his staff to write the bill, but we know from his own leaks that he's doing away with overtime regulations. So surely he wouldn't have required that.

Now the only reason he's spending \$500,000 and more is because when it comes to labour laws, the Sask Party can't be straight with the public. They didn't talk about the law in the election and people didn't vote for it. And they didn't vote for the Sask Party to waste half a million dollars to develop the most extreme labour laws in the country.

Mr. Speaker, why is the Sask Party dragging this process to literally the last days, the last days of session? Why are they afraid of public scrutiny on this bill?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. In the hon. member's question, he's referencing what the people of Saskatchewan voted for in the last election. Mr. Speaker, I think the people of this province voted for a plan to keep Saskatchewan growing, and I think they voted for a government that was going to insist on balanced budgets for the people of this province, underpinning that growth agenda.

And today in the editorial of the Leader-Post, we see some response to that because they've looked, this paper's looked at BC and Alberta and some other provinces and have some things to offer. They say, contrast Saskatchewan with the gloomy news out of British Columbia Wednesday. The BC government said its current-year deficit will increase to \$1.47 billion. Alberta's swelling deficit will hit \$3 billion this year, Manitoba is \$440 million in the hole, Ontario is \$13 billion deficit, and the federal government has a \$26 billion deficit. Here in the province of Saskatchewan, including consultation investment, a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. And more importantly, the editorial goes on to say, "Compared with what's going on around the nation — and globally, for that matter — Saskatchewan is on another fiscal planet . . ."

Members opposite seem to be on another planet as well. It's a negative place. We invite them to come back down to earth. Come back to Saskatchewan — the only balanced

budget in the Dominion of Canada.