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Workplace Fatalities

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's Workers' Compensation Board annual report shows the province is moving in the wrong direction when it comes to workplace fatalities. In 2012 WCB [Workers' Compensation Board] recorded 60 fatalities across the province in every age group, in every sector. Mr. Speaker, this is the highest number of fatalities at workplaces in our province in over 30 years. Mr. Speaker, obviously the province needs to do more to make sure when people go to work, their jobs are safe.

To the minister: why does the province have the highest number of workplace fatalities in over 30 years?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every workplace death is a tragedy, not just for the worker, but for the workplace and for the family members of the worker. The number of fatalities that we see in our province is a reminder to all of us that we need to be vigilant in our workplaces. Our hearts go out to the family and friends of people that are killed in the workplace, and I think I can offer condolences on behalf of all members in the House. One of the worst and saddest days in the legislature is the Day of Mourning where we read out the names of the people who lost their lives in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, I can provide some context for the information that we have regarding workplace fatalities, but I want to point out to the House and to the public that even one workplace fatality is too much and by putting the numbers in context should not be seen as an excuse.

We have 19 of the fatalities are due to exposure. This is due to long-term exposure to asbestos; often that took place many decades ago. We have created a mandatory asbestos registry, and I thank the members opposite for their participation in that. People will know that buildings which contain asbestos, where it is in the buildings. We have 10 motor vehicle and airplane fatalities. We formed an all-party committee to study traffic-

related accidents and appointed the member from P.A. [Prince Albert] Carlton to be the Legislative Secretary in that area. We've done other things as well, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the number of deaths in this last year is not only the highest in the last 30 years, it's nearly double the number of fatalities from last year. And the report spells out the problem clearly. It says, and I quote, "Saskatchewan holds the frightening position of being second worst in Canada for workplace injuries and has the highest number of overall injuries outside the workplace."

When the fatalities increase and the WCB misses its target for total injury rate, there is a glaring problem in safety in our work sites across our province. To the minister: what has been the measurable impact of Mission: Zero if the rate of fatalities is increasing?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I can advise the member opposite that Mission: Zero is part of the workplace safety program done by Workers' Compensation Board. It has worked with workers and with employers to have plans in place, protocols in place to drive down the injury rate. Although we are the second highest in the country, our numbers have on injuries dropped down, and we've had a significant drop in our lost-time injuries. And I say that not to take away from the fatalities that are there.

Mr. Speaker, I was mentioning earlier some of the numbers, and I will provide a few more. We had, as part of that 60, 15 of them were people that died from heart attacks at work. That's an increase from five at work. We know that we need to do more work with the overall health of all of our citizens.

In addition to that, we've reviewed and updated the legislation regarding OHS [occupational health and safety], which is now part of Bill 85. I would like to ask the members opposite to support that legislation when it goes through.

We've provided better protection for late-night retail workers. We use video cameras. We've got safe cash handling procedures. We have a check-in system and personal emergency transmitters. We have taken a great deal of progress in that area, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These are real people who've lost their lives at work. It's a real tragedy for the province, and the stats are alarming. WCB said there were five youth fatalities, all of which were killed by a motor vehicle accident in the workplace. A quarter of the fatalities happen on construction sites. And, Mr. Speaker, WCB said 14 of the fatalities were related to asbestos exposure.

Clearly the province needs to take real action, real action to lower these fatalities. What is the minister's plan to make Mission: Zero more than just a commercial? What's the plan to lower the number of fatalities in our workplaces, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I will go on with some of the stats. At 2.79 per cent, the time-loss injury rate is at its lowest rate level in 20 years. We've added three additional OHS workers. We've increased safety and prevention costs from 18.2 million in 2011 to 19.8 in 2012. Safety association funding has increased 15.6 per cent to \$8.9 million. OHS has increased to 9.5 million from 9.2 million.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of work left to do in this area, and it's incredibly discouraging to see numbers that are going the wrong way. Mr. Speaker, we share the concerns of the members opposite, and I'm sure of every workplace. And a lot of the employers have talked to us, want to work harder to do a better job in that area as well. Even one is one too many, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the province needs actions to prevent workplace fatalities, not just commercials telling people to be safe at work. Mr. Speaker, the government has an opportunity in front of them today. They could be boosting up, strengthening the occupational health and safety provisions in the provincial labour laws, but we're seeing a watering down about other workplace legislation.

Mr. Speaker, why has the government not taken workplace safety as seriously as it seems to be caring about rewriting 100 years of workplace laws?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, we're taking great steps to try and increase the number of fines, to increase the fine limits, to increase the number of prosecutions, and to ramp up prosecution. Workplace safety is more than just enforcement. It's a matter of education. It's a matter of training. It's a shared responsibility.

I'd like to make a quote from the member opposite, when we both attended a College of Law event on March 2nd. The member opposite said:

I agree totally with the minister in terms of occupational health and safety. It's one that we should just really do as much as we can. It was one that as a government we too struggled with and we hoped we could do much more. So I believe we should talk about it specifically and it's really something we can get behind.

I look forward to the member's support as we go through committee on Bill 85, and in particular the safety requirements that are in that piece of legislation.

