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Proclamation of Workplace Legislation

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been one year, five months and 14 days since this Assembly passed legislation that significantly increased the fines for employers that violate occupational health and safety rules. My question for the Minister of Labour: why has the government not proclaimed section 24 of that legislation?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier the member opposite was highly critical about lack of consultation, wanting us to postpone and delay things. Mr. Speaker, we're going ahead with consultation. We've got a number of advisory committees that are under way. We're optimistic that this proclamation will come about in the early new year.

We are very concerned about the safety of all of the workers in our province. We have an unacceptably high injury rate. We make no secret of that, and we intend to develop and implement a regime that will give us a substantial reduction in the injury rate and hold people accountable for things that take place in our workforce. That process is under way, and the indication I'd like to give the members opposite is that it will take place likely early in the new year. And we look forward to them supporting everything that we're doing in that regard because I'm sure we all have a common purpose in that area.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, here's what the Minister of Labour had to say on May 8th, 2012, and I quote, "These changes will serve as a significant deterrent to ensure that people will follow the Act." They pledged to implement these changes last fall, but when they proclaimed it, they left out section 24 which increases the fines for employers liable for workers' serious injury or death from 300,000 to \$1.5 million. My question to the minister: why has he failed to deliver on what he has correctly called a significant deterrent?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite across and myself both agree on the importance of workplace safety. We both agree on the importance of some significant deterrents. We need to get our regulatory regime in place. We are in the process of training occupational health and safety workers.

As our province grows, we have more and more corporations that are large multinational corporations carrying on business in our province, and it is appropriate that we have fines that are reflective of their ability to pay. We're also aware that we've got many small businesses with one, two, and three employees, and we have to make sure that we've got appropriate methods in place to ensure that those people have fines in place that adequately reflect their ability to pay in their place in the marketplace. When you've got businesses of incredibly disparate size, you have to make allowances for that.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it does not in any way minimize the obligation of all employers to ensure that their workers are safe, that they're adequately trained, that equipment is in place, and I look forward to having something in the relatively near future, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, in committee last fall the minister said, and I quote, "I find it disappointing that the best way to get people's attention is by prosecuting them and fining them. But the reality of it is that when you talk to the officials that are in this room, that is the most effective way of doing it." That's what he said.

Mr. Speaker, last spring we read into the record 60 names of workers who died on the job last year. And I know that members on both sides of this Assembly said we never want to do that again. Yet for some reason, despite recognizing that increasing fines for employers is the most effective way of improving occupational health and safety, this government has refused to follow through on its promise to implement these changes. My question again for the minister: will this government do so today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite is aware, we've included occupational health and safety provisions into *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. This Act clearly defines rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. It better protects workers in a great number of ways. We received some 3,800 submissions. We want to make sure that the things that we do are done appropriately and done with some diligence and some caution on the thing.

As much, Mr. Speaker, as I would like to see some things take place immediately, Mr. Speaker, I can advise that the officials within the ministry are working hard to have regulations in place that will adequately and appropriately protect workers.

The member opposite raises the numbers of fatalities and, Mr. Speaker, even one is one

too many. One injury is one too many. The only acceptable number, Mr. Speaker, is zero.