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## DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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### Comments on the Throne Speech

**Mr. Forbes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today and join in the debate on the Throne Speech. It's an important occasion. We reflect on the vision and the purpose of our government and our House here and how we should conduct the business of our province.

And I always enjoy the member before me from Nipawin. He's not a stranger to hyperbole. I reflect often back when the quote, the best budget in the universe, and added so many different layers to it in terms of mathematics, knowing your facts. So it's always interesting when the member reflects on other people in the House and their mathematical skills and their hyperbole. So to the member, it's always interesting hearing your thoughts.

But I too want to reflect on the tragic events of last week. It was something that struck us all very deeply. And I want to offer my condolences to the families involved and my own thanks to all the people that were involved: our own people here in this building, our own Sergeant-at-Arms, right up to the federal folks. It's such a sacred duty to make sure that our democratic institutions are secure and safe and that the purpose for what they are built for continue on, and that's the full participation of all citizens, of all people, and that people can be heard, and they can be seen to be in action and doing the work that they've been elected to do.

So I think this is an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for us all to reflect, especially those who are elected, to take a moment, to gather all the information possible and continue to be in that information-gathering process, and reflect on how we can ensure that our democratic institutions continue and in fact flourish. That we flourish: that we do become the country that has been well known in many decades past as a beacon for democracy and a beacon of tolerance and a beacon of hope, that in fact that our purpose is not lost and that we maintain that. Because it is the Canadian way and it's the Saskatchewan way to support that.

And we see that daily, whether it's through how we strengthen our human rights, how we strengthen the participation of citizens. That's hugely, hugely important. So I do want to make sure that we do take this opportunity to reflect on that.

So also the traditional, I do want to give thanks to many people, my own constituency assistant. It was interesting. She's a very busy person. As the member from Nipawin reflected, that maybe he's not so busy or his office is not busy, but I can tell you over on our side, it's very busy. And the people are coming from all over the province. If he wants a list of people who are visiting our offices to get assistance, it's not a quiet time in Saskatchewan, who are looking for help. And my assistant does a stellar job, and I want to thank her for that.

And I want to thank my constituents. Saskatoon Centre's a wonderful, wonderful place to represent. And I don't know if many people . . . I haven't heard the other side talk about how last Saturday was actually a day to support local business, small business. So I went out to Mayfair Bakery, as I often do. And it's interesting who I meet there. They have the best bread in Saskatchewan. It's a local business, and I think it's important for us to get out and support our local businesses as much as we can. And I will talk a bit about that more. But whether it's 33rd or 22nd or 20th or 2nd or 3rd or Broadway, their streets are amazing in Saskatoon, and I am proud to represent many of them here.

As well I want to give a big thank you to my own family. We've had some exciting news. We've had two new grandchildren. They're not twins, but two daughters have added, so this would be Felix's and Francis's . . . I don't think they're listening right now, but maybe way back or into the future. But it's an exciting time. It's an exciting time for us.

So, I want to reflect on this Throne Speech, and it was an interesting one. In some ways just because whenever you hear a Throne Speech, you do have to sit back and say, so what does that sentence mean? What does that sentence mean? And I've got a couple. I've bookmarked this a couple of times here. Page four, here talking about “. . . my government's goal of doubling exports by 2020 . . . introduce a new growth tax incentive . . .” Now it's interesting this government's approach to tax incentives, I think about the film tax credit. What happened here? How come one is wrong and yet the other one is right?

You know just today we had a visitor, somebody who has moved to Vancouver, moved to Vancouver because work isn't here anymore. Now I know the government here spent a lot of money — I think it was this summer on a film, *Corner Gas* — about product placement, now talking about Saskatchewan, trying to direct all sorts of money to it. But the fact of the matter is, if we had a decent film tax credit, the film would have been made here because they're worried about that film, *Corner Gas*, being made in Manitoba, or Ontario. So here you have that situation.

As well, I read this about the next page, and I quote:

Through the New West Partnership, Saskatchewan is working with Alberta and British Columbia to harmonize labour standards and occupational health and

safety regulations.

Well here we go again, just a few short years ago we had the employment Act created when this government overhauled over a dozen pieces of legislation. And then they said, well don't worry, it's not going to change anything. Don't worry, it'll all be good. And yet we did see some major, major changes to labour legislation, and it was done in a hurry-up fashion — no consultations, no public meetings.

We, on our side, we had seven meetings which hundreds of people came out to talk about their worry about what this means. And so I know the minister's going to be going and speaking to the SFL [Saskatchewan Federation of Labour] this week, and I bet there will be questions about what does he really mean about harmonizing labour standards and occupational health and safety regulations? Last week we saw the premiums for workers' comp for employers. Many went down. Some didn't. But we still wrestle with the elephant in the room that Saskatchewan has the second-worst record in terms of injuries. And as well even in our own homes, we have not a great record when it comes to safety just generally.

So there is work to be done here, but I'm not sure it's this work. And I think we have to really focus on occupational health and safety, not to line it up with Alberta or BC but really to make sure our workplaces are the safest they can be. They absolutely should be and it makes sense to do that. We know it makes sense.

Now the other one that I wanted to focus on, and this isn't a bad idea, this is one that I'm going to look at with a lot of interest is, "This session, my government will amend *The Health Information Protection Act* to strengthen provisions protecting patient privacy." That's a good idea. That's a great idea. But you know, it's only one of the suite of privacy legislation that we really need to take a look at.

Interestingly here, and this is the ironic part, is if you're talking about harmonizing occupational health and safety and labour standards, are we going to be talking about harmonizing information privacy? If that's the case in the workplace, what's interesting in BC and Alberta is private employers are covered by privacy legislation. They are not here. That would be a good thing if private employers were covered by privacy legislation, but they are not here. So what is the government plan here? Are they going to say, only the things we want to harmonize we will talk about? But other things that have been raised like privacy in the workplace is something that we really, really need to focus on.

I also want to talk about what's been happening in Social Services. And there's some things, a lot of things that are interesting in here. And I think that I just want to take a moment to talk about the child welfare legislation, Mr. Speaker. And I hope that we actually see this, my hope we actually see this in the next month or two so we can have a chance to talk about it over the winter months, have some input. That's our role as opposition, to make sure we take it out and talk to people. We're coming up . . . I mean in theory our election should be next year, and we won't have a chance to take a look at that legislation if we don't look at it pretty quick. Now they've announced it several times that

there's going to be a review of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. We have yet to see it. It's been several years in the making, and we really hope that it happens really quickly.

The other one, and this is an interesting one, is the government talks about the social impact bond and makes a big deal about it. It makes a big deal that they say it's the first in Canada. Actually I think it may be the third in Canada. We know the federal government has a social impact bonds, and we also know that in Alberta they were talking about this idea. I think it was Premier Alison Redford whose idea about social impact bonds. And so I'm kind of curious to see and what the facts are going to be in the way of a good story. So I'm interested to hear more about this.

And really what happened with the Sweet Dreams, well clearly a good, good cause, a very important cause. It was kind of done in a hurry-up fashion because we didn't have much lead time. It was done in the last week of session, budget had already happened. In fact the estimates already happened. And this happened after that, so there was a real question about that.

I just want to take a minute, Mr. Speaker, just to talk about the announcement of the poverty reduction strategy. And I think this is one that we had asked for, many people had asked for. It had been called for, for a long time. So we're glad to see that this is moving forward, and we're looking to see how this develops. Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. I think that we want to make sure that in the spirit . . . And some of the folks have said that, you know, have wondered about whether or not . . . And I appreciate what the former minister said about, you know, cutting across party lines. And I think that's a good thing.

You know when we have worked together on this, I can think about the work that we've done in this session over the past couple of years around asbestos. The Minister of Labour has worked with that, has worked on Jimmy's law together. When it makes sense, we've worked together. And so we're looking forward to seeing what this plays out to be.

Our concern right off the bat though is the fact that it could end up being a pre-election photo op, but I have confidence in the people who are involved that that won't happen, that in fact while this may be a real rigorous work, and it should be rigorous, that really this should not be used to some sort of quick or political advantage that really spoils the good work of some of the folks that are involved. And I think this is important that we take a sincere look at this because it's an important issue for sure, and there's just too many people who are falling by the wayside that I think that we need to take a good look at that.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to just say though that the reviews are in, and the reviews are very not kind at all. And in fact *The StarPhoenix* last week said the "Throne speech sets flat tone." And in fact I'll read and I'll quote from the article, October 23, 2014:

Given the opportunity to generate excitement with a bold vision as the province heads for an election in 2015, Mr. Wall chose instead to reiterate many measures

already taken and provide a smattering of new offerings that mostly cement his government's commitment to get the private sector more involved in services now provided publicly.

So there you go. It's not a very kind editorial, and in fact it's not very exciting, not very engaging. There's a few things in there but, generally speaking, leading up to an election you would think this government would take the opportunity in fact to lay out a bold, engaging vision for everyone but in fact chose to play it in a very low key.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it reminded me of this cartoon. I don't know if you saw this cartoon from *The StarPhoenix* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September. There is a cartoon of this fellow who I imagine to be the Premier, and then there's this farmer looking at four piles of something. I'm not sure what the piles are, but the farmer is saying, "Hey poster boy, how about cleaning up some of your messes in your province?" Now this is what the piles are labelled: seniors care, smart meters, lean.

And then there's two that are not named, and I can just think of what they could be. They could be the Deveraux housing fiasco we've had. And I'm doing petitions every day, and I can talk a bit more. It could be the film tax credit. It could be the ministers' travel that we talked about last spring. But this is quite a little . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . It could be northern roads or the Premier's travel. But here we have . . . And I think the quote is really quite appropriate: "Hey poster boy, how about cleaning up some messes in your own province?" Yes, I think the poster boy should get to work on that.

Now you know, we've raised some of these issues. And I think about, you know, I know the government will say, hey, hey, hey, you know that's a little offside. You can't refer or think about the Premier as the poster boy. But really there are some issues here that we've got to deal with, and they're real issues, serious issues.

You know, we talk about seniors. And I just have to talk about 95-year-old Roy Armstrong has bone, bladder, and prostate cancer, and struggles to walk and feed himself after two heart attacks. But the government says Armstrong's too fit, too fit to take up a place in a seniors' care home. We're hearing stories and stories like this over and over again, real people. This guy has a name. His name is Roy Armstrong. He's 95 years old, and he's got these kind of conditions. And this is a situation. So I think the government needs to get down to work on it.

Last week we heard about and we continue to hear about lean. We continue to hear about lean and this government just refusing to acknowledge that they really messed up on this one. They really messed up on it. In fact this is one, again the cartoon, the poster boy really needs to get down and figure out what's happening with lean. They've cut off six months of the contract, maybe 5 million, but still 35-plus million compared to what they're spending in Manitoba.

How can you justify that, especially when you have people, leadership from the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region who are saying this is just really not, not good? And this is what she had to say. She said there's been a lack of respect, tattling on leaders if they

question, expecting rigid conformity in a militaristic style, gossiping and undermining. It consists of activities that are not meaningful and in some cases are insulting, all of which are part of John Black's approach, that are not only not educationally sound but cause skepticism, alienation, and frustration.

So this is really something that we have to take seriously. And this is one of those piles that the Premier, or in this cartoon, the poster boy, has to get done. He has to get it fixed now. We're coming into election. This would have been the Throne Speech. This would have been the time to say, hey, you know what? I've got some stuff to clean up. Let me clean it up. But instead the government, the Premier chose to take a road of ignoring that, just ignoring those piles and saying, hey, we're not going to deal with it.

And then today, today we heard questions about the smart meters. We have a situation where clearly, clearly this is a government who's not engaged in their files, letting SaskPower take the rap for it, throwing them under the bus. And here we have a situation of a government that's plowing ahead with pet projects that they should know better. It shows a real lack of due diligence and really, at the end of the day, showing a real lack of what this means for Saskatchewan families, real lack of what this means for Saskatchewan families. So this is a really unfortunate circumstance we've found ourselves in here. And I think this really shows a lack of ability for this government to show the leadership that they need to show.

And I have some real, real concerns about it when we know in Alabama and in Philadelphia they were not using these meters. They were saying, hey we've got to back off. This is not the right thing to do. But instead the government now is throwing the SaskPower under the bus, throwing them under the bus. But they like them when they do the climate change, the carbon capture thing, hey? They love that.

But you know the one thing that really got me, and I was thinking about this this fall, was the whole issue around the government's failure to enforce a contract that meant the end of an affordable housing project. And really when this government talks about how it knows how to work with business, how they're the people who know how to make things work . . . But here you had a situation where we had a fixed-price contract, and that meant the developer was going to take the risk and everybody went in with eyes wide open, eyes wide open, a \$10 million contract, but instead this government let the developer off the hook, let the developer off the hook.

This really . . . Actually people across Canada were watching this, what this meant for contract law because if you are saying well that contract really doesn't mean anything . . . And what it means for P3s is huge, is huge because are they really, is this government really going to enforce their laws?

So there were a couple of really odd moments here when we were talking about the Deveraux project. And this is what the minister said when asked to explain the government's decision. The Minister of Social Services said, and I quote, "You're assuming there's these desperate homeless people."

Well, Mr. Speaker, this really shows this disconnect. And I could go through editorial and editorial about how people are concerned about the disconnect this government has from the realities within our communities, a real disconnect. So I hope that she will take the time to really think about that and really get to learn what that means.

I see and I know in our own community where we have a Housing First project that's worked so well to get 16 or 17 people off the street that are harder to house, that are causing a significant impact in their own lives but also in terms of the health care system, how that can work. But this minister, when she says that kind of thing, really shows a strong disconnect.

Well, Mr. Speaker, another local political commentator wrote, and I quote:

It is the latest indication that Premier Brad Wall seems unwilling to do anything to displease business, even when he knows business is dead wrong and even if it means his government is failing on its promises to deliver low-income housing.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are some real concerns out there, some real issues that people are facing in Saskatchewan, whether it is seniors looking for a safe, dignified place to live; an affordability issue; whether it's the smart meter fiasco that we're having right now; the lean fiasco; ministers' travel; the Premier's travel; the film tax credit; the Deveraux housing fiasco, which I think is really a huge problem.

This government has no shortage of people on the other side to pat themselves on the back. But as this cartoon says, "Hey poster boy, how about cleaning up some of your messes in your own province." End of quote, Mr. Speaker.

So with that, I will be supporting the amendment — of course I will be; that's the only reasonable thing to do — and voting against the Throne Speech. Thank you very much.