

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
November 22, 1984

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the Assembly, a group of 14 grade 7 and 8 students from the Admiral School in Admiral. They are here with us today to observe question period and visit various places in Regina. I'm sure that all members will join with me in welcoming them here today and wishing them a safe return home.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the legislative Assembly, some special guests with us today, here in conjunction with the opening and the kick-off of Canadian Western Agribition in Regina. This is an international event that not only is Regina proud of, but Saskatchewan is proud of, and in fact, Canada is proud of, some of its attributes being, of course, that it is the world's largest cattle show, including the grain show, and as well, the rodeo event.

So the people I would like to introduce to you and to the members of the legislature today, and I would ask them to stand up — they're in the Speaker's gallery — as I call out their names, include Dawn Abbey, Miss Rodeo Canada, from Strathmore, Alberta; Bonnie Pedersen, chairperson of We're Proud to Know You, with the Agribition committee; Gordon Stephenson, chairman of the rodeo committee for Agribition; and Jami Eistetter, with Agribition as well.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hepworth: — They were providing us with some entertainment, for those of your who were in the Legislative Cafeteria for lunch today, in conjunction with the kick-off, and I would encourage everyone here to attend the Agribition events over the next 10 days to two weeks, and ask everyone to welcome them once again officially.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Engel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the opposition caucus, I too would like to extend a hearty welcome to all of the special guests from Agribition, and in particular to Don. Welcome to Saskatchewan, and I hope you have a good week here with us. And I'm sure that all the people of Saskatchewan, as many as possible, will take in Agribition and enjoy the events there. I know the rooms in the motels are hard to come by next week, so it's a good indication that Regina is already filling up. Welcome here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lusney: — On behalf of my colleague from Cumberland constituency, I would like to introduce to you, and through you to the Assembly, 12 grade 12 students from Churchill High School at La Ronge. They're accompanied by their teachers, Karen Robertson and Alfred Wiens. I hope they have an interesting and enjoyable visit to the legislature. And may you have a very safe journey home.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Appointment of Employment Minister

Mr. Shillington: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to Mr. Premier, and it deals with Saskatchewan's number one economic and social problem, unemployment, and with the fact that to date your government has been all talk and no action. In your \$50,000 prime-time, province-wide television extravaganza on November 9, your only announcement was to repeat an earlier announcement that you planned to announce something. And you failed to deliver on that.

I quote from your television speech: "Next week I will appoint one cabinet minister whose sole responsibility will be jobs." Mr. Premier, the public of Saskatchewan took that to mean that there would be one minister would be full-time. I repeat, Mr. Premier, that you have given that responsibility to one of the ministers with one of the heaviest work-loads in cabinet. My question, Mr. Premier, is how you came to so mislead the public of Saskatchewan. Was the truth not one of those fundamental values that you spoke of that night?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I've discussed this with the media at least one news conference, and I said that I would apologize for any misunderstanding as a result of the way I worded the phrase. I never intended it to be the sole responsibility, solely the responsibility of one individual, or solely in the hands of one individual. I can only say that I have complete confidence in the individual that has that responsibility, and I believe that individual will do a very good job, and I'm delighted that the member opposite watched the program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — I didn't happen to see it, Mr. Premier. My constituents were all talking about that afterwards, and how you had misled the public, I might add.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Premier, my question has to do with what you have said by that appointment. What you seem to be saying is that you really only have one competent minister in a cabinet of 26 people because you have overloaded a minister who's already overworked.

Mr. Premier, you have some ministers with portfolios so light they're embarrassing, and you have two ministers without portfolio. Are you telling the public of Saskatchewan that you couldn't think of a way to shift around, or shuffle the cabinet responsibilities, such that with this huge cabinet you wouldn't have one minister who could work full time on Saskatchewan's number one problem?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, as I said on the television show, and I've said many times and will continue to delineate, the unemployment problem is twofold: one is the creation of economic activity and jobs for those particularly that have skills. The other part of the problem is to address those that do not have skills which now run up to 30 to 50 per cent of the entire number of unemployed, and many are 15 to 19 — obviously, in many cases, children.

So we are going to be doing a co-ordinating role of putting together the Departments of Social Services, Education, Advanced Education, Science and Technology, and so forth, to make sure that we can get at these young people that are unskilled, that have dropped out of school, and frankly can't work their way into the labour force unless they do get some skills.

On the other hand, the Departments of Labour, Economic Development and Trade, Tourism and Business, Agriculture and others, will do whatever they can, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that there is as much economic activity in this province as there is any place else, and hopefully, more.

That has to be the responsibility of somebody with a considerable amount of experience, Mr. Speaker; not somebody that is lacking in experience, but somebody who has experience in this legislature, and experience in administration, as well as the entire Saskatchewan scene. And that's why I've picked the particular minister I have, and I have all the confidence in the world that he can carry it out.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Premier, you're missing the point of my question. My question is: if you are serious about making job creation your government's number one priority, why didn't you make that that minister's sole responsibility and perhaps have shuffled some of his other responsibilities off to some of the other ministers?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that it is my prerogative to rearrange cabinet or bring people in and out of cabinet as I see fit, and I will, as I see fit. I believe the minister has a great deal of competence and it is one of co-ordination, and not in any one particular item, not necessarily in Agriculture, not necessarily in Social Services, but the combination of things that we have to do to address this unemployment problem. And I believe he has the skills to handle it, and we'll obviously see them.

Resignation from Cabinet

Mr. Koskie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier, and my question has to do, Mr. Premier, with the member of Thunder Creek, the circumstances surrounding his departure from the provincial cabinet in January of last year. On March 9, 1983, you told this House, and I quote:

He and I had a conversation and we mutually agreed that given his financial and family responsibilities, it was best at this time that he step down from cabinet.

I want to draw to the attention of the Premier the testimony at the Saskatoon trial, under oath, by the member in question, Mr. Colin Thatcher, and he said, and I quote:

I did not leave the cabinet voluntarily.

My question then, Mr. Premier, is this: which is the public to believe? With two inconsistent statements, I ask you, which of you are inaccurate?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, my original statement stands.

Mr. Koskie: — Supplemental. I ask the Premier: in view of the statement by his colleague, the former cabinet minister, are those two statements, in your view, consistent?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I can make no comment on whether the — and I will not make any comment — whether the statements made by the member or MLA were accurate or not. I can only say what I said and repeated, and those were the facts, and that's as I see them.

Mr. Koskie: — Another supplemental. I'd like to ask the Premier: would you indicate, Mr. Premier, what were the changes in Mr. Thatcher's financial and family responsibilities, what were the changes — just listen — what were the changes in Mr. Thatcher's family and financial responsibilities which you gave as reason for him stepping down, that had changed from the time that you appointed him to cabinet and the time that he was dismissed?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not prepared to discuss a confidential conversation between me and a member of cabinet, and I don't believe I'm obliged to. I said because of those reasons the action was taken, and I can only stand with it.

Mr. Koskie: — I'd like to ask a further supplemental to the Premier. I'd like to ask the Premier: will you clarify for the people of Saskatchewan why you were so concerned about the member from Thunder Creek's financial position that you went so far as to remove him from cabinet? What were the risks that you were, in fact, trying to protect against?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, it is always the prerogative of a leader, and certainly the Premier, that people can do — will come in to, and go out of cabinet. I make that decision. I don't have to explain why I make that decision. I make it in my judgement for the good of the province, the good of the cabinet, and so forth. I made it in this case because I believed that I should, and I did. And I will stand by it.

Mr. Koskie: — Yes, a further supplemental. I want to ask you: did you base your decision to fire Mr. Thatcher solely on the information regarding his financial and family responsibilities; solely on the information that you had received from the member himself; or whether, in fact, you had additional information; and can you indicate the nature and the source of the information?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I can only reiterate. I make decisions with respect to cabinet ministers. I do it at the best of my judgement. I did in this case, and I'm under no obligation to say why this minister may be moved to that portfolio, or this minister may leave, or another one can come in. If I had to — or if any leader had to do that — there would be no need to have a cabinet, or a leader, or the system that has been built up for literally hundreds and hundreds of years as traditional.

Mr. Koskie: — Addressing a question to the Premier. On both March the 9th, 1983, and again on June the 1st of this year, you told the legislature that Colin Thatcher's departure from the provincial cabinet did not involve any improprieties, financial or otherwise, with regard to his performance of his duties. You assured us that on two occasions. I'd like to ask the Premier: will the Premier confirm or deny that Colin Thatcher's dismissal from the cabinet, in fact, had to do with a dispute between yourself and him over political patronage.

You had instructed Mr. Thatcher to take a Crown Corporation accounting contract away from a Moose Jaw firm to give it to a firm in Swift Current, and he failed to follow your instructions. Is that one of the matters under consideration in dispute between you and Mr. Thatcher?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I will advise the members opposite, and advise you, that I'm under no obligation to discuss why the member and I came to this mutual agreement, and I won't. And it's as simple as that. I make the decision, and it's confidential. I deal with cabinet ministers every day, and it's confidential, and that's the way that it will stay. I gave the reasons, and those reasons were the truth, and there's nothing more that can be said and nothing more that I'm going to say about it.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, I direct a question to the Premier, and he will be observing that we are pursuing this line of questioning, asking him to tell this House the circumstances under which the member for Thunder Creek left his cabinet. I'm asking the Premier some questions because we are finding it hard to believe the answers given by the Premier.

I am going to ask the Premier this: did you at any time hear conversations in the cabinet chamber by which Mr. Thatcher talked freely about the murder of his ex-wife? I ask you that very frankly.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, what is in cabinet is confidential. It always has been. We are sworn to an oath of office. I'm sure the hon. member knows that, that it isn't open to public debate. The institutions as we know it, this Assembly, cannot work — our system of government could not work without confidentiality. So I can't, and I won't talk about anything that was discussed in cabinet.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Premier. I refer the Premier to the *Montreal Gazette* of Saturday, November 10, a story by Heather Bird, in which the quote is as follows:

One of Mr. Thatcher's cabinet colleagues asked him about it, meaning the divorce settlement, at a cabinet meeting. "Why do I have to pay the settlement when a bullet only costs a dollar?" Thatcher replied.

My question to you is this: did you ever hear any conversation of that kind, or was any such conversation reported to you?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, one, I can't discuss what was in cabinet. Number two, if my recollection is accurate, the MLA from Thunder Creek was not in cabinet subsequent to the event. The MLA resigned from cabinet. We agreed that he should, and that was it. He was never back in cabinet after that.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I'm clearly not making myself clear. Prior to his resignation from cabinet, but at the time that to public knowledge there was a dispute between the member and his estranged wife concerning a divorce settlement, the press reports, Heather Bird reports, that there was a conversation in cabinet in which the member for Thunder Creek is quoted as saying, "Why do I have to pay the settlement when a bullet only costs a dollar?" I am asking you whether you ever heard that or whether you ever had that incident reported to you?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, anything that was in cabinet I obviously will not comment on, and I can't. It's impossible to do. And no, I have never had that reported to me.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, supplementary. Does the Premier then say that that story in the *Montreal Gazette* is fanciful and has no basis in truth? Are you asserting that?

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. The rules of the Assembly for question period do not allow a question such as the one that has just been asked. You cannot ask a minister to state whether an article from the paper is true or false. That's against the rules of the Assembly.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — I refer to the *Ottawa Citizen* of November 10, and this time a story by a different reporter, Peter Calamai, and he reports as follows:

Political sources now remember Thatcher telling fellow ministers that he wouldn't pay a court-ordered \$819,000 property settlement to his ex-wife when a bullet only costs a dollar.

Second report. I ask you again: have you any knowledge of this story because of your personally hearing it, or because it was reported to you?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I have knowledge of it to the extent that it has been reported, and I've read some of the reports and looked at them. It has absolutely nothing to do at all with my decision and the mutual agreement of the MLA in removing himself from cabinet.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — The story by Heather Bird with the quote that I quoted, and I won't quote it again, is followed by this comment:

Several people who heard the comment reported it to the authorities.

I ask you sir: to your knowledge, was any such report conveyed to any authorities?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Koskie: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to direct a question to the Premier. I want to ask the Premier: at the time that you made your appointments to cabinet in May of '82, and in particular the appointment of Mr. Thatcher to the cabinet as a cabinet minister, one has to realize the sequence of the events, that it was almost a year to the day after his ex-wife had been shot and wounded in her Regina home. It was public knowledge that there was an intensive police investigation under way with respect to the attempted murder. There were also widespread allegations that the member of Thunder Creek was a suspect in that investigation, and what I ask the Premier: do you mean to tell the people of Saskatchewan that knowing that, as did all the citizens of Saskatchewan, you never once thought to ask anyone such as the Justice department whether or not am an that you were about to be putting into cabinet was, in fact, a suspect? Can the premier indicate whether or not he had any investigation done prior to the appoint of Mr. Thatcher to cabinet?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I didn't have, or ask to have, any police investigations done on members of the legislature prior to me making the appointments of cabinet. I certainly would be aware that there may be no end of people who would be under suspicion in the event of someone taking a shot at someone; no doubt that there would be a lot of people, but I had nothing brought to my attention that would cause me to think that it was any member of the legislature.

Mr. Koskie: — Rather than a specific . . . Mr. Premier, a supplemental. Rather than indicating whether or not you had a police investigation, I'm going to ask you whether or not you had, in fact, made any sort of investigation, whether you had called upon your Justice Minister to give you any briefing in respect to the allegations that were about, whether, in fact, at the time of the appointment of Mr. Thatcher, did you, in fact, take into consideration the potential risk?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I obviously didn't ask for any police investigations. If there was anything that should be brought to my attention, I would have been aware of it. Nothing was brought to my attention that had any bearing on me deciding whether one MLA should or should not be a member of cabinet, and I made my decision accordingly.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, did you consult on a routine basis with the Minister of Justice on making cabinet appointments so he would have an opportunity to make available to you any information which you might properly have?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously the current Minister of Justice was not the Minister of Justice at that time, so I couldn't consult with him.

An Hon. Member: — Mr. Romanow did not bring the matters to your attention.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — There was nothing brought to my attention from the previous administration. I believe during the time of the incident the attorney general at the time was Mr. Romanow. I was provided no information when I became Premier that there was something significant about the events that I should be aware of. The new attorney general was . . .

An Hon. Member: — He was sworn in the same day.

Hon. Mr. Devine: — He was sworn in the same day, so . . . Obviously from that point on, it . . . We can look at it, but prior to that I've had . . . I didn't commission anything. I wasn't advised of anything. And I just made my decision on the best information that I had.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — I won't pursue that. Mr. Speaker, new question. With respect to the stories that you say are the facts and the stories which you say are inaccurate in the *Gazette* and the *Citizen*, I hope I'm not hearing what some members are saying, that he is not denying the stories. Members are saying that he didn't say they were inaccurate. But what I am asking

you is this, Mr. Premier: do you not believe that stories like this bring disrepute on the cabinet and Government of Saskatchewan; and if so, have you asked for retractions from the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Ottawa Citizen*?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's fair to say that nobody in this Assembly, nobody in this Assembly, is happy with the situation. There are no winners. Every member of this Assembly, I'm sure, feels that way. The media will . . . I mean this is a very sensational story. They will tell stories or speculate or so forth. I suppose if you were going to get into retractions, there's been enough innuendo in this case to last for several decades. I don't know where you'd begin. But no, I agree, I'm not happy with it. I wish it hadn't happened, and we won't even debate it, but it is the case, and it is the fact, and we will deal with it as best as we can.

Hon. Mr. Blakeney: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. The story in the *Ottawa Citizen*, and I'll repeat it again, says that:

Fellow ministers remember Thatcher telling them that he wouldn't pay a court order of \$819,000 property settlement to his ex-wife, when a bullet only costs a dollar.

Yet, none of these fellow ministers blew the whistle.

Now that's a very serious allegation against the cabinet of Saskatchewan. It is either true or not true. If you tell me it's not true, I'll accept your word, but do you not feel you're under an obligation, if it is not true, to ask the *Ottawa Citizen* to withdraw that sort of allegation — and it appeared in many other newspapers — Mr. Premier, do you not think you should be asking for a withdrawal if that, in fact, is not true?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — Perhaps we should, Mr. Speaker, and I'll take a look at it. Maybe that's a reasonable idea; I mean, I will consider it. Fair enough.

Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Premier, I'm not sure that, in fairness to you, you entirely understand the allegation that's been made by those reporters. What they have said, Mr. Premier, is that you've handled this matter as you've handled all others; faced with a very serious situation, you've done nothing. Mr. Premier, I would suggest to you that there are some higher values than cabinet . . .

Mr. Speaker: — Does the member have a question? The member is making statements but has not asked a question. If you have a question, will you get to it?

Mr. Shillington: — Well, Mr. Premier, in light of the fact that the safety of an innocent third party was at stake, are you able to unequivocally deny that you neither heard directly or indirectly any such statements by the former member from Thunder Creek?

Hon. Mr. Devine: — I believe, Mr. Speaker, that I've said already that, when I took office and this administration took office, we received no information from the previous administration or from the previous attorney general that there were any investigations on any members of this Legislative Assembly that I should be aware of, or that I should take into consideration, or that I should weigh. And the former attorney general had been in that office for some time. I have a lot of respect for his talent and his judgement. He did not choose to advise me that there was something serious here.

Obviously when we take, took hold of it, then we will deal with it accordingly, and I did, and we have, and the events are well-known. But there was nothing brought to my attention from the attorney general of the previous administration, that had been obviously watching the entire matter, to my office. And so I had no reason to think that there was anything that he knew, or the previous administration knew, that had any impact on any MLA in the legislature on either side.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Guest Clerk-at-the-Table

Mr. Speaker: — Before Orders of the Day, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly that Mr. Alan Sandall, Esquire, Senior Clerk of the House of Commons in London, England, will be a Guest-at-the-Table this fall. Mr. Sandall is a graduate of Durham and Oxford Universities with the degree of Master of Letters, and has been a Clerk since 1974. I ask all members to join with me in welcoming Mr. Sandall to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Introduction of Pages

Mr. Speaker: — It is also my pleasure today to inform the Assembly that Thomas Johnson, Lani Knaus, Tracey Loewen, Mary Ann McGrath, and Pam Switzer will be Pages during the present session.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TABLING OF DOCUMENT

Hon. Mr. Lane: — Mr. Speaker, I hereby lay on the table a certified copy of the conviction of W. Colin Thatcher.

Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I move that an Act to amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act be now introduced and read the first time.

Mr. Speaker: — The minister has asked for leave. Is leave granted?

An Hon. Member: — No.

Mr. Speaker: — Did I hear someone say no?

Mr. Sveinson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, I said no.

Mr. Speaker: — Leave has not been granted.

Hon. Mr. Lane: — Revert to Notices of Motion.

Mr. Speaker: — File Notice of Motion for first reading of a Bill, and Notice of Motion.

The Assembly adjourned at 2:35 p.m.