



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE BILLS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Nadine Wilson, Chair
Saskatchewan Rivers

Ms. Judy Junor, Deputy Chair
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Greg Brkich
Arm River-Watrous

Mr. Wayne Elhard
Cypress Hills

Mr. Glen Hart
Last Mountain-Touchwood

Mr. John Nilson
Regina Lakeview

Ms. Joceline Schriemer
Saskatoon Sutherland

[The committee met at 09:30.]

The Chair: — Good morning, everyone. Good morning and welcome to everyone and welcome to the listeners watching us this early morning. I'd like to introduce members of the committee first of all.

We've got Mr. Greg Brkich, Mr. Glen Hart, Ms. Joceline Schriemer, and Mr. Wayne Elhard. And on the opposition side we have Ms. Judy Junor and Mr. John Nilson. So thank you for attending early this morning.

Bill No. 906 — *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011*

Clause 1

The Chair: — First of all, the business before the committee is Bill No. 906, *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011*. And I'd also like to welcome Ms. Heppner, Nancy Heppner. And Ms. Heppner is the sponsor of the Bill. And would you please introduce the representative from Bethany College?

Ms. Heppner: — Good morning, everyone. Joining us today is Mr. Howie Wall. He's the president of Bethany College.

The Chair: — Thank you. So first of all we'll have the Law Clerk, Mr. Ring, present his report on the Bill to the committee. And then I'll ask Ms. Heppner and Mr. Wall to make comments and answer any questions that the committee members may have. And then we'll proceed clause by clause with consideration of the Bill. Is that acceptable? Mr. Ring, will you present your report, please?

Mr. Ring: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, committee members, Ms. Heppner, and Mr. Wall. I've examined this private Bill and I'm pleased to report that it is drawn in accordance with the rules of the Legislative Assembly respecting private Bills. I am also pleased to report that, in my opinion, it contains no provisions that are at variance with the usual provisions for private Acts on similar subjects, or that are deserving of special attention. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Ring. We will table your report. And at this time is there any questions from the members for Mr. Ring? Okay. Seeing none, any comments by Ms. Heppner on this Bill?

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll keep my remarks brief. I am sponsoring this on behalf of Bethany College so I'll let Mr. Wall explain what this means to the college. Briefly though, it clarifies language in an existing Bill, the legislation that governed Bethany College, to clear up the wording around the exemption for the education portion of property taxes. The language to date had been a little bit ambiguous and the college has never paid taxes.

So as I've said previously, there's no financial implication for the local school division, as this is not a taking away of taxes. It's just the clearing up the language around it. This Act does have the support of the local community, the mayor of the village of Hepburn as well as the Minister of Education. And I'll let Mr. Wall proceed with his comments.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Heppner. And Mr. Wall, would you like to take this time to present your comments please?

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Thank you very much. And thank you for allowing this opportunity to come before you and to give you a snapshot of the work of the college as well as some rationale for the reason for the amendment that we are proposing. My name is Howie Wall and I serve as president of Bethany College. And I have been at the college now for 10 months but I've had a long history of academic administration, having worked at the University of Saskatchewan in various administrative roles for nearly 30 years. I've been on campus for more than 30 years but some of those were as a student.

Bethany College began as Bethany Bible Institute in 1927 as an outgrowth of the Mennonite Brethren churches in the Saskatchewan Valley area. Its purpose was for the instruction of young adults for the service in the church and the community and to train future leaders. In 1958 Herbert Bible School and Bethany were amalgamated, with the location remaining in Hepburn. In 1968, the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute in Coaldale, Alberta amalgamated with Bethany and became jointly sponsored between Alberta and Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren churches.

Bethany's college board is made up of directors from the sponsoring churches as well as representation from alumni. Currently the majority of directors are from the province of Saskatchewan and they represent a wide region of geography. Bethany College is an accredited college with the Association of Biblical Higher Education, gaining full accreditation status in the year 2000. The ABHE [Association of Biblical Higher Education] is the primary North American accreditation body for Bible colleges, ensuring the standards of Bible colleges throughout Canada and the United States. Those Bible colleges in Saskatchewan that have accreditation status are accredited also through ABHE.

The mission of Bethany College is to nurture disciples and train leaders for service, and we do this in developing students' love for Jesus Christ and for God, their understanding of scripture, and their service in the church and the world. As an Anabaptist evangelical college, Bethany's distinctive is that it's a learning community that prepares young adults for vocational and volunteer ministries and service, whether it's community service or vocational service, throughout their life.

A number of the areas of service that are currently, I guess, receiving students or recent graduates are places like the Open Door Society in Saskatoon, Mennonite Central Committee, The Bridge on 20th; here in Regina, Healing Hearts ministry; and others, local and community services as well as international services.

The rationale for the proposed amendment. Bethany has historically been granted an exemption from payment of the education portion of property taxes and has been exempted of this since its inception. In 2009, the change in authority from the boards of education to the Government of Saskatchewan to set the rates subsequently ended this long-standing agreement, as this principle of exemption for payment of the education portion of property taxes appeared to be not fully, clearly stated

in the Act, in the college's incorporation Act. I apologize.

As such, the proposed amendment clearly articulates the long-standing exemption, bringing into alignment with the historic practices. In addition it maintains consistency between all provincial Bible colleges in terms of the exemption of the education portion of property taxes. I have a letter of support from the minister. I think that has been submitted as part of our package, I believe.

The Chair: — Perhaps we can get them from you and show the members.

Mr. Wall: — Perfect. In addition we have a letter from the mayor of the town. Bethany College is an active and vibrant partner in the village of Hepburn and surrounding areas. Numerous members of our faculty and staff live in the region, either in the village or in the surrounding area. And we regularly open our facilities for community events and activities and we have a strong relationship with the local school, facilitating local school events, hosting sporting events and tournaments in the college for regional sports and their activities.

In this regard, I want to express my personal appreciation and that of the college for your kind consideration of this request for this amendment that seeks clarification, as well as our deep appreciation for Ms. Heppner's assistance and support, and her work in the constituency on behalf of those who live and work there. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, Mr. Wall. Do any of the members have questions at this time? Mr. Elhard.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Wall, the provisions of this legislation will bring continuity to past experience for Bethany, and I don't know if you've said this or if I missed it, but is this also consistent with the experience of other similar institutions in the province — Caronport, Pambrun, Eston, and others?

Mr. Wall: — Yes, it is consistent with that school portion of those taxation regimes, yes. In terms of the municipal part of it, every area seems to have a unique service level agreement, each of the regions, and we have a very operational agreement with the town of Hepburn. The other colleges have the municipal services in a variety of ways, but again that I think just represents the distinctives of those communities. But in terms of the town and the . . . sorry, in terms of the education portion, yes it will be consistent across the board.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Elhard. And Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — I have a question. In looking at the original section 12, the college was subject to local municipal taxes but was “. . . exempted from all other taxes, rates, levies, and assessments which the Village . . . has at present the power to impose.”

And then in the new one you're exempt from the education portion of the property taxes but not from taxation of local

municipal services. It seems like you allow yourself now to be open to any levies that the town will assess that you weren't open to in the original one. And I'm thinking in particular of communities who are putting health levies onto their tax base. So in the original section 12 you would not have been subject to that; in the new one you have opened yourself up to that.

Mr. Wall: — As we were working through these sorts of dynamics we had a number of wordings, and some of which included being exempted from all taxation, including PST [provincial sales tax], GST [goods and services tax] and things like that, and that was not appropriate, I think. And so, as we've tried to narrow the focus, we are, as you say, we are likely opening ourselves up for that, yes. And that is not good, you're correct with that.

In terms of our regime of how to be, I guess, a corporate citizen within the town, some Bible colleges have service level agreements. We engaged in those conversations with the town administration, and they didn't really want to go down that road. We have a good relationship with the community in terms of the tax regime for municipal services and again the question that continued to I guess come up was, why would we want to change that relationship? Why would we want to enter into that? It's the school portion of the taxes that's the one at stake here or the one of concern at here, but I understand the question very much. Yes, thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Nilson, you have a question?

Mr. Nilson: — When you're subject to this taxation the same as everybody else in the village of Hepburn, what are you designated as — a school or a college or is it residential or is it commercial or is there a special category for your institution?

Mr. Wall: — We are unique in the town, and to say that we would be special category, I'm not exactly sure of how the, how it is listed in terms of the tax. I have the various things here. We are one-off in the town. So it is a unique assessment process. The assessment map has a variety of things in it. I can find that out here shortly.

Mr. Nilson: — The reason I ask the question is that your taxes could be changed as a single entity that wouldn't affect anybody else in town, and so I just wanted to make sure you understood that, that this legislation doesn't protect you at all from anything like that.

Mr. Wall: — We had some of those conversations with the town administration, the mayor and the administrator. And we had, in the context of what would the other businesses in town — and Hepburn is a small community; there aren't many businesses — and that would be the dialogue is, would we pull up roots, take the number one, you know, employer out of the town? That's really our only recourse. That would not be a very good thing to do. The community is, it's a growing community, but the college is a fundamental part of that community, the backbone of the community.

Again, we've had good relationships. We did have about 15 years ago, as the file goes, we did have some conversations about, you know, is this the right way or not and on and on and on, and both the college and the town said, it's working; why

would we not continue? So yes, the town could be . . . Sorry, the college could be vulnerable to the one-off changes to assessment and that sort of thing, but again we're a vibrant part of it. We would understand the dynamics of that, yes.

Mr. Nilson: — So are there any expansion plans for the college in the next decade?

Mr. Wall: — Actually our dream, our goal would be to, we call it the ministry arts addition. It would be a part of the teaching part of the college. And that is, the town looks at the teaching parts in a different way than the residential parts. Again the services that would be combined or would be used in the residential would be much more municipal-based than the teaching part. But we are hoping to develop a ministry arts or performing arts addition in the next 10 years, yes, and it would be a theatre style of location there, but it would be part of our teaching mission of the college, not the residential part.

Mr. Nilson: — So does the college give degrees or certificates, and is it related to the University of Saskatchewan or some other university?

Mr. Wall: — Yes. Again we're accredited with the association of biblical education, the ABHE, and we're degree-granting. According to our charter, we are able to grant theological degrees. And we just had convocation, our graduation exercises this last weekend, and we conferred approximately 50 degrees and diplomas, 18 B.A.s [Bachelor of Arts], 10 three-year bachelor degrees, and about 20 two-year diploma certificates. So we are a degree-granting institution. Correct.

Mr. Nilson: — So now I assume Bethany is a sister college to a number of colleges across North America. Does that include some of the ones like in Kansas and other places like that, or where are the other colleges?

Mr. Wall: — Our denomination has a number of colleges across the country and throughout the United States. The closest related, I guess, college to our mandate is Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, BC [British Columbia]. Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg is also jointly sponsored by our denomination, the churches in Manitoba. Kansas, you're correct there. Tabor College I believe is there. Fresno Pacific University in Fresno has been an outgrowth of our denomination over the years. And at this stage, our graduate school in Canada is just re-forming itself through Trinity Western as a graduate school of Trinity Western University. ACTS [Associated Canadian Theological Schools] Consortium is the name of that.

Our denomination has a long history of higher education. It's a core value. In fact we have a number of faculty members and even a president of one of our universities in Canada, former president that has been part of the denomination. So higher education, Christian higher education is a core value in our denomination.

Mr. Nilson: — The reason I asked that is I know through my church connections, I worked with a lot of people that have graduated from these different institutions, so my sense is that you're building on a good solid foundation, and if we can assist in that, then that's what we should do. I have no further

questions.

The Chair: — Ms. Junor.

Ms. Junor: — Was Bethany College part of the review that either has happened or is ongoing with post-secondary? From this committee I think actually triggered that review, that we wanted to see a more rigorous policy around degree granting from colleges. So I was wondering if you participated in that.

Mr. Wall: — Yes. The first meetings, I understand, are tomorrow in Saskatoon. I've been invited to those as well. That has begun. And again the theological degree-granting status has been a part of the various Bible college Acts in Saskatchewan. And I understand the differential between the theological degree-granting abilities and other social contract degrees that the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina confer. And I understand the dynamics of that. Being at the University of Saskatchewan, I see both sides of the argument very, very well and could probably make all the points from both sides on my own. But yes, we've been invited to be a participant in that consultation process.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you. That's all the questions I have.

The Chair: — Are there any other questions from the members? Seeing none, we'll begin clause-by-clause consideration. Clause 1, short title, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

[Clause 1 agreed to.]

[Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.]

[Preamble agreed to.]

The Chair: — Carried. Therefore Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, enacts as follows: *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011*. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I would now like a member to move the following motion:

That the committee report Bill No. 906, *The Bethany College Amendment Act, 2011* without amendment.

Mr. Elhard: — So moved.

The Chair: — Mr. Wayne Elhard. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. I'll have another member move:

That the fees respecting Bill No. 906 be waived.

Mr. Brkich: — I so move:

That the fees respecting Bill No. 906 be waived.

The Chair: — Mr. Greg Brkich. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. We'll now have a draft copy of the 11th report being distributed. And once you have a chance to review it, I'll have a member move the following motion:

That the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Private Bills be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Is there a mover?

Mr. Hart: — I so move, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Mr. Glen Hart. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you. Mr. Wall, do you have any final comments?

Mr. Wall: — Just I very much appreciate the support of the province of Saskatchewan and our member of the legislature. Thank you very, very much.

The Chair: — You're quite welcome. And thank you, Ms. Heppner. Any comments from the members? I'll ask a member to move the adjournment motion, please.

Ms. Schriemer: — I so move.

The Chair: — Ms. Joceline Schriemer. And is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. The committee stands adjourned. Thank you very much.

[The committee adjourned at 09:52.]