

Sask. rejects Bill 80 idea

BY JAMES WOOD, SASKATCHEWAN NEWS NETWORK; CANWEST NEWS SERVICE OCTOBER 6, 2009

The Saskatchewan Party government is rejecting a new proposal brought forward by provincial construction unions aimed at the controversial Bill 80.

Meeting with Advanced Education and Labour Minister Rob Norris on Monday, Terry Parker of the Building and Construction Trades Council recommended the province bring in an independent third party to deal with the unions and construction contractors to come up with options to deal with the concerns raised about the bill.

The proposed legislation would open the door to unions currently not allowed to organize in the province's construction sector, and end the requirement that unionized workers in construction join the union specific to their trade.

The construction unions operating currently in Saskatchewan say the bill will set up parallel systems, drive down wages and allow employers to foist unions of their choice on employees.

"There are stakeholders out there who still say they have not had their opinions brought forward and renewed properly. And this way it would get everyone involved to try and find solutions," said Parker, who described the meeting called by Norris as "non-productive."

"We hope the government will set aside Bill 80 as flawed."

In an interview, Norris said the council's proposal for an arbitrator to be brought in was incompatible with the legislative process still under way.

Bill 80 was the subject of hearings by the legislature's human services committee in June. The committee is expected to reconvene soon for questioning of Norris and then present a report to the legislature during the upcoming fall sitting, when Bill 80 will be voted on.

He said the building council's proposal showed the unions were concerned about "losing their monopoly" and that "they are going to have to compete for employees with other bargaining units."

Norris said that during his last meeting with Parker in August he had agreed to look at union concerns relating to the legislation's provisions around "abandonment," site certification and the parallel process.

"I continue to be open-minded about addressing issues, questions, comments, concerns that have come in from a variety of stakeholders. So I'm not opposed to amendments but at the same time, the spirit of the legislation %96 that is to ensure we have a more competitive Construction Industry Labour Relations Act and a more competitive construction industry within Saskatchewan, that we're offering greater choice ... those seem to me the fundamentals," said Norris.