

MLA David Swann throws support behind Farmworker's Union

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The MLA for Calgary Mountain View, Dr. David Swann, visited Bow Island Friday in order to throw his support behind the Farmworker's Union, an institution created by Burdett resident Eric Musekamp in an effort to secure equal rights for farm labourers.

"I have worked at this for over a year," Swann said. "They (the current government) say yes, yes, yes and nothing happens."

He added that he and people like Musekamp are only asking for basic human rights, rights that are a constitutional given, to be applied to farm labourers.

"Farmers are hugely liable without WCB coverage," he said.

"That's the irony that's been pointed out many times."

He went on to say he's always been a proponent of human rights.

"Human rights has always been a passion of mine. I can't believe that, in the 21st century, we're still treating some workers different than others."

Swann said farmers are able to continue to have workers who don't have WCB coverage and who aren't allowed to form a union because they've never been legally challenged.

"Eric and Darlene are the first to challenge it. Our own government is violating the basic rights of local and foreign workers."

He said one day there's certain to be a lawsuit following an accident that will force the legislation to change.

"The other way is if enough citizens who care come forward and lean on their MLA's."

He added some officials have said it would be too much of a financial strain on farmers to institute the reforms the Farmworker's Union is asking for.

"If that is the issue, the government has to assist the farmers. You can't compromise the worker's rights."

He pointed out some slaveholders in the southern United States made a similar argument when a movement began to do away with slavery.

"The irony is not lost that we've recently celebrated the 200th anniversary of the end of the slave trade.

"I've heard it said many of the slave owners said we will go under economically if we make those changes. This is a modern form of this abuse on a less heinous scale.

"Swann said the public may soon see some of these changes enacted since the all-party committees have been formed and opposition members can now also be involved in making policy.

He also intends to keep on taking the issue before the public. Swann took part in a march with Lorna Chandler last week, who lost her husband in a farm accident in Black Diamond. He said they will lay wreaths in Calgary and speak with the media there regarding what he considers the abdication of government responsibilities.

"I'll continue to embarrass the government along with Eric and Darlene whenever the opportunity comes up," he said. "I don't believe this government has done its job."

He said he believes the government has failed to serve the interest of municipalities in general.

"They have to come, cap in hand, every year," he said. "I have a question for rural communities. What has the government done for you in the last decade?"

Swann said he believes it's time for change, and that his party has a plan to get the province back on track. He said the surplus money should be put into one fund, and then the interest on that fund should be divvied up to take care of various issues like infrastructure and post-secondary education.

"It's somewhat following the Norway model. It leads to a more sustained economy."

He said the surplus money from the oil and gas industry won't be there forever, and unless the government acts soon, the future could be bleak.

Another issue that Swann has a passion for is the environment. Swann acted as the medical

officer of health for the Palliser Health Region until he was fired in 2002. According to his biography this occurred because he spoke out vehemently in favour of the Kyoto Accord. After much controversy, he was offered his job back, but decided not to take it. However, he has retained his commitment to environmental issues.

"I feel just as passionately about it today," he said.

He added he's disappointed in the federal environmental plan which was announced last week. He said he doesn't think the many soft intensity targets are aggressive enough. He explained that soft intensity targets simply mean a factory has to do better than they did last year to meet the Kyoto standards, but it gives no criteria as to how much better it has to do. In theory, he said, a factory could do better with the portion of the business that existed last year while adding on to the factory.

He is, however, impressed with the public's interest and activities in trying to push the Kyoto standards ahead.

"It's an encouraging sign. The public is way ahead of the politicians."