

TILMA contains no threat to labour

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It appears Saskatchewan Federation of Labour president Larry Hubich is ready to condemn the B.C.-Alberta trade, investment and labour mobility agreement (TILMA) without any consideration of the potential benefits that may accrue to Saskatchewan. ("Western trade deal worries unions", Leader-Post, Feb. 23).

In my view, failure to at least look at the agreement and what it may offer would be a serious error.

The Saskatchewan Party believes the provincial government needs to pursue a growth agenda. While that includes removing barriers to growth, such as the removal of inter-provincial trade barriers, it also means:

- Maintaining public ownership of Saskatchewan's major Crown corporations;
- Maintaining and strengthening environmental standards so that growth is achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner, and;
- Enhancing the well-being of workers in the province.

The Saskatchewan Party supports TILMA in principle because it is consistent with the growth agenda we have called for.

A future Saskatchewan Party government would not sign on to the agreement unless certain it was in the best interests of Saskatchewan people and removed barriers to growth without negatively impacting on the public ownership of the major Crowns, environmental standards in the province and well-being of workers.

Given the impact of TILMA across the province, we also believe the provincial government has an obligation to consult with stakeholders and the public prior to accepting or rejecting Saskatchewan's participation in TILMA.

TILMA is about eliminating interprovincial trade irritants, making it easier for business to do business and making it easier for workers to work across western Canada.

It's designed to streamline business registration and reporting requirements so that businesses registered in one province are automatically recognized in the other.

It enhances labour mobility by recognizing occupational certifications of workers in western provinces.

It provides open and nondiscriminatory access to government procurement, and it creates a clear, comprehensive and enforceable dispute-avoidance and resolution mechanism.

Those areas exempted from the agreement are also clearly outlined. They include provincial laws and regulations governing water, taxation, royalties, labour standards, occupational health and safety, procurement of health and social services, social policy and aboriginal policies and programs.

If this province were to become a party to the agreement, Saskatchewan businesses could become more able to compete in the booming economies to the west. They would need more workers -- and Mr. Hubich would have more members.

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