

The construction industry in Saskatchewan is an integral part of the provincial economy. In the past few years, the labour force has expanded significantly as the sector provides the infrastructure the province needs and the amenities a growing population expects.

Bill 80 is pivotal to further growth of the construction sector because the industry continues to be held back by an archaic, rigid system designed to restrain, rather than expand.

The abandonment issue is a vital, but not commonly understood, component of Bill 80. It arises out of the Saunders Electric case. In the early 1980's, Don Saunders Sr. operated a unionized electrical contracting company. In 1984, his son, Don Saunders Jr. opened an electrical contracting business under the same name, but with a non-unionized work force. Without warning, in 2004, the union decided to pursue payment of back dues from the Saunders Electric that was never unionized. In fact, they had never made any attempt to represent those employees or collect dues prior to that time, but there was an old collective agreement on the books with the "other" Saunders Electric. Under existing legislation, the Labour Relations Board ruled in favor of the union, a decision that would have effectively bankrupted the small electrical contractor.

Under no reasonable circumstances would one expect to see an unfulfilled contract be enforced when services were never provided. And under no reasonable circumstances would a contract be in effect forever and a day when the seller has provided no evidence or interest in even participating in the transaction.

A legislative framework where the abandonment of responsibilities still enables the "seller" to collect for services never provided, even after ten or twenty years, seems quite absurd. This is broken. It needs to be fixed.

That's what Bill 80 addresses – the creation of a legislative framework for the construction industry that enables it to grow, to create yet more employment and to provide the amenities, services and infrastructure that residents of Saskatchewan expect.