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Future Sask. liquor stores to be private

BY CHARLES HAMILTON, STARPHOENIX FEBRUARY 7, 2013

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According to the provincial government, all future liquor stores in Saskatchewan will be owned and operated by private companies.

Photograph by: Don Healy , Regina Leader-Post files

All future liquor stores built in Saskatchewan will be owned and operated by private companies, the provincial government says.

While the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority (SLGA) will continue to regulate and sell alcohol, the government will no longer be in the business of building new liquor stores, according to the minister responsible.

"Any time there is a population growth that would be a market big enough to support a full-line store it will be a private store," Donna Harpauer, minister responsible the SLGA, told reporters at the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association convention.

The provincial government announced last November it is adding three private liquor stores in Saskatchewan - two in Saskatoon and one in Regina.

Harpauer said the government is getting out of the business of building new buildings in an effort to save on costs.

"In essence we felt that the government has better places in health care and education to spend capital dollars and there is a limited amount of dollars," Harpauer said.

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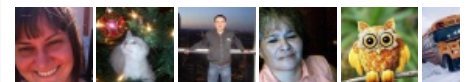
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The Opposition NDP says it was unaware that the announcement in November meant all future liquor stores would be private businesses.

"If they had been straight about this in the election that would be one thing, but apparently there is a lot of caveats and a lot of, 'Oh by the way,' when they said they weren't interested in privatizing liquor stores," said Warren McCall, the NDP critic for the SLGA.

"Right now we have an SLGA that seems to be relatively healthy, relatively well functioning and is a business that returns a profit to the people of Saskatchewan and helps to pay for health care and education."

The three private stores announced in November will set their own prices - subject to social reference pricing, which means products cannot be sold for less than a set minimum, to reduce over-consumption and binge drinking - but will still purchase most of their liquor through the SLGA.

The new stores will get 16 per cent off SLGA prices, similar to the private franchises that already operate in rural areas. The stores can also bring in products not offered by SLGA, for which SLGA will calculate the price as if sold in publicly owned stores. The private store would receive a discount equal to 16 per cent.

The private stores also can offer home delivery, sell some non-alcohol items such as soft drinks and open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. - longer than SLGA stores. They can also include chilled beer rooms. All future stores will be based on population needs and will be approved and regulated by the SLGA, Harpauer said.

McCall said his party is concerned the move is part of a larger "pattern of privatization."

"Say there is a store that needs to be replaced? Does that go to private tender as a way to chip at the existing stock of stores?" McCall said.

There is no word on when three new stores will open or if any plans for new stores are in the works.

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Kyle Chalmers

I personally don't see this as a big deal. The "Opposition NDP" needs to focus on the bigger picture here.. it says "f provincial government (and crown corporations) a considerable amount of money that could be better used for Hk to maintain the store replacing an entire building wouldn't be necessary and therefore wouldn't fall into this suppos of it question.

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Len Willie

He (BRAD WALL) is a B.S. breathing LIAR, he Guaranteed there would be no privatization of the liquor stores in Sa Oh buy the way, Sask Tel is next I suppose. What else is on his chopping block secret agenda? Remember the film i

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