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Housing Crisis

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier yesterday modestly referred to yesterday's budget as historic. Although not quite as historic as the medicare budget or our own first balanced NDP budget after Grant Devine, yesterday's budget was historic in that, within hours of the Finance minister tabling it, he was already admitting that it failed to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people. Now that must be a record, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister couldn't deny his government had ignored affordable housing and, according to the *Leader-Post*, admitted his budget didn't go as far as he would have liked on social issues.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as the old saying goes, he who holds the purse strings holds the power, and that minister failed to use the billion extra dollars at his disposal to help families suffering from the housing crisis.

To the Minister of Finance: how does he explain his first budget's failure to address affordable housing when his own Social Services minister admits that Saskatchewan is in a housing crisis?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly exciting times in Saskatchewan, and we had an exciting budget on how we're preparing for growth. And it's surprising to me when we have that member stand up and say, what are we doing about affordable housing? I will say what I said yesterday. That government was unaware that we were in a crisis, quite frankly, until the eve of the election. For 16 years they had to address the housing crisis.

Mr. Bob Pringle, a very credible man who has a passion for social issues who I'm very honoured to have on the task force that I have announced, said yesterday when he was being interviewed on the John Gormley show, he said this, Mr. Speaker: Well if I look back to three years ago when we had an independent study done at the Saskatoon Food Bank, I was saying clearly to government that the clients at the food bank were spending 70 per cent of their income on shelter. There's nothing left. And the issue wasn't addressed.

They were the government at that time, Mr. Speaker. What did they do?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, housing was shockingly absent from the government's budget yesterday, leaving many feeling that this government has forgotten the very people it's tasked to protect. Peter Gilmer of, the Regina anti-poverty minister, accurately pointed out that while the the government invested substantially in economic infrastructure, they failed to address social infrastructure in this budget.

Students also felt this budget missed the mark. Despite holding protests and repeatedly drawing the attention of government to the need to address student housing, they went home empty-handed yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Social Services: how does this government look students and families in the eye after this budget which sees \$1.3 billion just sitting in the bank and no dollars for affordable housing?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I would like to say that the NDP, when they were in government just prior to the election, did a study and introduced a number of programs. The students had already started their classes at that time. They knew there was a shortage. Was there anything in their proposal for students? No, Mr. Speaker, there was not.

Now the member opposite maybe doesn't know, but in the Estimates book the Sask Housing Corporation does not list their numbers in that document. However, there is \$71.5 million being spent on an existing 856 units that are in development as we speak. There's an additional \$47.5 million that's being dedicated. Going forward, we have 84 submissions on different groups that want to partner with government on different housing units. We're putting out an expression of interest to spend an additional \$18.4 million on Métis housing and First Nations housing. Mr. Speaker, that's \$137.4 million.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!