

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan
DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD)

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QUESTION PERIOD

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Support for Low-Income Families

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of discussion lately about the rising costs of housing, but we know rising food prices are also putting the pinch on Saskatchewan's most vulnerable people. In 2005 the Sask Party released *100 Ideas* to help grow Saskatchewan. Their no. 3 idea was to, quote, "Increase the food allowance for social assistance recipients."

To the Minister of Social Services: what is she doing to help low-income families deal with the rising food prices?

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. And I'm very happy to stand up to answer that question.

The NDP [New Democratic Party] failed the most vulnerable people of Saskatchewan when they were in power. They had 16 years. And their record shows that they failed, and they even admitted it, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. A member of the NDP Party said, and I quote:

"It is a clear signal that we certainly have not accomplished our vision or our goals on making sure that no one is . . . left behind. People are being left behind."

That was said in 2006 when the Leader of the NDP was the premier of this province. He admitted that he was leaving people behind.

What have we done, Mr. Speaker? Well immediately after becoming the minister, we added money or we met with the city of Saskatoon to help with discount bus passes. That's what we've done to help people.

Mr. Speaker, we have made one of the largest food bank donation announcements. We have donated \$440,000 to the food banks of . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well in a *StarPhoenix* article entitled "Priced out of the market," Linda Pritchard says her stomach has adjusted to the feeling of being hungry because she's having to choose between putting food on her plate or the plates of her grandchildren. Her rent is going up from \$550 a month to \$900 a month. That, combined with the noticeably higher prices at the grocery store, is making it almost impossible for Linda and her family to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, Linda's family is like so many others who are on assistance, facing a double whammy of skyrocketing rents and rising food prices.

To the minister: she has more than a billion and a half dollars in the bank. What will she do to help families like Linda's?

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. And I'm more than happy to address that question. What did she do just a short while ago? And that was to give the largest increase to the Saskatchewan employment supplement that we have ever had in this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — That's what she will do to help people, unlike the previous administration that did absolutely nothing to increase funding for the most vulnerable people.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we know the Minister of Health has been busy cutting programs that help vulnerable people. And we know the Minister of Social

Services only solution to the housing crisis so far has been to appoint a two-person task force to study the issue.

Well while the Health minister defends his mean cuts and the Social Services minister waits for a report to hit her desk, Saskatchewan residents are struggling. While the minister has made some changes that will help low-income citizens, her government has made many more that will hurt them.

To the minister: will she show that she truly has the best interests of low-income families at heart and commit to helping families struggling with rising food prices?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I suppose the member opposite didn't hear the answer to my last question. We just gave the most significant increase to the Saskatchewan employment supplement that this province has ever seen.

That is to help families in order to meet the increased costs. So, Mr. Speaker, they can use it for food. They can use it for rent. They can use it for child care expenses. They can use it as they choose to address the issue.

The member opposite mentioned the task force on the housing. What did his party do when they were in power? On the eve of an election, Mr. Speaker, they had a quiet little committee that met people by invitation only. They made proposals. Those proposals have not been implemented for six months, and they admit that they're failing, Mr. Speaker.