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Activities of Community-Based Organizations

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, we know that the cabinet committee on CBOs, community-based organizations, recently did a review of government processes related to agreements with CBOs and is now requiring CBOs to actually have policies and guidelines in place in regard to political activities. Could the Minister of Social Services outline if there were any specific problems that led to this requirement for CBOs to have political activity policies in place?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I'm very delighted to be able to talk about our community-based organizations and the great work that they do right across the province, whether it's in the ministry that I'm responsible for or Health or the other human services ministries. Mr. Speaker, we can't do what the community-based organizations do. On the ground, they have a chance to deal with people first hands-on and know their unique situations.

Mr. Speaker, I think when it comes to community-based organizations, we're always making sure that they can provide the information not only to us but for the citizens of the province when it comes to whatever program that we've been talking about. Mr. Speaker, we've had the chance in the last number of years to meet with many of them. We have well over 200 community-based organizations in the province. Just about \$400 million is spent on those CBOs, and they do a great job when it comes to dealing with people with disability, our children in care, our seniors. And, Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you, as a province, we thank them wholeheartedly for the work that they do.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Social Services agree that it would be highly inappropriate to ask a community-based organization to use its resources to support a political party or an individual candidate?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I'm not really sure where the member opposite is coming from. I know that CBOs have a task to do, that they are, that their work is for individuals on the ground. I'm not really sure if there's a political purpose with that.

But I assure you that when it comes to making sure that our vulnerable individuals are looked after, regardless of the party that is in government in this House, I think that we would ensure that their work is to look at everybody across the province. We won't put a political hat on anybody.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much. The Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre receives provincial government funding, and it therefore follows very strict rules about how it uses that funding. And the food bank is also a charity, so it also has to follow strict rules that are laid out by the Canada Revenue Agency to not use its resources for political purposes.

But we recently have learned that the Sask Party was involved in asking the Saskatoon Food Bank to use its resources to support the election campaign for the member of Saskatoon Sutherland by paying him during the campaign period. Wisely, the food bank refused to do that, but it is incredibly concerning that they were even asked to do that. To the minister: will she agree that an independent investigation is needed into this matter?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, the allegation he has just brought up is something that of course we would be concerned about. But at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we know the good work that they are doing. I've had an opportunity to meet with the CEO of the food bank here in Regina and talk about not only the work that they're doing for people that are using the food bank but the added opportunities to talk about skills and training.

Mr. Speaker, there are individuals on both sides of the House — but I can tell you specifically on this side of the House — that are really concerned about it and have a passion for ensuring that work happens for our vulnerable individuals.

Mr. Speaker, I know that we all have friends on one side of the . . . In various organizations, the community-based organizations that we rely on, this government, are lots of times are not only our friends but they are our family members, and we have the opportunity to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of questions that I'm sure the member opposite would like to ask, from using everything as a political football, as he normally does. But my question to him is making sure that the services that are provided for people that are vulnerable are something that they are providing. That's my goal, and it's the goal of every member on this side of the House.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: I think, Mr. Speaker, the question when it speaks to transparency and accountability and ethics of this House is, does she think that this deserves or warrants an investigation?

The Speaker: I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: We're going to take notice of that question, Mr. Speaker.