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of the

## Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

# DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

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### Affordable Housing

**Mr. Forbes:** Mr. Speaker, Tara Hobbins also struggled to obtain affordable housing. Here's a quote from a recent letter she wrote:

I'm on the verge of homelessness. This upsets me due to the fact that I'm a hard-working, responsible employee and strive to maintain a good life. I don't think that, working \$14 an hour, I should have this problem.

Tara sought help from Sask Housing, and do you know what they offered this single mom and two young daughters, Mr. Speaker? This government offered her an apartment with a possibility of cockroaches and bedbugs infestation. Tara says, and I quote, "I was revolted. I was revolted. How can a government property have such low standards?"

I want to know what the minister says about that.

**The Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** Mr. Speaker, it wasn't many years ago when we had vacancy rates of less than 1 per cent across our province in every major centre. Mr. Speaker, our government took immediate action to address the housing shortage, and in fact we've invested now over \$581 million in housing within our province to develop over 8,800 units, Mr. Speaker. Our wait-list for social housing has gone down, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to continue to have our housing programs and to look at this issue. We understand that now we should look more closely at affordability because we have addressed the availability. The vacancy rates now across the province on average are over 4 per cent, so the programs are working, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure with this particular mom . . . I don't know what housing unit he is referencing, but we are always looking for better housing, and we're renewing a lot of our housing portfolio.

**The Speaker:** I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

**Mr. Forbes:** Mr. Speaker, this is such cold comfort for Tara. And we know this government has cut \$5.4 million from the Sask Housing budget this year, \$5.4 million. But thankfully Tara ended up finding an apartment to rent, one that didn't have cockroaches or bedbugs like the Sask Housing one that was offered to her and her young daughters. But she's still struggling because the cost of rent is sky-high and she only makes 14 bucks an hour, picking up every shift she can.

Tara is the kind of person who should be supported by Sask Housing. She's the kind of person who has a real chance to get ahead, to give her daughters the best chance and start in life. But Tara was horribly let down by Sask Housing, and she says, I quote, "I just felt like they didn't care or they couldn't care less." To the minister: what does she have to say about that?

**The Speaker:** I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** Mr. Speaker, in my last answer I said how aggressively this government has been working on housing programs to increase the amount of housing available to those most vulnerable.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't think Tara wants to go back to the taxes that she had to pay under the NDP [New Democratic Party] because, quite frankly, we have given record tax cuts on this side. I don't think that Tara wants to give up the children's drug program that this government introduced, and I don't think Tara wants to give up the active families benefit that this government introduced. Mr. Speaker, Tara no longer has to pay PST [provincial sales tax] on children's clothing.

We will always continue to work on programs and incentives for our families, our most vulnerable families, but we don't want to go back to the taxes of the NDP because Tara would be struggling even worse if they were in government again.