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DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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Anti-Poverty Strategy

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to stand today and enter into the debate on an anti-poverty strategy. And we've seen a lot more attention to this over the last few months, but it's been a call that's been going for many years, and it's one that I think that we should heed. So it is an important debate that we have before we take our leave of the House for the summer. And we know that it's one that has serious consequences right across this province.

And we find ourselves in an unfortunate situation where we have . . . we are only one of two provinces that are left in the country without an anti-poverty strategy. And just as recently as earlier this week, we saw a situation where once again the Children's Advocate . . . And it's not a new call. The Children's Advocate has been calling for an overarching anti-poverty strategy in Saskatchewan because, as he's pointed out with the stats . . . And we'll probably get into a lot of stats and I hope we don't get into a situation of duelling stats, but I think it's important that we take the time to really reflect on what the Children's Advocate has said.

Earlier in March we had the Poverty Costs coalition talking about it. A few years ago we had the Poverty Free folks talking about it. We've been calling for it. But many others have called for it and it's just one that makes a lot of common sense. And I think with this government . . . And even the Minister of Social Services has talked about strategy. She's talked about the mental health, addictions strategy and the disability strategy. Both are very good and wise initiatives, but it would be good to have us connect the dots. It would be very wise for us to connect the dots.

I think that it's important that every government realizes that we're only as strong as our weakest link and how, if there is poverty in our communities, then it's something that we should focus on. And it's not one that we should be stepping back and congratulating ourselves if the rate goes down. Until there is no poverty, I think we keep focusing on it. And that doesn't matter, whether when we were in government or the Sask Party's in

government, it's something that we should rise above the petty politics of it and really strive to do the good job that I think that we can do. And this is where an overarching strategy can make a lot of sense.

And as the Children's Advocate had pointed out, 16 per cent of non-Aboriginal children live in poverty. Thirty per cent of Métis and non-status First Nations children in our province are living in poverty. Sixty-four per cent of status First Nations children in Saskatchewan are living in poverty. And we know that there are estimates that poverty costs us some \$420 million in higher health care costs, and of course the whole issue of what this means for social assistance costs, some \$720 million there. And as well, we know that Saskatchewan tops the list in terms of highest rates of women residing in a shelter.

And we can go through this, and just last week I raised questions in the House about what was happening at our food banks where we see in Regina the food bank usage has gone up some 24 per cent in terms of senior citizens using its services. And for the first time, we're starting to see seniors who are having to utilize shelters, emergency shelters, and this is something that nobody can take any kind of happiness. This is a call to action. This should be a call to action and one that we would happily embrace here in this House. And it would be a great thing if we were to say, listen, let's really work on this, you know.

And I recognize the government, as I said earlier, two strategies that they're really striving to put forward, and I hope to attend some of their sessions. Good work. Good work. We have a lot of hope. There is a lot of optimism that those will do the jobs that they are required to do. But the question we have overarched is the same one the advocate has, the same one the poverty folks have, is the overarching strategy that to eliminate, to tackle the issue of poverty in our communities.

And so I just want to reflect on a couple of articles, and then I do want to take a minute to talk about our own situation here in Saskatchewan. And of course, this was an editorial that was actually in response to the cost of poverty campaign. And it notes that it was a coalition of Saskatchewan community groups that put this together, and they really focused on the cost, the financial cost, and hoping that that would have caught the attention of this government.

But the government while . . . And I understand some met with the Poverty Costs folks, and I'm happy to hear that. It's always good to be meeting with community groups, and we would always hope the government does that. But there were no reassurances that anything more would come out of it, and we have some concerns about that.

But a *StarPhoenix* editorial on March 15th, 2014, talks about, and the headline is "Ideology beats sound policy." And it talked about two articles, or two news items, that were in play that week. One was of course the poverty campaign, and the other one of course was the whole issue on tanning beds. But it seems that . . . And this is the quote from *The StarPhoenix*:

In both cases, the attitude of the government seems to be that other provinces can

heed good advice and get positive results, but Saskatchewan will do its own thing despite evidence that says the government would avoid costly problems down the road by taking action now.

It goes on to say:

Saskatchewan and British Columbia are now the only provinces without a poverty reduction strategy after Alberta, long the standard bearer for personal responsibility, recently adopting a comprehensive policy. Yet Social Services Minister June Draude insists that Saskatchewan's growth in average weekly earnings and its low unemployment rate somehow point to a superior anti-poverty strategy in this province where a tenth of the population is impoverished.

And it goes on to talk about:

Given the . . . high cost of social programs such as health care and welfare, not to mention the human cost of unrealized potential that has its roots in poverty, it's difficult to understand the provincial government's reluctance to consider sound public policies in place elsewhere in Canada.

And it goes on. But I have to say it's something that we really, we should take the time to think through and rise above. Rise above, as I said, that petty politics that sometimes in this House stops us from doing the right thing, stops us from doing the right thing. So I would really ask today, as we debate this situation that we have in our province, that we really take a look at what can we do and really engage our communities to develop this overarching anti-poverty strategy. We have a moment in time. And I think that often this government likes to say we are either the first province to do something but, you know, it's not really about being the first or last; it's about doing the right thing. And it's never too late to step up and say, you know what, let's get at this problem; let's get at this issue, you know.

I was struck by this cartoon that was in *The StarPhoenix* back in the fall. And it's a cartoon of Stephen Harper and it says, the one caption says, good news, the poverty rate is on the decline in Canada. And then the next box it says, bad news, the evidence-based data comes from a box of fortune cookies. And the fortune cookie is, the label on the box is, 2011 results of voluntary household survey.

And this is the thing that I really worry about, that we're missing. We're missing out on . . . Sometimes we survey, sometimes we use data that isn't that solid and we get caught up in that and it's really unfortunate, particularly in the light of the changes at the federal level. We can't really trust those numbers. But I do want to say, and I have raised these numbers in the House, you know, when we look at our own social assistance rates here in the province, while . . .

And I do think and I have to acknowledge, and I will say this and I've said it many times, we are encouraged by the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program, and that has really worked well in terms of the call from the community. DISC

[Disability Income Support Coalition] has really set the agenda on what we should be doing there. And full recognition to DISC and the good work they're doing, and I'd also like to recognize the government for listening. Now we always have some questions about how it's being implemented, but generally it is the right way to go.

Now I have to say that this still leaves other situations that we have in terms of social assistance. And one that we see right across when we started keeping track . . . And this is through written questions, so if my numbers are wrong, they're only wrong because of the written questions that we got, the answers that we got. So if there are better numbers, we would sure like to see them and have them because it's important that we have accurate information.

But we see right from 2008 when there was an average of 6,000 families on social assistance. In 2012 that number actually . . . Actually it increased 2010 and '11. We are still seeing about 6,000: 6,100 in 2012, 5,700 in 2013. We haven't got a full set of numbers yet for 2014. But that is really significant, Mr. Speaker. So while we know the minister will say and talk about poverty rates going down, that they've cut this and that, we see the numbers.

When you couple them with what's happening with the Children's Advocate's numbers and we see our own answers to written questions, we have concerns. And we see some problems with the children's numbers here. These are the number of children that we see: in 2012, there were about 13,000; last year, 12,400 children who were living in families who were receiving social assistance. That's a shocking number, Mr. Speaker.

And I think that while we can talk about percentages or cuts in the poverty rates, these are real people. This isn't a percentage. These are real kids who are in our schools across the province. Way too many of them are, you know, as the Children's Advocate pointed out, are First Nations or Métis, but this is a real number. These are kids that are in our schools, in our neighbourhoods, and these are our families that are in our communities and our towns and villages right across the province. And we really should be doing something about it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as well, the caseloads that we have for Social Services . . . And again these are numbers from written questions. And we see that in February of 2014, the latest numbers we have, there is a caseload for Social Services, when you combine social assistance, TEA [transitional employment allowance], and SAID, the number was 28,101. Now, Mr. Speaker, when we left government, the caseload was 25,998 — about 26,000. That's 2,000 more than when we left government. Mr. Speaker, in the lowest, and then we have the lowest actually was in 2008, 23,678.

So well we see the numbers are there, that there is work to do. And I always appreciate that the minister says there's more work to do, but the first thing you do, you have to have a plan. You have to have a plan and one that fits all these pieces together.

And I would really call on the government to take some time, really think about the value of their position of saying, no, we're not going to do this. And while they say that we're

involved in action, but the actions aren't having the effect that they think they're having, that in fact it seems that they're stuck, that they're stuck. There may be things that they're doing well, and as I said, and we'll talk about SAID, but there's many more pieces to the puzzle than just that.

The Children's Advocate has advocated for changes and a real focus on that because he sees the result when things go off the rails. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's time that we really think about this motion before the summer break. And I would move:

That this Assembly call on the government to develop and implement a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

And I do so with my folks on this side of the House. And I think it's a very important motion, so I would enter this motion into the House. I do so move. Thank you.

The Speaker: It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Centre:

That this Assembly call on the government to develop and implement a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Docherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm pleased to have the opportunity to enter into the debate. This is actually a debate that I have both personal and some experience in. I've got an interest in this for sure.

So since this is the motion from the member from Saskatoon Centre, I take it that he's trying to assert that this government doesn't care about the province's most vulnerable. And I find that to be a fascinating premise but not surprising since we're used to the opposition standing up in this Chamber and making farcical and unsubstantiated claims. They like to frame this with, we've been told and this is what we are hearing. Well we already come to this Chamber and leave the hearsay and the gossip behind and stand behind what we say because we have a growth plan. We set targets and goals, and we have a lot. There is a lot more work to do. And I have nothing but examples here, and I'd be happy to read them into the record.

So let's start with poverty in Saskatchewan. In 2006 and 2011, that's a 50 per cent reduction in the percentage of persons in low income. That's a Stats Canada. So that's from 10.7 per cent in 2006, 5.3 per cent in 2011. Saskatchewan is tied with Newfoundland for the second-lowest percentage of people living in poverty at 5.3 per cent, again another StatsCan number. Sask outperforms almost all other provinces and their strategies. And between 2006 and 2011, the incidence of child poverty dropped from 14.8 per cent to 6.2 per cent.

The NDP record at this though, so the NDP introduced a strategy in 1998 called Building Independence: Investing In Families. That was in 1998. So the incidence of child poverty in Saskatchewan, in 1998 the incidence of child poverty was 11.2 per cent, again a Stats

Canada. That was the number. By 2006 that number had gone from 11.2 per cent to 14.8 per cent, so the incidence of child poverty actually increased in those . . . while the opposition was in place.

So the headline at the time, in 2005, here's a headline on The StarPhoenix: "NDP fails to reduce child poverty: Saskatchewan numbers higher than the national average."

In 2003, the incidence of child poverty in Canada was 17.6 per cent, while in Saskatchewan that number was 18.3 per cent or 40,000 children, says the *2005 Report Card on Child Poverty in Saskatchewan*. And so Garson Hunter, who's a professor of social work, University of Regina, social policy research unit, said, those numbers are disappointing; we don't see any government social policies being brought in that meaningfully address the issue of child poverty. There's Garson Hunter. I know him well, a really good prof, knows his stuff.

In 2006 Saskatchewan's child poverty rate was the second highest in the country. That's the *Child and Family Poverty Saskatchewan Profile 2008*. And in the NDP's 1991 platform, they promised to work to eliminate the need for food banks in Saskatchewan, wanted to work to end child poverty by providing increased income supplements. Well, Mr. Speaker, that didn't quite occur.

So I was kind of puzzled by the member from Saskatoon Centre when, and I'm not sure, but I mean he talked about it again today in his motion and he talked about the 24 per cent increase in the numbers of seniors using food banks. And that was from an April 30th, 2014 CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] News article. So I'm not sure whether the member from Saskatoon Centre is either misinformed or misinterpreted the stats. I mean we saw today in regards to SIAST and the living skills program some difficulty understanding exactly what the facts were. So anyways in this article, it states that there was a 24 per cent increase in the number of seniors using the food banks last month compared to last year at this time.

So the *HungerCount 2013* report however shows a 9 per cent decrease in Saskatchewan from 2012 in seniors using food banks, from 689 to 629 individuals. The overall percentage of people using food banks who are over the age of 65 is 2.8 per cent. So the overall number of people using food banks in Saskatchewan has decreased by 8.8 per cent from 2012. So I'm fascinated, you know, where these numbers come, but I guess *HungerCount 2013*, a reputable agency. Well okay. Not for now.

So I'm going to go on because I've got nothing but examples of investments that this government has made for the most vulnerable. And I'm going to start with supports for seniors since we're on that topic.

So from our budget, so Social Services 2014-15 budget for seniors include \$10 per month increase in benefits under the seniors' income plan — that's in July of 2014 — to a maximum of \$260. That's single seniors. And \$225 per month for each member of a married couple. All right. An increase in the monthly income threshold and the personal care home benefit from \$1,875 to \$1,950, that's again in July of this year.

Let's move on, since I'm proud to be the Legislative Secretary for disability issues, proud to be a part of that. Well let's talk about the investment we've made for people, citizens with disabilities. So in particular, \$9.9 million in funding for the Ministry of the Economy's employability assistance for people with disabilities program to assist adults with disabilities to prepare for, secure, and maintain employment. Again, an amazing program.

I, for one, like to trumpet any time I can the issue of . . . and our program, our SAID program, Saskatchewan assured income for disability program. And I've got nothing but positive comments from people in the disability community about how grateful and happy that they are, amazingly.

Anyway so this Ministry of Social Services investment of \$5.1 million in 2014-15 will increase benefits under the SAID program for the third year in a row — \$20 a month for those in residential care, \$50 a month for individuals, \$55 a month for couples. This increase will take effect in June of this year. It will benefit more than 12,000 households. Absolutely, absolutely amazing, sir, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy again to talk about this and go on in terms of the SAID program, this four-year commitment to increase income, living income benefits by \$100 a month for those living in residential care; \$350 a month for those in independent living arrangements; and \$400 a month for couples who are living independently.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk about some of the pieces that we've been involved in in relation to tax reduction. So for instance the low-income tax cut-off, the low-income cut-off . . . Since 2007 Saskatchewan has seen larger reductions in the incidence of low-income, both adults and children, than any other province in Canada. Saskatchewan has the lowest rates of low income for all persons and children in Western Canada. Saskatchewan has the second-lowest incidence of low income for all persons in the country. So between 2007 and 2011 the number of Sask residents in low income declined by 23,000 people, including 8,000 fewer children.

Mr. Speaker, the actions that we've taken to assist low-income people, we increased the minimum wage by over 25 per cent since 2007 from \$7.95 to \$10 an hour; implemented historic personal income tax cuts since 2008 which have removed more than 114,000 lower income Saskatchewan people from the provincial tax rolls; doubled the low-income tax credit; and significantly increased the income threshold.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go on. Just a couple more pieces. But in relation to adult basic education and in relation to First Nations and Métis, \$5.9 million targeted specifically for First Nations and Métis learning to continue efforts to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people — 25 per cent of the adult basic education budget is allocated for on-reserve programming.

In 2012-13 the demographic participant information showed 68 per cent of adult basic education learners are First Nation and Métis and lastly, Mr. Speaker, adult basic education training continues to focus efforts on First Nations-Métis education and the employment strategy. Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for...

The Speaker: Time has elapsed. I recognize the member for Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand today and participate in the debate and of course on the motion:

That this Assembly call on the government to develop and implement a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that now is the most crucial time for the people of Saskatchewan to begin some of this particular work, Mr. Speaker. We heard the member from Saskatoon Centre speak very eloquently about the challenges that many people face within his constituency, within his city, and of course within his province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think what's really important, that we also stress on this side of the Assembly, is that on page 10 of the child's advocate report, there is a couple of headlines that really caught my attention. And the first headline on page 10 is, "Two-thirds of status First Nations children live in poverty." That was one headline, Mr. Speaker. The second headline, and I quote again from the document, "Children living on reserve do not . . . [enjoy] the same level of services as those off reserve."

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I mentioned earlier that I thanked my colleague from Saskatoon Centre for calling on this government to develop a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, Mr. Speaker, that he comes from an area that has a myriad of people from different worlds and of course different lifestyles. And he speaks very eloquently and passionately about the challenge that all people face, and I recognize that. There are many people in many of our communities that struggle, and the ones that pay the greatest price are perhaps the children.

Now I think what's really important, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the document itself, I want to take a reference to the document and speak about the First Nations and Métis people and of course the northern community people as well. I do this, not out of disrespect nor to diminish the needs of others, but to simply highlight the cause and the concern that many northern leaders and many northern people have expressed over the years as we talk about developing an anti-poverty strategy as a government.

Mr. Speaker, I look at the revenues that the government currently enjoys, great revenues from oil and gas. The agricultural sector is certainly booming, Mr. Speaker. You look at the industry of potash. You look at the cattle industry. You look at the tourism opportunity, Mr. Speaker. You see the great amount of revenues that Saskatchewan is enjoying at this juncture of our history.

And this is the purpose and the reason and the logic I think behind my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Centre, is doing the call and has continued doing the call for the government to get serious, to get serious about implementing a very comprehensive anti-poverty strategy. And, Mr. Speaker, I think the member from Saskatoon Centre recognizes the great amount of income that the current government enjoys. The economy is booming. The population is growing. But there's still a segment of our population that

is not feeling the benefit and is not feeling part of our province because of poverty.

Now in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we have many challenges that we often want to speak about. And I look at some of the families and some of the hurtful things that have been done to some of the families in northern Saskatchewan. And many of the cuts are related to the Social Services department, in particular the Sask Housing component.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know many people's rents have gone sky-high. We know many seniors in our cities are paying much more rent than they anticipated. We know they're paying more for their medicine. But in northern Saskatchewan, that problem is also dramatically increased because of the distance from some of our more central markets. And we're talking paying a significant amount more for power, because you consume more power in the North because some of the houses are not properly insulated, in particular the Athabasca Basin where it's not uncommon to see 900 to \$1,000 a month for power bills. Mr. Speaker, we see the high cost of transporting basic foods that help address poverty and, Mr. Speaker, nothing from this particular area has been addressed whatsoever.

We see families that are finally starting to see a little light when they have the opportunity for employment, where they have struggled when they were younger with very young children. And they go to school. They get a trade. And, Mr. Speaker, they then turn around and get a decent job. And this family wants one thing that 77 per cent of the people of Saskatchewan enjoy, and that is the opportunity for home ownership. And you look at what has not been done in support of these communities, is that they have not been afforded the opportunity to buy their house off Sask Housing because the minister callously cancelled that program. And it affects that family, that working family, Mr. Speaker, and the children living in those homes.

Day in, day out we stand here in this Assembly and we present petitions on the remote housing program, on the rental purchase option, for many families in northern Saskatchewan so that they're able to exercise those options and buy out Sask Housing, so they can see the value and achieve the dream of owning their own home and having a mortgage.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the fundamental difference, the fundamental difference that I'd point out to people that might be listening, and the reason why I think the member from Saskatoon Centre made this very compelling argument, is now's the time. The economy of Saskatchewan is pumping on all cylinders. The Government of Saskatchewan is enjoying record revenues, enjoying record revenues, and as much as they want to pat themselves on the back, they simply inherited the booming economy and the growing population. But we're not going to go there, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to go there primarily because it takes lot of hard work and a lot of hard years to rebuild the economy and the hopes of the people of Saskatchewan.

But while we have this largesse of revenues coming into our province, while we're enjoying the boom of the agricultural sector and of the tourism sector, of the oil and gas

sector, of the mineral sector, and the list goes on of how every sector in Saskatchewan seems to be pumping on all cylinders, making our province stronger financially and, Mr. Speaker, that is something that we within the NDP circles applaud and recognize it's something that we need to continue building on.

However, the fundamental argument that we have is while we have this opportunity, we should be doing a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy to help those that have less than us. It is a very simple message: to help those that have less than us. And there's nothing more compelling and compassionate than that basic statement that the member from Saskatoon Centre has made on a continual basis.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we see the actions, as I mentioned, of cutting programs that are very essential to northern Saskatchewan communities and to First Nations and Métis people. When we see the advocate's report say that two-thirds, almost two-thirds, and I'll quote again, "Two-thirds of status First Nations children live in poverty," these are Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they enjoy the distinction of being our First Nations people, but they live in Saskatchewan. These are Saskatchewan families. These are Saskatchewan children. And we can't understand, on this side of the Assembly, with the largesse we have in terms of a government getting a great amount of wealth, why can't they do something to help those that are less fortunate than many of us in our province.

But a fundamental difference I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, in the last minute that I have, is that if you look at the callous attempt by the government to divert the attention of people to what the NDP did or didn't do versus what they're trying to do today, the fundamental difference that I'll tell the people of Saskatchewan and why we're calling for an anti-poverty strategy, Mr. Speaker, is today, 2014, the Saskatchewan government enjoys a \$14.2 billion budget. They enjoy a \$14.2 billion budget. That was their budget this year, Mr. Speaker. And I can tell you that that is a phenomenal amount of money to have at your disposal.

When the NDP assumed government in 1991, Mr. Speaker, we had a deficit of \$15.5 billion. So it's almost a \$30 billion difference. So our point is and my point is, you can stop playing the games of saying, why didn't you guys do this? And our response is, because the province was flat broke. Now we're saying, you guys do this because you've got \$14.2 billion to work with and, Mr. Speaker, they're failing.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Ms. Jurgens: "We believe that the fundamental objective of public office is to serve our fellow citizens with integrity in order to improve the economic and social conditions of all Saskatchewan people." Mr. Deputy Speaker, this direct quote is taken from the Legislative Assembly's code of ethical conduct for members of the Legislative Assembly as found on our website at legassembly.sk.ca. These are not just words on a website. They're an inspiration for action, action that helps maintain a strong economy, action that puts money back into the pockets of those that need it; action that provides traditional assistance for those who need it, and action that focuses on programs that help people

make the transition from poverty.

Mr. Speaker, it truly is an honour to participate in this debate. I thank the member opposite for bringing up the issue of reduction of poverty in Saskatchewan. It really provides me the opportunity to highlight the many actions that we have taken to improve the economic and social conditions of all Saskatchewan people. Together my colleagues and I have taken a multi-pronged approach and made a commitment to holistic cross-government solutions.

The message from Kelvington-Wadena member, who is our Minister of Social Services, says it so eloquently, and I quote from the document *From Dependence to Independence* that says: “We are also measured by our efforts to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable members of our society are met.”

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite can talk about taking action now. Well we’re two steps ahead of them all of the time. The caseload, our member opposite said the caseload is horrendous. Well let’s compare the results of undisciplined rhetoric to our disciplined action. The child welfare caseloads when the NDP were in government rose by 53 per cent. And we’ll just compare those seven years, from 2000 to 2007.

What we are doing is we are working on four pillars: sustaining a strong economy, ensuring our citizens have more disposable income, removing barriers to independence, providing financial support to our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our actions are fulfilling a commitment of our growth plan. We have purchased an additional 300 training seats. Now in the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, we now have 6,700 training seats. We have increased training allowances and income support to support 1,000 new apprenticeship and ABE [adult basic education] opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the member from, my colleague that just finished talking in the House here, indicated . . .

An Hon. Member: Coronation Park.

Ms. Jurgens: Coronation Park, thank you . . . indicated that we have been increasing all of these helps for our most vulnerable. Well now we have 6,700 opportunities for apprenticeship training funding.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Athabasca can talk about whether we pay attention to First Nations or not. Here are some statistics that’ll help him understand just where the First Nations and Métis are participating in Saskatchewan’s bright future. We have 68 per cent of adult basic education learners that are First Nations and Métis. Well we have put 25 per cent of our ABE budget for on-reserve programming. We have Aboriginal participation increasing in apprentices to . . . We now have 13.8 per cent of total apprentices are First Nations. Our First Nations are part of our Saskatchewan economy. Note that that is almost the same as the ratio of First Nations in our province. So our disciplined action speaks far louder than any undisciplined rhetoric the NDP will throw

around.

Mr. Speaker, we have what I like to call the Hub and COR [centre of responsibility] in Prince Albert. It is a model that is being recognized around our province and across the world. Because of the leadership that is shown by our city, we have 10 active Hubs in the province in Prince Albert, Yorkton, La Ronge, North Battleford, Moose Jaw, Estevan, Weyburn, Nipawin, Lloydminster, Swift Current, and Saskatoon.

I would like to point out that since the implementation of the Hub in Prince Albert we have seen an overall crime rate decrease by 18 per cent and violent crime rate decrease by 38 per cent. Not only that, we are being recognized around the world. Just yesterday *The StarPhoenix* highlighted — on the May 6th *StarPhoenix* — highlighted that P.A. [Prince Albert] serves as a role model. And this is a quote: “Its ability to get results comes primarily from a willingness to look at evidence, weigh and adopt those measures that are deemed successful, and adjust those measures that fall flat.”

Mr. Speaker, we are full of action, not undisciplined rhetoric like the opposite members like to . . . Mr. Speaker, we also have taken actions to increase the minimum wage over 25 per cent. What that means is that we are now going to have a minimum wage that is over \$10 per hour compared to \$7.95 in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008 and again in 2011 our government increased the basic spousal exemption amounts and the dependent child tax credit amount. What that means is that a Saskatchewan family of four or more with an income of 75,000 is expected to pay less in total provincial taxes and utilities than their counterparts in any other Canadian province.

Mr. Speaker, in the North those people that need a little helping hand up, are income assistance recipients, receive an additional \$50 per person per month in recognition of higher food costs. Again actions speak louder than undisciplined rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, our citizens are pulling together. We are working shoulder to shoulder to reach Saskatchewan’s full potential. We are looking at a bright future that includes the most vulnerable. It helps people make the transition from poverty.

Mr. Speaker, in the senior income plan, we see that we have increased benefits under the senior income plan. We have constructed long-term care facilities in Biggar, Kelvington, Kipling, Maple Creek, Prince Albert. We have increased funding for urgent issues and we call it the Urgent Issues Action Fund. And this will continue to improve services and long-term care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I can keep going on and on and on about how our record clearly indicates our government’s propensity to act. Our actions speak louder than words. We are creating a reduction in poverty. We are helping the people of our province — all people of our province.

When I talked about the seniors’ income plan, let’s compare the failure of the NDP with their undisciplined rhetoric and the success of disciplined action. The NDP failed to increase the senior income plan between 1992 and 2007, and they have the audacity to

say that they are taking care of the most vulnerable. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has the third-lowest percentage of seniors living in low income in Canada. Disciplined action versus undisciplined rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Coronation Park indicated that we have reduced the percentage of persons on low income. The headline in The StarPhoenix on December 5th indicated Saskatchewan NDP fails to reduce child poverty. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Sproule: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to rise on this debate in regards to the motion that my colleague has made. And I think it's a bit disappointing that some of the speakers haven't taken time to actually address the motion itself and instead just provide a little list of things that they wanted to highlight. But they obviously missed the point of the motion, so I'm going to try and address that a little bit in the short time that I have.

The motion reads:

That this Assembly call on the government to develop and implement a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

And I think that's something that's been highlighted and is certainly not something that . . . raging rhetoric from the opposition. It actually comes from the recently released annual report for the Children's Advocate. So I don't know if this untrammelled tendency towards ridiculous rhetoric is something we could apply to the Children's Advocate. And that's a very important role in our province that highlights some of the issues that many of our most vulnerable people are facing, and particularly children, which is always a huge tragedy as everyone knows.

Now in his report — and this is on page 10 just so everybody knows what we're talking about here — he made a comment about where this strategy is or whether it's in place at all. And what he says on page 10, in the paragraph, he says,

The provincial government has started developing such an overarching strategy, with investments in [things like] the *Child and Family Agenda*, and . . . the *Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People and the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan*.

But what he goes on to say is that “A poverty reduction plan could provide an overarching framework in which to address poverty in a more focused, measurable way.” And this is the concerns that, I think, we're trying to highlight and hopefully members opposite will take time to actually think about what the role and overarching plan would achieve in terms of bringing all these actions they talk about into a proper focus.

The Children's Advocate goes on to say in the next page . . . He's talking about how children living on-reserve are not receiving the same level of services as those off-reserve. And he does commend the province and the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan

Indian Nations] and the Métis Nation for publishing their report in 2013 on the joint task force. But he goes on to say, and I quote, “This work needs to begin in earnest now.” So there is work that needs to be done on all these activities that the province has indicated it’s working on.

What I’d like to focus on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a report that came out, and it was a review of the plan that this government introduced in 2012. It’s called *From Dependence to Independence*, and this was a report released by the Ministry of Social Services in 2012. And in the introduction . . . The report itself is called *Saskatchewan’s Anti-Poverty Plan, From Dependence to Independence: Does it measure up?* And it’s written by Brian Banks and Paul Gingrich. And these two individuals took some time to look at the plan that the government released in 2012, and they point out a number of deficiencies that exist. And obviously the Children’s Advocate is also concerned about the way they’re approaching anti-poverty in this particular government.

So in the introduction to the report, the authors write:

In 2012 the Saskatchewan Ministry of Social Services published *From Dependence to Independence*, a lengthy report describing the policies and programs it has designed to attack poverty in Saskatchewan. The preface makes strong claims regarding its intentions, “Previous governments in this province should be acknowledged for their work on different aspects of poverty, but no previous administration approached the challenge with a comparable commitment to holistic, cross-government solutions.

And it goes on to say, further down the page:

From Dependence to Independence sets out four pillars of poverty reduction: sustaining a strong economy, ensuring citizens have disposable income, removing barriers to independence, and providing financial support to the most vulnerable; as such it appears to be Saskatchewan’s version of an anti-poverty plan.

And the paper . . . That’s the end of the quote. And they go on in the paper to analyze these four pillars that are identified in this plan. And they point out some of the flaws I think that this government would do well to pay attention to. So the first pillar that they talk about is sustaining a strong economy.

And before that, on page 6 of their report, they talk about the resource boom and how it has provided some economic results. But what they also talk about is the other side of the growth equation. And here’s what they have to say:

On the other side of the growth equation housing prices have risen to unprecedented highs, the availability of low cost housing has reached historic lows and . . . [housing] is a growing public issue. And despite relative prosperity income inequality has not been reduced. In Saskatchewan inequality sharply increased from 2000 to 2006, then declined slightly, remaining above the level of the 1990s . . . Rapid growth of international immigration to the province,

approximately 31,000 between 2007-2011, has added to Saskatchewan's low income population.

So the concern here that they express further on in the page, and I quote, is, "*From Dependence to Independence* is almost exclusively focused on an income approach to poverty reduction." So this is a very ideological approach that I think is very classically reflected in many conservative governments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this government of course is no exception to the rule.

But the authors point out further:

Poverty, however, is not just about income levels; it is also about lack of opportunity, provision of meaningful employment, and developing a sense of belonging and community.

And we know there's other groups that have highlighted these issues over the years, most recently a group called Poverty Costs. That was a campaign to raise awareness about the cost of poverty in Saskatchewan. And they continually point out that there are many, many factors involved in poverty that go way beyond the income level of the individual, and they talk a lot about the cost of poverty. That's the main focus of the paper. But Poverty Costs indicated that in spite of a growing economy, poverty has not gone away; 11.9 per cent of Saskatchewan's children are still living in poverty. So what doesn't add up here, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And I think that's the question that this anti-poverty plan would answer if it was taken, and if the social science research that was applied to an overarching plan like the Children's Advocate is calling for, we would clearly, clearly see that it's not just about income. There are all kinds of factors that factor in.

The pillar one, which describes the economy, the authors point out it's not usually a theme in an anti-poverty plan because those plans usually focus on anti-poverty measures. But he says by focusing on the economy, this plan . . . And I'll quote them. They say, "By describing all low income persons as dependent, the plan establishes a negative frame of reference and creates stigmatization and a sense of ostracism from the rest of society."

And the second pillar is, to ensure citizens have disposable income, describes how this government is taking steps to provide more income. And the concern there is, "While these changes, particularly reduced taxes on the lowest income quintiles, have a positive effect on those with lowest incomes, many of these programs also provide superior benefits to middle and upper-class income earners, not the poor." So I think that's one of the flaws I think that this government needs to address.

And then finally pillar 3 is about nine areas of government intervention. And pillar 4 describes financial support to some vulnerable populations, but the focus there is on seniors and those requiring extra shelter allowance and transportation allowance. And the comment here is, "Programming directed at improving opportunities for unattached individuals, single parents, First Nations, rural poor, and immigrants is difficult to identify. It is apparent from a later discussion the plan that First Nations education and

employment are seen as a success indicator, but there are very few specific initiatives in the plan to address this long-standing issue.”

And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there just isn't enough time to go through the entire report.

I'd spoke about, last week in the 75-minute debate about a project that my constituency assistant was doing last week. It's a challenge called living below the line, and it's a challenge for everyone to live on what welfare recipients would live on when it comes to their food. And this is from her blog, and I'm going to quote from her blog last week. It reads:

A conversation with the husband this morning resulted in us adding up what \$1.75 turns into when you look at a month. So \$1.75 for 30 days is \$52.50. A single person on the Saskatchewan assistance program gets \$714 per month for every expense you can imagine. \$459 of this is for shelter.

And it goes on to say, you try and find a place in Saskatoon for that.

And I'm going to run out of time. I won't be able to read the whole blog, but I strongly recommend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you look at it. Her name is Erica Spracklin and this is her blog on her experience in poverty. It's worthwhile looking at. I urge the Assembly to support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Prince Albert Carlton.

Mr. Hickie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to yet again rise in this House to take part in a debate of this magnitude. This is a worthwhile discussion to have as we have a government who has in the last, first term . . . in these last two years of this current term has worked tirelessly, but not as just ministers in government, but working with the deputy minister level and the individuals that give every day of their lives to government and public service to try to make people's lives in this province a better place.

And it's that note where I want to start in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the inter-ministerial work that's being done and by the Minister of Social Services today, who along with other ministers are working with their deputy ministers and staff to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our population aren't forgotten and left out.

We've always said from day one that we believe that our government . . . Had we been lucky enough to form government in 2007, we'd talked leading up to the election that we believe in a hand up versus directly handouts. Now there are people who need our help, who will always need help of government because they are unable to crawl out of a situation due to limitations beyond their control, whether it be inherently just a cycle of perpetual violence they live in or it could be that their personal lives are just such that through mental health or addictions or through physical ailments they will never be able to get out of a situation without some hand up or maybe in some cases even a handout still. But that's important to recognize that that's the group that we're talking about today,

I believe.

There's a lot of individuals in this province who are seeing and . . . The economy in this province is actually thriving. It has and we've always said it's . . . We don't take credit for that. We've gotten out of the way of that economic boom, we'll call it, or economic expansion in the province. The government has always, under our Premier, has always said we need to form policies and formulate action plans to encourage that growth. And from that growth, we see the direct benefits to the population of this province. We see that we have more people employed in the province than any other time before. We have more opportunities for people who are in fact in lower income families to do better. They can in fact address their education needs at a different level. They have more opportunities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to experience a better way of life because the economy of the province is doing better than it was in the past.

You know, we've directed, ministers have directed to their officials that we are no longer going to work in silos within the concept of working together in collaboration. I believe for too long that previous governments, notwithstanding even ours when we first formed government, that everyone was focused on their end goal within their own ministry to ensure that their portfolio was managed and that their direction that was given within the mandate was followed.

But there's also been an enlightenment whereby we see people working together now, crossing over from ministry to ministry to ensure that we in fact have opportunities to use synergies, use ideas across ministries and across the bureaucracy to look at innovative ways.

My colleague from Northcote talked about the Hub model and the COR model that's being used within the Ministry of Justice. You know, that's one fundamental working group that in principle, they work with ministerial colleagues from Education, Social Services, Health, Justice, Policing to assure that they address the most vulnerable people within, not just the demographic group, but have issues that are, as I've stated before, sometimes systemic within their own families that they need help to get out of those situations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And you know, that's where the government of the day, our government has looked at other issues involving particular groups. We talk about seniors who in fact, when the minister of Social Services, the first minister, took over, she started looking at ways to increase their economic situation, their outlook. And the current Minister of Social Services has also done the same.

We are always looking at opportunities to engage with groups, and the Human Services Committee has talked to the Seniors Mechanism group in this province. We heard from them loud and clear that there's still more to do, yes. And we will definitely take on those challenges and work towards ensuring that that group, the group that built this province, the group whose shoulders we stand on every day, as the Premier has always said, and other colleagues have, are supported by this government.

And on that note, the seniors' income plan has been and will be looked at every year, budget to budget, to ensure that there is an economic advantage to those seniors who still require the hand up, not the handout because they are making their way in this province, and they are respected by us because of what they've given to our province. They've built this province for us. They've built it so we can stand here today and have the opportunity to in fact have this debate in the House, which is really important.

And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We had a moving statement today by a minister about those who've given their lives so we could have what we have today in this province. And that's why we don't ever, ever want to forget the sacrifice of those before us. And in that context, I mention seniors because they have built this province for us. We will always have them in our minds moving forward.

Also in the whole issue today in the debate, we talk about, you know, getting people opportunities. And we look to this government's . . . again an issue working with partnerships in the community, and we talk to and about Habitat for Humanity. We have groups in our major centres who see an opportunity and synergies with the government to pool resources, work together to provide families the security of a home, which gives them the hand up so they can actually have a secure environment so families can, mothers and children can in fact have the security of a home whereby they can then engage in other processes in the government and in the province to ensure that they have security and well-being.

So in this purpose, you know, we have a sense of need still. We understand that and we're going to work towards that. And the government and Minister of Social Services has provided money for Habitat and will continue to provide money for Habitat homes in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You know, we talk about the record of what the NDP has done in the past, what we're doing now as a government under the Sask Party. And you know, there's an interesting statistic — I hate to dwell on this sometimes — but we see that children living in low-income families declined by 12 per cent in NDP's last seven years. That's a good record. That by itself, that's nothing wrong with that.

But because of the fact we're able to have an economy in this province that's doing better now, we're seeing that we have less children living in low-income families because it's declined by nearly 36 per cent in our first four years as government. So it shows that there's still things that are working. We're addressing the needs because the economy's doing well. And we see that comparison back and forth across caseloads from the past to caseloads of today.

We see that there are opportunities because we're reinvesting dollars that are coming from our resource revenue sector back in social programs. We're not forgetting about those needs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have a social conscience, as any other government should, and will have in the future, to show that we are addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in this province.

Now having said that, we have a dedicated corps of men and women who work in public service who are always trying their best and working their best to give everybody the opportunity to thrive in this province. And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We have more work to do and, you know, we'll never stand on our laurels. We'll always strive to do better because we want everyone in this province to have a great quality of life. And we are doing everything possible by looking at other jurisdictions, looking at new, innovative ways to engage with other partners in the province.

We're looking at innovative ideas to ensure that we can see . . . we can maximize our dollars to give everybody in this province the benefits that are inherent to living in a democracy where they can come forward, they can ask, they can give advice to our Human Services Committee, to ministers, to other committee members as well as MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly], to see what in fact we could do better in this province. We are always going to engage those groups, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We see that happening in more and more times here. And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? This government will always strive to do what we can to make their lives better. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The time for debate has expired. Questions. I recognize the member from Regina Douglas Park.

Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's one thing to talk the talk, Mr. Speaker. It's another to actually walk that talk. You know, it's an unfortunate reality, Mr. Speaker, that those living with disabilities or are suffering from mental health and addictions are more likely to live in poverty. But our government is taking actions to change that. \$446.2 million in funding has been allocated for people with disabilities; \$238 million is allocated to mental health services. There's been a 34 per cent increase for funding for mental health services in the last seven years. To the member from Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker, where are the . . .

An Hon. Member: Saskatoon what?

Mr. Marchuk: Saskatoon Centre, sorry. Where are the NDP plans to improve the lives of those living with disabilities? Where are the plans to improve the lives of those suffering from mental health and addictions? What are your plans to walk the talk?

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

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And it is a good question. We've been very clear that we have been very supportive of DISC's initiative and it's resulted in SAID. And while there may some things we would have done differently, generally we are happy with that program. We are supportive of the mental health initiative that's happening right now. Unfortunately, we think it's a little too slow, that it should have been announced sooner. And we're going to get the results a little too . . . Well it should have been quicker because we know there are issues that should have been done right now.

So, Mr. Speaker, what our position is though is that what we need to do is connect the dots. We need to connect the dots. And this is what we're seeing the problem with this government, is that they're not connecting the dots. We see The StarPhoenix. We see the Children's Advocate, Poverty Costs — all calling for us to connect the dots. That's our stuff.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Sproule: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if the government has read some of the comments on their From Dependence to Independence paper. And I want to ask whether or not they're concerned about the gaps that are in that report. Particularly their whole approach lacks a foundational base and a well-thought-out definition of poverty that sees poverty in terms of power, asymmetries, or human rights. And secondly, the gap in the plan is that it avoids the discussion of how social exclusion and stigmatization act as a barrier to reducing poverty. And so my question is for the member from Prince Albert Carlton: is he concerned about those gaps in their 2012 report?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Prince Albert Carlton.

Mr. Hickie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course we are. Any government that gets a report from an independent body or from anyone that says that we could do better, we will look at those comments. We want to see if we can address those deficits to make sure that we could do better in the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's important. You know what? And the member from Athabasca yawns. He mocks my answering, mocks the process today. Shameful. Shameful for that member to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when in fact the member . . . His colleague asked a very good question. And the answer is like, it's too bad, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government could always do more. Our ministers have said that. We will always take advice from those in the community, and we will always work to make this province the best place ever to live, raise a family, and thrive. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook.

Mr. Moe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is in action when it comes to helping those living with little or with no income. In 2008 this government increased the basic and spousal personal tax credit by \$4,000 and the Saskatchewan dependent child amount by \$2,000. In 2011 we further increased the basic and spousal personal tax credit amounts by \$1,000 and Saskatchewan dependent child amount by \$500. In total this government . . . Increases to these personal credit amounts are providing over \$300 million in annual tax savings and have eliminated provincial income taxes for almost 112,000 Saskatchewan residents.

To the member from Saskatoon Centre: do you agree this is a good step to reducing poverty, and if not, what exactly would you do?

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

Mr. Forbes: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's about connecting the dots, connecting the dots. And this is what The StarPhoenix, Poverty Costs, poverty-free Saskatoon, many, many community-based organizations are calling for things that make sense. But one of the programs that he didn't talk about is our basic living allowance for people on social assistance. Do you know when the last time that was increased, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The last time it was increased was 2007. That's a shameful record on their side.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

Mr. McCall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the independent officers of this legislature, we look to them for a great deal of guidance on many different issues. So when the Children's Advocate comes forward and says that this government should be providing a comprehensive anti-poverty plan, you'd think the government would listen to the Children's Advocate.

My question to the member from P.A. Northcote: why are they disagreeing with the Children's Advocate in his call for a comprehensive anti-poverty plan?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Ms. Jurgens: I thank the member opposite for that question. Our actions speak louder than any rhetoric that the NDP throw. Our actions have, from Stats Canada information, indicated that between 2006 and 2011, there is now a 50 per cent reduction in the percentage of persons in low income. Our actions are creating a reduction in poverty in our province. We walk the talk. For example, we have a provincial training allowance which provides income support for adult students with low income in basic education and related studies. Mr. Speaker, we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Moose Jaw North.

Mr. Michelson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the NDP, our government isn't afraid of setting targets and implementing actions to achieve them. Our province's population has grown and continues to grow and prosper. But despite this growth in numbers, there are over 23,000 fewer people living on low incomes and 8,000 fewer children living in low-income families. We've reduced the number of low-income people more than any other province in Canada. In fact since 2006, the number of low-income people has been reduced by half. On top of that, food bank usage rose by 94 per cent during the . . . [inaudible] . . . period under the NDP. Their record makes it hard to take lessons from any of those members.

To the member from Saskatoon Nutana: what was the NDP's comprehensive plan to reduce poverty during their 16 years of government?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Sproule: I thank the member for his question, although it was difficult to get to it, I guess, when he had his speech prepared. But what the problem here, and what we're

hearing from these government members is the complete failure to recognize the ideology that's driving their whole approach and the fact that the Children's Advocate has called them on that. And they don't even want to address that issue.

My colleague from Saskatoon Centre continually raises the issue. We see the Minister of Social Services' failure to even comprehend what the problem is, and that's what's scary. We see that in their plans they talk about income levels, and they focus on income levels as the only solution to poverty amelioration. But clearly there's no focus on prevention strategies. That's the failure of this government and that's what the Children's Advocate is trying to point out.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the member from Prince Albert Northcote. And one of the things I think is important is we talked about home ownership. And we're going to ask her to do a little bit of work here, in the sense of asking her if she'd lift a finger to walk over to the Minister of Social Services, use her finger to tap the Minister of Social Services' shoulder and say, can you kindly restore the rental purchase option program for home ownership for northern Saskatchewan families that have been renting for years and years, and ask the same minister, can you restore the programs for many working men and women in northern Saskatchewan and their families can finally achieve home ownership? Will she do that, Mr. Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Ms. Jurgens: I thank the member opposite for the question. Our record clearly indicates our government's propensity to act. Disciplined action produces positive results. Here's one of them: Saskatchewan offers supports to working families through the Saskatchewan employment supplement, the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement, and the child care subsidy. These supplementary income programs lower the welfare wall by assisting low-income families to make the transition out of poverty while remaining in the paid workforce. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley.

Ms. Ross: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our government's housing strategy of Saskatchewan sets out direction to provide better access to safe, quality, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income earners through the creation of new housing and improvement to existing housing in the 2014-2015 budget, included 9.2 million for first year of a five-year plan for the federal-provincial investment in affordable housing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This means that people within Saskatchewan will have an opportunity to live within safe, affordable housing conditions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a plan. That opposition does not have a plan. They stand and they talk, but they have never ever put forward a plan. This government has put forward a plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the member from Saskatchewan Centre: what is your party's policy to provide adequate housing to Saskatchewan?

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member of Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found that very interesting. First thing we'd do is have a minister who actually knew her file on housing. We have a situation where we have a minister who's disseminating . . .