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Appointments by Governments

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday this government defended the Minister of Social Services' decision to appoint her very close friend to the Social Services Appeal Board. This is the same very close friend that the minister travelled to Ghana and London with on her \$19,000 taxpayer-funded trip, and it's the same very close friend that the minister took out for a \$200 lunch at taxpayers' expense. And when asked how the decision to appoint her very close friend was made, the minister said, "They gave me a list and I said, 'If all people are the same, as competent, well then, put Rita on the board.'"

To the minister: how many other competent people did she pass by in order to appoint her very close friend and travel partner?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And to the member opposite, I had an opportunity last night to review the information I was given about Rita's background. Since 1989 she's been employed in the social work field. She has experience in the child protection field as a social worker. She's experienced as a child and family therapist in both the public and the private sector. She has experience as a community wellness coordinator. She has experience as an individual who has contributed to her community, and she's been involved in a number of organizations like the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, the private practice registry of social workers in Saskatchewan, Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I also noted that when it came to the decisions that were looked at by the appeal board, between 20 and 25 per cent of the time the appeal board decided against the ministry. I think the people are doing their work. I think they make sure that the families are recognized and that they are front and centre. That is my goal, to make sure that we have people that are competent in this area. And as far as having somebody who is

supportive of our government, 60 per cent of the people in the province . . .

The Speaker: Next question. I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, when asked about whether it's appropriate to appoint friends to these types of boards, the Social Services minister admitted yesterday that "It's probably better if they're not a real close friend of the minister." So to the minister: why then did she appoint her very close friend and travel partner as Chair of the Social Services Appeal Board?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his question. As we've stated, we look at the qualifications of people that we appoint to boards. And, Mr. Speaker, we're not even against appointing NDP [New Democratic Party] supporters to boards. Just recently we appointed Dion Tchorzewski to the new ISC [Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan] board. I'm sure the NDP know them.

But, Mr. Speaker, for the member opposite to be asking this question, if he wants to have some concerns about friends and family being appointed to boards, Mr. Speaker, the member for Saskatoon Centre, when he was a minister, appointed Perry Kappel, his very own ministerial assistant, to a government relations job at SaskPower with a salary range between 48 and \$79,000 a year.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that the NDP wants a standard for us that they themselves refuse to ever live by, Mr. Speaker, and refuse to live by to this day. Mr. Speaker, I have a list of NDP appointments. If they want to listen to them, I'm happy to read them out, Mr. Speaker. Tom Keeping, former NDP MLA, appointed to the Chair of a panel that mediates disputes on farming in 1997. John Solomon, former NDP MLA, appointed Chair, Workers' Compensation Board.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is up. I have more. Please ask me another question.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Social Services minister said yesterday that she thought it would be inappropriate. And it's interesting that . . . [inaudible] . . . going on this line, if it were an NDP minister that appointed a very close friend to chair an appeal board related to their ministry.

So what she is saying is it would be inappropriate for someone from a different party to do this, yet it's somehow perfectly acceptable for her to do it. To the minister: how does this make any sense? How come the double standard?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Central Services.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: Mr. Speaker, the NDP want to talk about a double standard. It was the member asking the question who appointed his very own ministerial assistant to

SaskPower. We have list after list of NDP supporters that the NDP appointed to boards, Mr. Speaker.

I would point out in the case that was referenced with the Social Services minister, Rita Crone was paid about \$10,000 for her work on the Social Services Appeal Board, a job that is a very difficult position, Mr. Speaker.

But if the members opposite want to talk about their own record, I have a list of gold-plated contracts that the NDP gave to their very own supporters. Bernie Churko got \$217,000, about \$30,000 a month, for seven months of work to manage flood response . .

The Speaker: Order. I think we would all like to hear the questions and the answers. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bernie Churko got . . .

The Speaker: Order. Will the member for Regina Rosemont come to order and stay in order. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bernie Churko got over \$30,000 a month for seven months of work to manage flood response at Fishing Lake and we all know, Mr. Speaker, the NDP absolutely failed on that file. Tom Waller — I know that they know him — got \$417,000, over \$32,000 a month, to run the NDP's Forestry Secretariat for 13 months, a five-person office. Wil Olive was on the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance board of directors at the very same time that his very own law firm was receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal work from Crop Insurance.

Mr. Speaker, again the NDP cannot stand there and demand a standard from us that they themselves refused to observe.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is that this issue would never have even come to the light without a whistle-blower tipping off the opposition because the membership of the current appeal board is not listed anywhere and the government wouldn't even release the details about the current membership. That's how secretive this government is. And I guess it had a reason to be secretive because the minister had clearly yet made another inappropriate decision. To the minister: will this government agree to post the ministers' orders like this online so it can be held accountable for its decisions?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Central Services.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: Mr. Speaker, I shouldn't be amazed, but I am. Every day that we stand in this House where the NDP make accusations against us, we answer their questions. We released all of our travel information just recently, Mr. Speaker, and I'm happy to have a discussion about NDP travel when they were in government because

there are some pretty interesting stories there as well.

But, Mr. Speaker, for the member from Saskatoon Centre to stand up and ask for accountability and talk about appointing friends to boards when he did exactly the same thing, Mr. Speaker, perhaps he can explain to the taxpayers of this province why SaskPower was on the hook for paying for his friend to be on their board.