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## Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

# DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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

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### Food Bank Usage and Social Programs

**Mr. Forbes:** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Social Services minister. How can she possibly explain that food bank usage in our province has jumped 20 per cent over the last year?

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** Mr. Speaker, we're going to work with the community-based organizations on examining why those numbers have increased. Of course we don't want to see increased usage in food bank usage. We have the second-lowest poverty rate in Canada, Mr. Speaker, which is very positive, and we are excited about that for our province. But we know that more work needs to be done, and that is why we are embarking on a poverty strategy, working with the stakeholders in our communities. And we're sure that there will be a lot of good recommendations that come out of that report.

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

**Mr. Forbes:** Well, Mr. Speaker, many of the organizations that serve our province's most vulnerable are struggling. We saw that SWITCH [student wellness initiative toward community health] in Saskatoon is having to cut back its hours. And now we're hearing that in Prince Albert the food bank will be shutting down its hot meal program because of a significant lack of capacity.

To the minister: when the needs are increasing so much, how can she defend the fact that services are being cut for our province's most vulnerable?

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** Mr. Speaker, we have doubled the number of emergency shelters that are available within our province as well as increased the amount of money that we give to emergency shelters. We have invested \$475 million to develop over 8,300 units

across our province.

What was the NDP [New Democratic Party] record, by the way, on housing, Mr. Speaker? Well from, let me see, from 1990 to 2007 they only increased shelter allowances twice, Mr. Speaker. We have increased it a number of times. Mr. Speaker, we have increased the amount of money that we put into social services by a substantial amount. The Social Services budget has been increased by 54 per cent.

We are seeing some positive results. We are now the second lowest incident of poverty within Canada. However, Mr. Speaker, we know that more work needs to be done. We're going to work with the community-based organizations, but we have a number of initiatives that we've already undertaken. And we're seeing some positive results.

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

**Mr. Forbes:** Well, Mr. Speaker, these are the facts that are happening in Saskatchewan today. We know that food bank usage has jumped by 20 per cent in this province in the last year. And we know that the manager of the Prince Albert Food Bank says that food bank usage in that city has nearly doubled — doubled in the last two years. And we know that almost half the people served by the P.A. [Prince Albert] Food Bank are children.

The rising cost of living is putting a squeeze on too many families here in Saskatchewan, but this government has untold millions for American lean consultants and Japanese senseis, yet it sits on its hands when organizations that serve our most vulnerable people are forced to cut back on important services, Mr. Speaker. To the minister: how can she justify such misplaced priorities?

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** So I suppose the member opposite is suggesting that increasing the Social Services budget by 54 per cent is a misplaced priority. Or is he suggesting by increasing the funding for housing by over 100 per cent a misplaced priority? Is increasing the funding for child and family services provided to our most vulnerable children a misplaced priority? Obviously, because when he sat in cabinet he didn't prioritize any of those initiatives. We have increased those budgets year over year over year, Mr. Speaker.

And going to the food bank, Mr. Speaker, the quote from Steve Compton in response to the report on food bank usage, he said, and I quote, "We've actually seen a decrease and, you know, a few months has gone by. We're encouraged that that points to employment opportunities and some relief in vacancy rates."

Mr. Speaker, he recognizes more work needs to be done, but he also recognizes that work is being done.