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Poverty Reduction Strategy and Children Living in Poverty

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were hoping for better answers to our questions last week and today, but we'll keep coming back to this because Jerry deserved better and we have to make sure these kind of tragedies stop happening.

Now, Mr. Speaker, new information this week shows that Saskatchewan's child poverty rate is getting worse. One in four Saskatchewan children live in poverty — one in four. That's shocking and heartbreaking. My question is to the Social Services minister: what does she have to say about this?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is referring to a Campaign 2000 report. And they admitted that they were struggling with getting data this year because of the different data collections that's been discontinued by the federal government. So they are using a different method in which to gather data, and it is questionable whether we're comparing apples to apples. However, if we use Stats Canada data, we have the lowest rate of poverty within Canada here in Saskatchewan.

We are moving in the right direction. We know that there's more work that needs to be done. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we have completed a housing strategy, why we're working on a disability strategy. We have a violence against women strategy. We'll be releasing soon a mental health and addiction strategy.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have just launched a poverty strategy, and we're going to be working with the stakeholders within the communities to formulate that strategy. There's names that the member opposite should know, such as Cory Neudorf, Alison Robertson, and oh, his friend, Dr. Ryan Meili.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's disappointing to hear the minister dismiss the reports that have come out this week because we all should be stepping up when we know that children are living in poverty here in Saskatchewan. We all have to step up. And she has, and we think this is good news about the poverty reduction strategy. But we've been waiting now for weeks for an actual announcement about how this poverty strategy will be implemented. It's been well over a month since she's announced that. What will she do to get that happening right away so no children will be living in poverty here in Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again I'm glad that our province is moving in the right direction and our poverty levels are going down. However we know there's more work that needs to be done, and we'll be working with the stakeholders to get that committee put together and get started.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, I find it passing strange this minister will stand up and declare that poverty rates are going down here in Saskatchewan when my questions last week, my written questions last week that are normally answered every six months, has been ordered by this minister. Yet she has the gall to stand up and say they're going down, yet she has no proof. She has no proof they're going down. So our question to her: will she get that strategy happening right away, get on it this week, and announce how it's going to be implemented right away?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — You know, Mr. Speaker, Stats Canada has the answers. And according to Stats Canada, there is 36 per cent less children in our province on poverty than when that member sat in cabinet when the NDP were in government. Thirty-six per cent fewer children living in . . .

The Speaker: Order. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Mr. Speaker, yet again . . .

The Speaker: Order. The member asked the question. Now listen to the answer. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Yet again, just so that everyone can understand. According to Stats Canada, 36 per cent fewer children in Saskatchewan living in poverty than when that member sat around the cabinet table when he was in government. What was he doing then? There was no poverty strategy then. There was no announcement. We waited for 16 years for an announcement from that member and we heard nothing, Mr. Speaker.

We have done a lot, and we know that there's more that needs to be done, but we are going in the right direction. We're going to work with the people on the ground. We will

get a strategy, and we will have initiatives in due course.