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Provision of Social and Affordable Housing

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The latest numbers from this government show over 920 people waiting for social and affordable housing, including over 200 seniors. And these numbers are just for the larger housing authorities, and that's not counting all the smaller housing authorities in Saskatchewan. My question is to the minister: how many people in total are currently on wait-lists for social and affordable housing in our province?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have that detailed number at my fingertips here in the House. I'll provide the number.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that at least 532 people are waiting for social housing in our province. Two hundred and one seniors are waiting for social housing. One hundred and eight people are waiting for affordable housing. But that's just the number of people who are actually on waiting lists. That doesn't include many others, including those that are desperately homeless in our province.

My question is to the minister: does this government have a rough estimate of how many people are in desperate need of social and affordable housing in our province?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Mr. Speaker, there's been a number of initiatives that this government's undertaken in housing to increase the amount of housing that's available to families and to individuals. That work has come out of the great work that was done to have a housing strategy, Mr. Speaker, and that strategy is working. The vacancy rates around our province are now coming to a more healthy level, unlike when the NDP were

in power and vacancy rates fell to less than 1 per cent and they did absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for families in 2011, on average province-wide there were 63 people waiting to get new social housing. These people waited five months before they got a home. Now in 2014 we've decreased the amount of people on this list by 47 per cent and decreased the amount of time that they wait by 56 per cent. Mr. Speaker, for seniors in 2011 to now, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we have seen the waiting list decrease by 74 per cent and their wait time by 65 per cent. There's more work that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker, but we are moving in the right direction.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sandra Brown runs the Métis Housing Group in Lloydminster and she says and I quote:

Up until the Saskatchewan Party was elected, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation was a leader, and innovative across this country. The Saskatchewan Party has diminished the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to the point where they are almost ineffective.

To the minister: how can this government justify diminishing Saskatchewan Housing Corporation to a point where those who are on the front lines say it's almost ineffective?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that that member stands up and asks housing questions when he sat in cabinet when the NDP were in government and did absolutely nothing for housing when vacancy rates were less than 1 per cent in some of our major centres around the province. How does he explain that? How does the member from Athabasca explain it? Because he was at the cabinet table as well when they were sitting in the land of Nod according to the article at that time.

Mr. Speaker, in Lloydminster since 2007 the province invested and committed to the development of 31 affordable housing units, Mr. Speaker. Do you know how many the NDP built in your Lloydminster in seven years, their final seven years? Ten.

We've increased it by 300 per cent.