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Social Services Expenditures and Responsibilities

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services claimed last week that she is not cutting jobs in the child and family services division of Social Services, but the budget documents clearly show a cut of \$5.6 million in salaries from the child and family services division. To the minister: why won't she just admit that she is cutting child and family services jobs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members opposite. If he looks at the budget document, the member will see that there is money being transferred from government organizations to community-based organizations. The member opposite knows that Dales House and Red Willow, the last two government-operated group homes in Saskatchewan, were closed at the end of the month and that we now have more group homes that are run in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, there are now about 900 spaces in the community. The last 16 that were operated by government are closed and, Mr. Speaker, that work started under the previous administration. The previous administration had all but 16 left, and now we know that the work can be done within the community, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, at a time when the minister's been cutting jobs in child and family services and elsewhere in her ministry, you would think she would show a bit more restraint. To the minister: why did taxpayers have to spend \$3,634.33 for a limousine service when she was in London, England for four days last June?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, the expenses that happened last year in England was

during a trip where I took not only to England but to Ghana, and I talked about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. And then when I was in England, I had an opportunity to meet with a number of organizations, including the ministers of Education, people from housing, and also people involved with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

I was very cautious of the amount of money that we were spending, but I also know that as a government we learn from other organizations. We talked to the disability community as well and at that time the conversations that we had helped us to direct our own disability program.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that the money that we spend as ministers are looked at by the taxpayers. I'm aware of that, but I'm also conscious of what we can be learning from other organizations.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services and one government official, the cabinet secretary, charged \$3,634.33 for limousine services while she was in London, England for just four days. That's eight months of social assistance and shelter allowance for a single adult. To the minister: why didn't she just take a black cab or the underground subway? Why did she rack up over \$3,600 in limo fees?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I am very, very much aware of the costs when I'm travelling. So is every other minister when we go out on the trips. And I know when we make any movements around cities like London, which I'm sorry I'm not familiar with, I do ask somebody to take me around to them. We had an opportunity to meet with a number of different organizations that have an impact on what we're doing as government.

When you can see the spending that we have done as members of government, it is considerably less than was spent by the members opposite, and I would dare to say that the result of what we're doing has had an impact on the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite can talk about me all he likes. I think what he should be asking is how we're making a difference to the people that are vulnerable in the province. And I'll stand up for that record any day.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Services and the cabinet secretary spent almost \$19,000 in total to visit London and Ghana. The Ministry of Social Services has no notes about the minister's trip to Ghana and neither does Executive Council. But taxpayers paid \$19,000 for her trip, including over \$3,600 for a limo in London. To the minister: how can she justify this kind of spending when she's making cuts from her own department, including the child and family services division?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to clarify the last statement that the member made when he said that there was cuts. Actually the budget for the child and family services last year was \$209,911. This year it's \$218,397. That is an increase, not a decrease.

Mr. Speaker, we also know that as a government the work that we're doing, especially in countries like Ghana where there is very little information about issues like fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, we know that in a province that's growing, we have an opportunity not just to talk about economic issues, but I think we have a responsibility to talk about social issues as well. I had an opportunity to talk to health officials, the Minister of Education, and various organizations there to talk about FASD [fetal alcohol spectrum disorder]. And that's something that's been important not only to us, but I remember being in opposition where the members opposite actually agreed to a bill where we're talking about awareness.

In a province that's leading Canada in so many ways, I am proud to be able to say that our province is talking not just about economic issues, but about social issues.