

SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

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

N.S. VOL. 55 NO. 18A MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2012 1:30pm

Housing Needs

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the low vacancy rate right across Saskatchewan for places to rent, the lack of affordable housing is a Saskatchewan-made crisis. That's why it makes absolutely no sense that tenants of social housing are being called and told they must vacate the premises. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because the Sask Party government, in the midst of a cold, snowy winter, wants to boot them from their homes. They want to sell these homes because that's apparently the cornerstone of their affordable housing strategy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the CEO of Sask Housing said the phone calls to the tenants were made in error. But why can't the minister admit the real error is the Sask Party government's lack of any of action on affordable housing?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, what the member opposite should talk about is the efforts that we have made in affordable housing. We've funded over 2,000 new units for \$182 million since 2007, and we've funded over \$114 million in investments, Mr. Speaker, to repair homes.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that there are people that are living in social housing right now with incomes, some of them as much \$100,000. We know people that need social housing are making a lot less money than that, so we sent out letters to individuals advising them that within the year, there'll be opportunities for them to move into another place if their income is at the level that warrants it. There are individuals who are making a lot of money — from 4,600 to \$9,400 a year — that we do not believe belong in social housing.

Mr. Speaker, there is more work to be done, and we want to ensure that people have a place to live that's safe and warm in our province.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: You know, Mr. Speaker, the error of this government to ignore the housing crisis will be one of the worst legacies of this Sask Party government. People in communities, large and small, cannot find decent, affordable housing, and the vacancy rate here in Saskatchewan, in Regina is below 1 per cent because the Sask Party hasn't made building affordable housing a priority. And there's been housing summits and forums, and still the projects are stalled.

Mr. Speaker, the planned sell-off of social housing lands squarely on this minister's desk. It is that government who wants to force people out of their homes. Why are tenants being told they should look at their options for a new place to live when the minister clearly should know these places don't exist?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that the member opposite knows that we're going to be spending \$344 million on housing through this government up to the year 2015-16. Mr. Speaker, that member also knows that in its last year, they built 58 units. Mr. Speaker, we know that the social housing that we have right now has got some tenants in there that have the means to live outside of the social housing units that we have.

We're going to reinvest about \$53 million into more multi-density homes within our city, but no one is going to be asked to leave the place that they're in right now until there is someplace for them to go.

Mr. Speaker, all the savings, all the money that is invested that we receive in Regina will go back into housing in Regina. We're going to be working with tenants on a one-to-one basis and, Mr. Speaker, the families will have the opportunity to buy these homes if they qualify for a CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] mortgage.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, living on the street isn't an option but until there are affordable housing options for people, the risk of turning people on to the streets exists. It's unbecoming of a government who claims to support Saskatchewan people to force them out of their homes. Until the options are actually built, it's ridiculous that people will have to be told that they have to leave their homes.

Now Sask Housing said the content of the calls was in error. But they shouldn't have been making the calls in the first place, and they wouldn't have been made in the first place if the Sask Party had any ideas about housing that didn't require the sell-off of social housing units.

Mr. Speaker, until there are actually affordable housing options in our communities, where does the minister think people should live?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I have told the member opposite that anyone that's in a social housing right now, if their income is below the \$46,000, they will not be asked to go unless there's another place for them to live. The people that have a higher income can look for other places to live.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would much prefer to have someone with a high income look for a house to live than someone with a low income looking for a place to live. Mr. Speaker, there are opportunities for people who have higher incomes to go looking. I would rather . . . A family that has got two children that are making less than \$20,000 a year needs government support, and that's where we are going.