

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. 30A MONDAY, MARCH 11 2013 1:30pm

Housing Availability

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the disturbing reports keep coming about how the Sask Party's ignoring the need to build affordable housing. On Friday the CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] released the February construction numbers of new multi-family housing. And the numbers are grim, Mr. Speaker.

Year over year Regina has seen a 70 per cent drop in multi-family dwellings and it's worse in Saskatoon where it's been a 91 per cent drop from February last year. And clearly the Sask Party's Throne Speech commitments to build 10,000 new units of affordable housing, such as apartments, is off track.

The CMHC says there's a huge demand and we definitely know that to be true, and the vacancy rates are dangerously low in our cities. To the minister: why has the Sask Party failed to keep the housing construction on pace with demands?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite should be looking at some of the other stats that we've had an opportunity to look at and to celebrate since we became government. We've had 4,988 rental units developed since we became government. That's 4,988. That's \$114 million in investment on top of the repairs that we're giving.

Mr. Speaker, we also had the highest number of housing starts since the 1970s; that's nearly 10,000 housing starts. And as far as multi-unit starts, they have quadrupled, Mr. Speaker, quadrupled since 2007. Mr. Speaker, we have an increased number of people moving in to our province and an even larger number of houses being built. In fact last year there was over 9,000 houses built in this province. Mr. Speaker, that is a huge number and we know that we have to be working not only as a government but with developers and with municipalities to continue that trend.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, having a good year for housing starts is a step in the right direction, but the problem, the problem is if that trend doesn't hold. CMHC says Regina saw a 70 per cent drop from 126 new units last year to 28 this February. And in Saskatoon, those multi-family units went from 173 last year to a mere 16 this February. When family dwellings — apartments and other multi-family units — have fallen, it's a clear sign the Sask Party is just not focusing on the proper priorities of decent, affordable housing for Saskatchewan families. Their short-sighted approach doesn't plan for our long-term needs.

To the minister: why can't the Sask Party make affordable housing a real priority and act on it?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Draude: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what the priority is for this government when it comes to housing. \$344 million is what we're going to be investing in five years. We know that that's going to create over 12,000 units and it's going to help repair over 24,000 units.

Mr. Speaker, we know that within our government we've got developers. We've got municipalities. We've got meetings with business people that are saying, where can we . . . what we need now is more developed land so that we can actually put houses up.

Mr. Speaker, we have 744 more family units in this province. We have 4,988 more rental units in the province, and we built nearly 10,000 units last year. Mr. Speaker, I know that the government cannot do it alone, so does developers, so does municipalities. That's why we're working in conjunction with each other and having the summits and an opportunity to speak together. The only people that aren't excited about the work that's being done are the nine members on the other side of the House.