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Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure and an honour to enter into the debate on the Speech from the Throne 2013. Listening to the member from Greystone, I almost thought the theme of the speech was, we know there's more work to do. And I think that's an acute observation on his part because they do have a lot more work to do. And he certainly acknowledged it throughout his remarks.

There is a lot of work to do. We have an awesome responsibility. We are very glad, very happy that people are choosing Saskatchewan as a place to call home. It's a great place to be. And we think that's a wonderful thing, but it comes with an awesome, awesome responsibility to make sure our province is sustainable and that people, when they come here and they bring their families, that they can expect that it's affordable, it's safe and that their whole families, including their parents and the children, are safe and well looked after.

So I'll get into more on those details as we go forward. But, Mr. Speaker, I think this speech in many ways falls short for the families and the people here in this province who have a right to expect more from their government. This government's been in power now some six years. And this government, I mean, we often hear this, they tend to skip a beat and want to talk about the '90s as the reason things . . . why they are hobbled and can't do the things they should be doing. But that's not quite true. It's their responsibility. The Sask Party asked for the job. They got the job, and they should deliver. And that's what people . . . that's their expectation.

Now before I get started on my comments and the body of my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to acknowledge several people. And of course, as we should do and we ought to do is acknowledge our family and our support. It's not easy being in the role we have because if we do our job well, we're out and about and we hear things that we should hear. And sometimes it's pleasant and sometimes it's not so pleasant. And when we have those people come up to us, I always say, you know, this is why I'm here, to be

accessible to people so they can tell me what's on their mind. And whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, it's our job. We asked for the job and it all comes with it. And we have to act with a certain class and a certain graciousness in that role.

So I do want to extend a thank you to my own family who have experienced this now for several years. They've been very supportive and they continue to do so. I want to thank my own executive back in Saskatoon Centre for being supportive as well, to make sure I continue to do my own work, and my constituents. I tell you, you know, I know, I know the member from Nutana said last night she has the best riding, the best constituency. I think it's the second best. I think Saskatoon Centre is really the heart of Saskatchewan. I think it's the best. I tell you we have, along Spadina Crescent, the most beautiful part of the province. When you're taking a walk along there, along the Bessborough and the churches, it's a beautiful place. And people often think of that image when they think of Saskatchewan. And I'm proud to represent downtown Saskatoon.

I have a very diverse, very diverse constituency because I also represent a lot of 20th Street. I share that with the MLA for Riversdale, 21st and 22nd. Real working class areas where these are the folks that really drive the economy, drive the service industries. And when I talk about issues, when we talk about labour issues, these are the folks that really put things together for Saskatchewan. They are the ones working in the mines. They're the ones who are working in the stores. Many of them have ties to agriculture. Many of them go up north. And many of them are in unions, many of them are not, but they make a lot of difference.

But I also represent some very wealthy people downtown, in the condos downtown. And sometimes they don't call me as often as they might, but that's what I understand. I think and I know that Bill Doyle, the president of Potash Corp of Saskatchewan, he lives downtown in one of the condos. A big deal when he moved up here as part of the commitment Potash Corp made. But he hasn't called me many times. I don't expect that, but that's okay. But I represent a wide range of people, I truly do, and it's a real honour. And I take it very seriously that we all want the best for Saskatchewan. And I think on both sides of this House, that's what we really truly do.

And as a teacher, I would often have that conversation with parents when they would come in, very unhappy about what's happening in the school. We have a common ground. We all want what's best for the students. And in this House, we want what's all best, what's best for Saskatchewan citizens and residents. That's our goal. That's our goal, and we take that further into Canada, and as a global responsibility.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to underline that when we see the exciting things that are happening downtown — whether it's in the arts, or whether it's in business, whether it's in social justice movements — when we have member statements, I'll highlight some of those. For example, Equal Justice For All, an advocacy group for those less fortunate, they're back in business. They've worked hard to re-establish their funding and that's exciting. I see high schools . . . I see Mount Royal that's done so well in terms of trades training and child care, providing training in that area. It's a real rebirth of that school. But I also think about E.D. Feehan, the exciting things that are happening at E.D. Feehan

and Bedford and the community schools in our schools.

So it's an exciting time. And it's an exciting time to be in our province because we are seeing some amazing things happen. And it's a good time to be here, but there are challenges because we know families are facing challenges daily that they think can be addressed by government and should be addressed by government and need to be addressed by government, but this government fails on those counts. And I will, I will get into it as we go forward.

So in many ways it's a disappointing speech. As I said, families are looking for more. They're working harder than ever, but they're not seeing this government step up to the plate and take responsibility. They're seeing a lack of vision for what it means to be a family in Saskatchewan and what it means to be a senior in Saskatchewan and what it means to be a kid in Saskatchewan. These are real challenges that this government needs to take on and needs to take on as quickly as possible.

And I think and I would argue that they should change their moniker, their motto, that there's more work to do. We know there's more work to do. I don't know how many times I've heard it today, that there's more work to do. We know that. Well we do know that. Let's get on with it. And that's what we're talking about with this Throne Speech.

So we see *The StarPhoenix* editorial from last week on October 24th, the day after the Throne Speech, and it says, the headline is, "Detailed speech offers no vision." And clearly that's the problem. It's more than just setting an agenda. This is where people get excited about seeing, hey I can get behind what this government's doing. I can support what this government's doing.

But it was more like a job jar of things that they pulled out of both things they're going to do — and I think of the Highway Traffic Safety report and that's a good thing, but that needs to go further, that needs to go further — but they're also pulling out things from the past. And people are getting this mixed message. Is that new money? Is that old money? What are they talking about here? It's like you need some sort of road map to understand what this government is doing sometimes.

But the other one that was interesting is this, and the member from Athabasca raised this today in a member's statement, and that's Bruce Johnstone's column from October 12th, 2013. And the headline is "Sask. Party growth plan adrift." And I thought it was a very thoughtful reflection on the past six years of this government and where they've come and where they're going and what's really happening. And I will quote from that column, and I quote:

From where I sit, the government's track record in economic development brings to mind Stephen Leacock's famous phrase "riding madly off in all directions." You could say it's been two steps forward and three steps back. A harsh assessment perhaps, but let's look at the record.

And really that's what we need to do. Now whenever this government gets challenged, it

says, let's talk about the '90s. Let's talk about the '90s. Let's talk about the record. Let's really talk about what this government has done, you know, whether it's Enterprise Saskatchewan, the cornerstone of the Premier's 2004 economic plan, the promise of Saskatchewan, all of these things. Where are they now? Where are they now? The film employment tax credit — where is that? What about the hostile takeover of Tourism Saskatchewan, the sacking of the CEO? All of these things indicate what this government's track record is.

And as Bruce Johnson talks about, and I quote again: "What it suggests is a government that [as he says] 'doesn't play well with others.'" Doesn't play well with others. "In other words, the Sask. Party doesn't like sharing power or tax dollars with any organization they don't have complete control over."

And so this is a problem, Mr. Speaker. And we have a real concern, a real concern about what is happening as we go forward in Saskatchewan, as we see record population happening in this province, but we see a government that's economic plans are adrift, adrift. And that's not us just saying that. This is a well-respected journalist in this province who's been watching both when we were in government and now that this party is in government.

So I think there is something to be learned from that column. Like really, what is the track record and what is this government all about? And I think the point about them not playing well together is something that we should all take to heart. So we have concerns, Mr. Speaker, and I'll go through this. And as a critic of a few areas, I have some observations to make about many of these areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've been talking about education because it is so important. It really, truly is important. It's an opportunity really, as I said, to make sure our province is sustainable. It's more than just meeting a need. This is a part of where we really speak to the vision of what we see this province being. Do we see a province of just people who are doing the basic industries or do we see an economy that leads this province, leads this country, leads North America? What do we really see for the people of Saskatchewan? And it's much more than just work. It's the arts. It's health care. It's all of this. So education is critically, critically important.

But we see a government that is chronically underfunded. The education system here in Saskatchewan has created a situation where we know there are students who are in hallways. We know that they're taking classes in boot rooms, that this is . . . The lack of funding has impacted the kids' learning. We know that there are cutbacks in educational assistants. We know that there are real challenges in terms of educational assistants making a real difference for those students who have special needs. We know this is a reality of far too many classrooms in this province. And we know particularly that there are specific barriers and challenges for students of First Nations and Métis descent. And what do we see with this government? We see a lack of willingness to really tackle this problem.

And in fact last year, on April 15th, we saw the release of this report, the joint task force

on improving education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Métis people. Do you remember that? That was April 15th, last year. Not a mention of this report. And this report was done by three well-respected citizens of this province, cost a lot of money. They were really committed to making sure that they would have an impact on the education of Aboriginal kids in Saskatchewan. But where is it? Where is it? It's not even mentioned, not even mentioned in the Throne Speech. Now I can understand why it wasn't mentioned so much in the Throne Speech a year ago because we were still waiting for it, but this is the time when it should have been incorporated into this year's Throne Speech. And it's not there. It's not there. Why? Has the government lost that report? What happened to that report? What's the game plan going forward with that report?

Aboriginal kids, First Nations kids deserve so much better. And they see this report being shelved, sitting on a shelf and, as they say, gathering dust. Where is it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I think this is appalling. And here we have an opportunity in a province that's doing as well as we're doing, and we have let that fall through the cracks. We've let that fall through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to just take a moment and talk a little bit about the P3s. And do you know this government is working very hard and we're hearing every member so far, almost every member so far, get up and speak in favour of this. So clearly they want to create the idea on their side that this is the answer, and don't think about it. Don't be critical thinking on this one, especially in education around schools. Don't do any critical thinking about whether this is a good idea or a bad idea. Just follow the lines, ideological lines around P3s when it comes to schools and bundling schools.

And we see a lot of people asking questions about, really, is this the best way we should be doing this? We know we need new schools. There's no argument there. We know we need to get on with the job. We all agree with that. There's no argument there. But are P3s the way to go? Just what we're hearing in *The Calgary Herald* where they're having some real problems.

And the minister talks about contractor fatigue, or there's just too much work out there and people may not be interested. And we're making a big investment. We're going down this road for 18 schools. We're committing a lot of money, so we better make sure we get our value for that. And we see what happened in Nova Scotia when they bundled 50 schools together and they decided the last 20 or so, they'd better — or 12 — they should do on their own because it was cheaper, because the P3 model was not working.

We saw what was happening in New Brunswick. And we saw what happened in Edmonton where we had these cookie-cutter style of schools. And we know in Saskatchewan, particularly in Saskatchewan where you see communities that have specific needs for schools that are different from each other, and a cookie-cutter model just won't work.

And so there's a lot of questions about this, you know. And I think that it's interesting that the Finance minister . . . And I'm going to quote from a column that actually came out today from Murray Mandryk. And this is . . . But we've known this, this has been the

thinking of the Finance minister. But this is how Murray Mandryk quotes, and I quote, “Finance Minister Ken Krawetz — when education minister — rejected the P3 model for the Willowgrove school in 2008 because the cost was too high.” He said, and I quote:

“It’s easy to say a P3 is a great idea in the first year when, in fact, over 25 years, it may not be such a great idea,” Krawetz said on Nov. 13, 2008. “So we’re not moving forward with P3s at this time.”

So that’s what one of the former ministers of Education said. Now we’ve had a few ministers of Education, I have to say, so we’re going to go back a bit here. But he was the first one and he took a look at that, and I think you need to look at what he’s saying about that now. He took some time. He travelled down East, I understood, to take a look, to see how things were going with P3s. And he came back and said, that’s not a good idea. And I think it was down East where they came up with that phrase, debt is debt is debt. There’s no way of hiding it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And sometimes people . . . And I know the member from Nutana really actually said this quite eloquently last night about debt and P3s, that sometimes people are attracted to them because it’s a way of hiding debt or putting it off to the side and it’s not counted. But truly we know the debt will come home because somebody has to pay, and it will be the taxpayers who pay. And so debt is debt is debt.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, we’ve been talking about our review of P3 school plans. We think it’s important to have an independent technical review of the government’s plans to make sure that we are getting value for money, that this is the best way to go, that we’re not making a commitment to a situation that will cause us a lot of problems further down the road. And we’ve got to make sure that we do that work, and I think a lot of people are asking the question about that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we’re going to have a lot of discussion about P3s, and I’ve got to tell you, this government’s track record when it comes to portables this fall . . . Now I haven’t heard many of the speakers from their side talk about or try to defend what happened with the portables this fall. But if that’s a sign of things to come, this is going to be the kind of message of what people can expect, we’ve got a lot to worry about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as there is a lot of problems ahead if this is what P3s mean. When this government bundled those portables together thinking they were going to get a better deal, and that’s just not what happened at all. People had high hopes and people said, we’ll play along. The school board said, we’ll play along, you guys. We’ll give it a try . . .

An Hon. Member: More of a bungle.

Mr. Forbes: More of a bungle than a bundle, that’s for sure. So I think there’s a little credibility issue here when it comes to this government. Now, Mr. Speaker, I do want to take a minute and talk about bullying. And I think that’s an important issue that we’ve all come to appreciate, that the time is now and that we need to act on it right away. And we were very encouraged this morning to see the headlines in The StarPhoenix that the minister, “Minister wants bully plan released.” And it was great to see that he says he

wants it to be released as soon as possible, and that's important that we have that.

And we know that since we've been calling for this — and I want to talk a little bit about what our record is and how we've been talking about this — but it's been over a year now, about a year that we've been talking about how important bullying is. So it's important that this government get on track and get this happening because our province unfortunately has had a couple of suicides in the recent past that we just need to say, we've got to resolve this issue. We've got to get to work on this and get it resolved as soon as possible. We cannot be saying, there's more work to be done, and we're going to do it in the months ahead, or we're going to wait for an appropriate timeline. That's just not on.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I know, and I just want to take a minute and say, you know, it was interesting that yesterday in question period I did raise this, and the minister had a couple of interesting answers that I just want to take a minute and reflect on, because I was a little surprised at his answers. And I appreciate the fact that he quoted our leader. And this is what he quotes our leader as saying, and I quote:

The Leader of the Opposition had this to say on Twitter over the weekend:
“Absolutely heartbreaking. I am committed to working with the government to ensure Saskatchewan does a better job of combatting bullying.” That was the member for Saskatoon Massey Place, the Leader of the Opposition.

So true. We are committed to working with the Government of Saskatchewan to combat bullying. We've taken that position. That's been our position, and that will be our position as we go forward to combat bullying so we don't see the tragic results in teen suicides or teen violence or what happens in schools. We have to stop that.

So I just want to underline that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I was a little bit taken back when the minister then said, we have until October 31st to file our submission. And I have to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and you've been here longer than I have — I was a little bit taken back because I think what's important to all of us here is the debate that happens on this floor. And I look at *Hansard*, and I honour *Hansard*, because it's a record of what all of us say. And that's where we come to share our ideas — on the floor of this legislature. We do text people; we do phone people; but this is where the public expects us to do the work, on this floor. We ask questions to make sure people get answers because they want those answers. And when we do our Throne Speech responses, that's our contribution to the work of the government. And so, Mr. Speaker, we have made a lot of contributions to the work of bullying to the Government of Saskatchewan.

Now the Government of Saskatchewan may have a Legislative Secretary, and we wish her well in her deliberations, and we hope that her work is fruitful and productive. But as an opposition, as members of the legislature, the people of Saskatchewan have paid us to do our submissions, to do our work on the floor of this legislature. And that's really important.

We do it in a public place, in this beautiful place, and we have galleries for people to come and see us have this dialogue, this debate. We don't do it by submissions. This is really critical, Mr. Speaker. And this is why we have *Hansard*. This is why this is televised. This is why we attend here, and we make it possible for people to attend to the legislature so we can have this debate. It's not just something as an afterthought.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was surprised when the minister . . . I don't know what he was saying, but I know the government has many, many researchers who read *Hansard*, and that's our . . . and this will be . . . And we have contributed to this dialogue, this debate on bullying for many, many months. And I want to talk about a couple of them today. And the one that I wanted . . . I mean there's three of them that I want to highlight. But the first one is when the Minister of Justice, on April 25th, wanted to go to the provincial-federal meetings about cyberbullying. And we had a special debate in the House that day. I hope this debate is not forgotten. It's in *Hansard*, and I'm looking at it right now. And this is what the minister at the time said, and I quote:

By pressing for an early report, the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers are sending a signal to Canadians that we take the issue of cyberbullying very seriously.

And we agree with that. We agree with that and we supported it in that debate that day because we wanted him to go to his meetings fully supported by this legislature, by this floor, by this floor.

Now this is what the Premier had to say, and this is what the Premier said:

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm grateful for the leave to discuss it, and [we are] grateful for the co-operation of the opposition when we asked if we could have this discussion just before we get into some other business on private members' day.

Mr. Speaker, I hope we will send a strong and clear message to the federal governments that they need to look at all Criminal Code improvements that could put an end to this sort of thing . . .

So the Premier even acknowledges that this is how this House works. We co-operate. When there's good ideas that are common sense, we work together. And that's the spirit in which we want to do this bullying initiative. So that's why I have that question for the minister is, why he's waiting for a submission. Our submission happened on April 25th. If they want a submission it's April 25th and this is what we had to talk about. This is what our leader had in that speech of the day. He said, and he talked about the work in Nova Scotia, and I quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Nova Scotia's also, Mr. Speaker, being proactive in combatting cyberbullying . . .

This year's *Speak Up: An Action Plan To Address Bullying and Cyberbullying Behaviour* lays out a solid timeline for new and expanded actions to combat cyberbullying. It's a multi-year action plan that combines more than 40 actions

involving police, schools, teachers, communities, health care providers, families, and government. So it's comprehensive, Mr. Speaker, and it's going to places where children are and where change needs to happen.

So we had quite a long, a good fruitful discussion on April 25th. So I'm hoping that contribution has not been lost, because it was meaningful and I think the Minister of Justice appreciated the fact that we took this, we co-operated with the government on that.

I also want to talk about the contribution that our Education critic made and this actually, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might find interesting, goes back to November 29th, 11 months ago. In fact exactly 11 months ago when the member from Rosemont raised the question in the House about what's going to happen about bullying and interjurisdictional work around bullying, and asks, and I will quote:

Mr. Speaker, the consequences of bullying are devastating including depression, self-harm, addictions, and suicide. I've witnessed these first-hand as a teacher, as I know I'm sure the minister has as well. We support the work that the province has done to raise awareness about bullying, but unfortunately it still occurs.

The Minister of Education said in mid-October the province could benefit from further coordinated national work. I certainly agree, and we also believe that there's important work to be done here in the province. This is an issue that matters to all of us, that causes damage that's simply unacceptable.

What actions has the minister and his ministry taken since mid-October to protect students against bullying?

So it's been over a year that we've been asking these questions. Now we do this because we believe all of us are committed to protecting our youth. And this is our contribution on the floor of this House. And this is really important to understand.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's what two of my colleagues had to say. And I just want to highlight that in fact we had an interesting visitor back on April 16th. And this is Halla Scott. I don't know if you remember the day that we had a visitor from one of the high schools in Regina here. And she had come because she really wanted to make sure that this government, through the Ministry of Education, promoted, acknowledged, supported gay-straight alliances in our schools.

And our leader here had been raising this issue for two or three weeks in April about this very, very important issue. And so what was happening was, the government was saying, we'll get to it. We'll get to it. But this grade 11 student who I think is a real hero for stepping up to the plate and saying, this is what the kids want. This is what the kids want. Now this is Halla Scott from Regina, and I certainly hope this government hasn't forgot what she was saying that day.

Again I don't know if she's made an email contribution, but she came to this House, to this legislature, and we often say to their legislature. This is her place to come and make a

statement, and so her government should listen to her. And to have the minister say, well the submissions are open until October 31st; you can email it, I hope he remembers to listen to Halla Scott. I truly hope that he does.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's been many different ways to make a contribution to the fight against bullying. And you've got to know and all the members on this House have got to know that we are committed to working with the Government of Saskatchewan if it makes common sense and it's a good, solid approach. It's our job as opposition to hold the government accountable, make sure they're transparent. But we are there to make sure our kids in our schools, in our communities, are protected. And this is the place where I want to say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it's a time for the response to the Throne Speech, and that's the way it's been in this province for over 100 years. I feel very strongly about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I want to talk, I want to shift to a couple of other points I want to say before we move on.

But I want to talk about labour. And I was again disappointed, actually more than just disappointed, about what was in this speech. Last year we had a record number of deaths in this province. We had 60 deaths in our workplaces — 60 workplace-related deaths — and this government fails to mention any response in the Throne Speech about that situation. That is shameful, Mr. Speaker. That is our number one concern in our workplace. Sixty deaths. Sixty deaths. We usually have between 30 and maybe up to 40, 44. Sixty deaths, but not a mention in the Throne Speech about fighting that.

Clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to make that a priority. In this side of the House, we will make that a priority for the weeks ahead. We have to do better than that. We just can't say . . . We just can't, on April 28th, have a day of mourning, acknowledge 60 names of people who've died, and then say nothing for the rest of the year. Is that responsible government? I don't think so. I don't think so at all. Sixty deaths in a booming economy like ours, we've got to do better. And you cannot say there's more work to be done. The work has to be done today in that area. Truly it's an important issue.

I also want to talk about minimum wage because, as the government would know and the minister would know, many of the people who live in my riding live on minimum wage. And they've already got ahead of the bandwagon by saying it's indexed. It's not indexed. It hasn't been indexed. The last increase of minimum wage in this province was last year. And the government made a big deal of rushing through the employment Act so they could get to indexing it. That's why, on May 10th, when we had this discussion in committee about what was the rush, the minister said, well we have to get it done so we can index minimum wage. They were hoping they could do it for summer. Now we're coming up to Christmas, and there is no sign of any indexation of minimum wage. So it rings a little hollow when this government gets out the PR [public relations] and says, we're indexing minimum wage when, I have to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have some real, real concerns about that.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also wanted to read into the record a very interesting letter that was caused by *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. The Archbishop of Regina, the Most Reverend Daniel J. Bohan, wrote a pastoral letter on work and worship to the Catholic people of the Archdiocese of Regina. This was distributed in the Catholic churches in Regina, I believe either on Labour Day Sunday or the Sunday following. And it's the first one where we've seen this kind of public commentary about a government action. And I would really encourage the members opposite to reflect on what the Archbishop has to say.

Now I have to tell you that I'm not Catholic but I did write all the churches about their concerns about the fact that this government was taking out the reflection or the connection with Sunday out of The Labour Standards Act, and what did that really mean for a province like Saskatchewan.

Now the minister would say at the time that in fact actually most provinces have taken out Sunday. And that's not accurate either. We know it's about half and half — half taken out the Sunday, half still have it. And it's how it's framed. We understand the human rights implications of that and I'm totally understanding and support of that. But I do also understand that our province has been built around the five-day workweek.

Schools operate on a five-day week, generally speaking. You can't take classes on Saturday. But Sunday usually is considered a day that runs right across the spectrum.

But I just want to, I just want to read parts of this letter which was so interesting that he circulated this or actually circulated through the churches this September.

Dear friends and co-workers with our Lord Jesus; [I'm quoting here, with our Lord Jesus Christ]

This past spring, the Saskatchewan Legislature passed Bill 85. This Bill made wide-ranging changes to labour laws in Saskatchewan. As Archbishop of Regina, I wish to remind all Catholics, but especially employers and managers, that it is important to consider the greater flexibility granted by the revised law in view of the moral question of how we are to live out our Christian commitment to justice in the workplace.

It goes on.

The place of ethics is supremely important as we seek the authentic well-being of people in the work place. Our legislators [that's us] need truly to be at the service of the common good of their people. Ethics enable us to create a balanced social order that is more centered on the human person and his or her good and thus promotes the dignity and rights of those who work. Every change in our labour laws needs to help our society move forwards in seeking just working conditions for all.

It goes on to say:

The growing disparity of income in our Canadian society is a pointed reminder of

the presence of this threat as the income of a small few is grows with noticeable rapidity while the income of the great majority stagnates. As we struggle to make our economy grow there is a noticeable tendency to reduce the human person to one of their needs: consumption. So people now are not only described but identified as “consumers.”

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to acknowledge and thank the Archbishop for . . . I mean it’s quite a thoughtful letter, and I would close with this. And he goes on to say:

In this way employers and managers can promote the values of human work, recognizing that a person is “more precious for what he is than for what he has.” And they can promote a “greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane ordering of social relationships . . . all of which supply the material for human progress.”

So that was Most Reverend Daniel J. Bohan, Archbishop for Regina. And I thought that was very thoughtful and something that we should all think about as we as legislators do our work here, and we do it with a strong sense of ethics about how we advance the social condition in Saskatchewan. It is about dignity.

Mr. Speaker, I know I’m taking . . . I’ve just got two more points on social services. I wanted to say that this report that came out this fall, *Out of Sight: How One Aboriginal Child’s Best Interests Were Lost Between Two Provinces*, not a message, not a mention in the Throne Speech about that. How did that happen? We need to do better. This is a big issue. I just want to say, last week was Foster Parent Week, and we acknowledge the good work that foster parents do. But I tell you, this is one of the biggest challenges that we have, and we’ve just got to step to the plate with that.

I also wanted to say, it was interesting that the member from Greystone . . . And I hear this so often, and we’ll hear this more from this other side, how they’ve worked so hard for seniors on the senior income plan. And I think that it’s a wonderful program, and it’s great that it’s been raised up, but I have this big question. Four years ago they talked about 18,000 seniors being on that plan. They were doubling the number from 9,000 to 18. Now it’s 16,000. So what happened to the other 2,000 people? What happened to the other 2,000 people? It was four years ago, 18,000 numbers, 18,000. That’s what the rallying cry was on this side — doubling nine to 18,000. Now it’s 16,000. What happened to the 2,000 seniors that were cut off the program? We’ll have lots of questions about that in the weeks ahead.

I want to talk about housing. And sadly this Throne Speech bundled the old messages that they’ve had, that they’ve brought forward but clearly that we need to do better. We need to do so much better. Here’s a story in *The StarPhoenix* just Tuesday, September 24th, 2013, when it talks about:

More than 20 per cent of Saskatchewan households are living in “unaffordable housing,” [20 per cent] which is higher than the national average and Manitoba, but lower than Alberta, according to the August edition of *Sask Trends Monitor*.

And Doug Elliott, the editor, this is what he had to say, and I quote, ““This is during a period when incomes rose quite dramatically, so this wasn’t because we had less money. It’s because housing costs have increased more than incomes.””

So here we have, Mr. Speaker, a situation that’s facing 20 per cent of the people in this province. It’s probably more because of renters. It’s even more than 20 per cent. But you have a situation coupled with the SaskPower rates that we’re seeing, the rate increases. People are finding this a real challenge in Saskatchewan when it comes to affordability — a real, real challenge.

The other issue I’m going to look a lot for: life lease, what that really means versus housing co-ops. And Housing First, we didn’t hear any mentions about that. Seniors, that’s a huge, huge issue. And I’m looking at the people from Prince Albert here. Last year there were four people who died over the winter months in Prince Albert of exposure. Now this is a situation where the vacancy rate in Prince Albert is 6.5 per cent, so it’s not because there’s no place to live, but it’s because of other challenges. But four people dying in a Saskatchewan winter in Prince Albert over the winter months, what’s happening with our housing strategy when that kind of thing can happen?

So, Mr. Speaker, I have some real concerns about housing, and affordability is a real issue. And the government can talk about their focus on the 3 per cent vacancy rate. We can look at what’s happening in Estevan where you have a zero vacancy rate. You can look at Prince Albert where it’s 6.5 per cent, but you have people dying on the streets because the housing just isn’t appropriate. So, Mr. Speaker, we expect more, and I think the families and the people of this province expect more for the province of Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I just want to say that we have an awesome responsibility. And I mean that in the old, classic sense, that this is a real huge responsibility to make sure this province and the people in the province are well looked after in a sustainable way. And there are challenges. And we see that there’s huge inequities, whether it’s income, whether it’s education, whether it’s care in our houses, care for our seniors in long-term care such as raised today with Sylvia Phillips and the situation that she finds herself. And we know that there are more seniors in that situation.

So there are some real, real challenges that we expect, and the people of Saskatchewan expect better from the government that we have now. We know this government can do better. It has the resources to do better, and it should do better. And it can’t keep delaying the job. It needs to get on with it.

We know that we’ll be hearing about the traffic report that was . . . the traffic safety report. We expect that there will be lots of discussion around that, and we support a lot of it. But I have to tell you that the member from Riversdale, who makes a very strong point about how we need to impound those cars of people who’s been drinking, that that can have a real impact. And we can’t understand why the government won’t step up to the plate and acknowledge that this has got to happen if we truly want to make sure our highways are safe.

Mr. Speaker, it is something to be able to be in this House, to be on this floor, to contribute to the discussions, the debates, the dialogue around the issues of the day. We expect that this government will step up to the plate, take its work seriously and responsibly, and act immediately, as quickly as it can on the issues that are facing our families. And whether it be the kids in the school and making sure that they're learning, that they feel safe, they have adequate facilities, and that bullying is not part of their reality, we can work on that as quickly as possible. We need to look after our seniors in a much better way. And we have to make sure our workplaces are safe.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'll be voting for the amendment — I think it's the one that makes the most sense — and voting against the main motion. Thank you very much.