

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, in rising for the first time as a minister to take part in the debate on the Speech from the Throne, I should like, first, to express the wish that His Excellency the Governor General continues his recovery and that it be a full and speedy one. I also wish to compliment the mover and the seconder for their excellent addresses and, above all, to compliment this House on its wise choice of Mr. Speaker, whom I know personally and whom I hold in high regard, as does every member of this House. Also, I should like to thank all hon. members for their good wishes. I appreciate their thoughtfulness and I trust this spirit of goodwill will illuminate all the debates in the House and in the committee relating to my portfolio.

In this new job of mine, I wear three hats: as Minister of State for Urban Affairs, as the minister responsible to parliament for the National Capital Commission, and as the minister responsible for housing through Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. In the time available to me today I want to deal with each of these areas of responsibility, if time permits and hon. members will allow me.

The urban affairs ministry is the agency which provides the communication links among all levels of government and among all government departments and agencies which have an effect on the urban environment. The National Commission has a special responsibility for the national capital area as an urban community which has a very special significance for all Canadians and of which they can all feel proud. In another sense, it is a model community, a showcase within which the results of imaginative and innovative urban planning can be displayed. CMHC is an agency through which the government fulfils its obligations to ensure that all Canadians have access to good housing and a healthy and satisfying community environment. It administers a capital budget of substantially more than a billion dollars, but it is not simply a banker. It is in fact an instrument of the government's social policy in the field of housing and community planning.

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During the past three years under my two distinguished predecessors, the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs has led the way in establishing a system of trilevel consultations involving the three levels of government at the national, regional and local levels. That system is a key element in our joint response to urban problems, and it is one of the mechanisms used to get more benefits, more cutting power out of our individual but harmonized efforts at managing urban growth. It means that the federal, provincial and municipal governments work with a common purpose, rather than at cross-purposes.

For the past 30 years Canada's rate of urban growth has outstripped that of every other western industrial nation and, if it continues at its present rate to the year 2000, we will be 90 per cent urbanized, with half of all Canadians living in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Clearly, this startling rate of growth is intensifying urban problems and spawning new ones. That, Mr. Speaker, is where our

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collective response must be directed—toward managing this rapid, unbalanced growth, not by imposing decisions on people but by providing attractive options. To meet this challenge, the concerted efforts of the federal, the provincial and municipal governments must be based on sound and achievable urban objectives, not vague theories or ill-conceived plans. I am happy to say we reached consensus on the general nature of those objectives at the second national trilevel conference in Edmonton last October.

We are concerned with the pattern of urbanization and the distribution of our urban population. We are equally concerned with restoring and improving our older centres to develop the kinds of services, housing and amenities they often desperately need to make them attractive places in which to live and work. But concern is not enough, and therefore we have developed many elements in our response to the urban challenge.

The Railway Relocation and Crossing Act, for example, has tremendous potential and we intend to exploit that potential to the fullest measure practical: to restore and revitalize our communities; to provide space for housing, for parks, for rapid transit corridors, for new commercial districts. This federal participation is in full recognition of and respect for provincial jurisdiction and with provincial priorities fully considered at all stages.

Another illustration is the new policy which now governs the management of federal urban lands and that includes a substantial amount of prime land in major centres. The federal government, as a major land owner in most Canadian cities, has reviewed its role as an "urban citizen" and defined a new set of policies governing the management of federal land and properties. We will ensure that the redevelopment of federal properties takes place in the light of their best urban use, rather than narrow, primarily financial considerations. These new policies will ensure that federal land as much as possible remains in the public domain. Further, local communities will be consulted during the analyses that will take place in planning the re-use of these land holdings.

Needless to say, the management of urban growth must take place within the context of regional growth strategies. They are as necessary to the effective handling of urban growth as is the trilevel co-operation in which we are actively engaged. Consequently, the federal government, through the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, CMHC and other departments and agencies, is involved in supporting the development of growth strategies for a number of urban regions, and it will support many more in the future as the provinces and municipalities formulate their plans.

One very special kind of planning is required in our port cities. We have a chance to reclaim our waterfronts, restore them to the use of our people and improve the capabilities of our ports to compete in world trade. The urban affairs ministry, together with other federal agencies, is examining the critical question of how port activities relate to and affect other urban functions. We have begun to do this, for instance, in Vancouver, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Halifax and Quebec City.

Mr. Speaker, I have given just a few tangible examples of how this government is proceeding with an effective response to urban growth in particular and to urban prob-