

Excise Tax

tion materials, which this removal of the tax would do, and building new houses. We are far behind in this area, and it is a national disgrace.

I am reminded also of housing in some of our downtown areas, particularly in my own riding of Vancouver East. We have hundreds and hundreds of people who are living in really desperate housing conditions in downtown areas. There are workers from the forest and fishing industries of our province who have had health problems, and many women who are raising children on their own who must live in these conditions. They are living in fire traps, old rooming houses and hotels, with cockroaches as constant companions. There must be programs to upgrade this accommodation, and to build new accommodation.

I plead that the kind of incentives, including the removal of excise tax on building materials, not be given in such a way that the values of them go to the landlords or the absentee landlords who own this type of housing. It should be done in such a way that it would be an advantage to the people who need the housing. They deserve it and they have a right to decent housing.

● (1740)

There is also the need for the removal of this excise tax so that we may have a national program to improve older homes. Such a move would help undermine the escalated pricing which occurs as the result of speculation. In many of the older areas of Canada, such as the maritimes, Ontario and Quebec, if not the western areas, there are many houses which the owners cannot afford to repair and, as a result, that housing stock is being lost. I am glad that the minister responsible for CMHC has mentioned this matter as a priority. I wish that he would raise some money for the proposal. Major emphasis should be put on the renovation of older homes.

In conclusion, we feel that there should be no excise tax charged to people who suffer as the result of natural disaster. Even more important is the necessity to remove the tax from general building materials and, particularly, from materials used in the construction and repair of essential homes. We feel that the government should get on with such a program immediately.

Mr. Gordon Taylor (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Halliday) for introducing this motion. Nobody has control over natural catastrophes. They are an act of God. I was very disappointed in the comments of the parliamentary secretary. In the first place, insurance policies do not cover natural catastrophes such as floods, tornadoes, prairie fires and so on. There is no way that people, even if they have the money, can protect themselves from natural disasters.

I am always amazed at the way in which we scramble and jump to help those in another country who suffer a natural catastrophe. It seems that we can never do enough for such people. This occurred recently as the result of the Italian earthquake. Surely we should have policies which give as much

to our own people as we are prepared to give to other people. Charity begins at home. I do not object to sending help to those in other countries who suffer a natural catastrophe, but I do object to the way in which we deal with natural catastrophes in our own country.

The parliamentary secretary suggested that the federal government could pay half the expenses and the provincial government could pay the other half. When one looks at natural catastrophes, such as the flood in B.C. during the Christmas season, one sees that millions of dollars must be spent to restore highways, railways, railway beds, bridges and so on. It has been my experience that once these expenses have been paid, there is very little left for the pockets of the people who suffered a loss as a result of the catastrophe.

A natural catastrophe occurred in my riding just a few years ago. While my home was not involved, a terrific flood carried away homes, filled basements with silt and ruined furniture. There was no federal government or provincial government help. Contributions came from private citizens. When these contributions were divided among those who had suffered, people who had lost as much as \$1,500, \$2,000 or \$4,000 in property received as little as \$75, \$40, \$20 for their losses, a mere pittance. These people had no way of knowing that the Red Deer River would flood.

The constituents of the hon. member for Oxford had no way of knowing that a tornado would hit their area. I saw the results of a tornado out west. It lifted buildings right off their foundations and carried them for 20 feet and dropped them on the ground where they would splinter and be completely ruined, along with the furniture. It is a terrible catastrophe and something which is very hard to believe.

Surely, after a catastrophe in which ordinary people lose everything they have, we should not give them mere excuses of how difficult and how much it would cost to administer a program which would merely give back the excise tax, which is all the motion asks. I am sure that we are capable, with our sophisticated bookkeeping systems of today, of working out the amount of excise tax which would be applied to such homes. I agree that this tax would not be enough, but it would help. It would also show such people who may have to rebuild and refurnish their homes, after they have spent a lifetime reaching that goal, that at least the government is sympathetic to their plight.

I have another suggestion for the government. When a home owner has lost his home as the result of a natural catastrophe, he should be able to deduct the cost of rebuilding and replacing what he has lost from his income tax. One may say that many people do not pay income tax. Most workers pay income tax, and it would help many people. I see no reason why the excise tax could not be applied at the same time. The difficulty is that when the catastrophe occurs, everybody is sympathetic, but as time goes by, very little of the help goes to the individuals to help replace their losses, and that is why I think we need a policy for Canadians which is based on the help the government is prepared to give to people in other countries who suffer a natural catastrophe.