

Supply

● (1240)

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact I am sure of my facts. The fact is that the Minister is going to be speaking to the luncheon. He was supposed to be meeting with the group privately and he called them to cancel, claiming that I was responsible because I called for this housing debate. That is a fact and he can check with representatives of the National Co-operative Foundation in Vancouver or anywhere else. He will not mislead the House in the way he misled the Foundation.

This is the first time we have had a full day's debate on housing in Canada. I am extremely concerned about some of the initiatives, or should I say retrenchments, embarked upon by the Minister and his Department. There is a new and narrow definition of "core need" as it relates to eligibility for RRAP funding. With the Minister's move to divest responsibility to the provinces, the Government of Canada will be washing its hands of the serious housing crisis facing communities across this country. If all of the Governments in Canada were as progressive as the Liberal Government in Ontario—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Copps:—I might not be as concerned. The Minister is going to be quoting some statistics. I can quote statistics from the housing program of the previous Conservative Government of Ontario. These are the most recent statistics available from CMHC and they show that the record in Ontario was dismal. I am hoping that with the initiatives of the new Liberal Government that situation will be turned around.

I know from calls and meetings and direct contact with people across the country that many Canadians are very frightened about the prospect of the federal Government turning over its responsibility for the delivery of social housing programs to provincial Governments. The people most concerned are those in British Columbia. We saw the evictions which preceded Expo. The provincial Government ignored the pleas of the Provincial Housing Coalition, ignored the statements made in this House and the questions raised by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner). It ignored pleas from across the country that the federal Government maintain a level of involvement in social housing which would guarantee a national housing framework. We have not seen that.

What we have seen is the federal Government cutting back on housing programs and suggesting that, by turning it over to provincial Governments, we are going to see an improvement. Unfortunately, the Government has not embarked upon a discussion of the dilemma now facing City planners. For example, the City of Winnipeg is facing very serious RRAP cut-backs because of the new definition of "core need". The city has pleaded with the Minister to change that definition and he has ignored them. Representatives of CAHRO have also pleaded with the Minister and he has ignored them.

We are seeing a return to the politics of ghettoization. That, unfortunately, was a development of the 1960s where we saw

Governments building public housing en masse, and making sure those eligible for public housing were lumped in to what can only be described as a social and cultural ghetto. We gave up that policy in the 1970s when we developed a mix of housing. We looked at eligibility for RRAP funding and said that, for example, people who are earning above the threshold of \$17,000 or \$18,000, or \$27,000 in the City of Toronto, were eligible to move into projects like the one at City Home in Toronto. That led to a good social atmosphere, a good mix of programs, and a better housing situation.

This Government, in the short space of 20 months, has developed a strategy which says that people who cannot afford to fully pay for their own housing should now be forced to move into ghettos. It has moved us back to the days when we ghettoized people who lived in social-assisted housing. I think that measure by that Government, without any debate or discussion; this redefining of the "core need" and depriving thousands of Canadians living below the poverty line of any hope of ever living in their own adequate housing, is a national disgrace. The Minister should stop laughing and start doing something about the crisis involving over one million Canadians living in inadequate housing. They have been ignored by this Government in its quest to turn its responsibilities over to provincial Governments and the private sector.

[*Translation*]

I think it is shameful, Mr. Speaker, and I know that many Liberal Members would like to take part in this debate to give their views on the national housing problem, something which is sorely needed in these Conservative times.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Reimer): Questions or comments.

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, I would like to address a couple of comments to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) concerning the questions she raised during her diatribe on social housing. She did not seem to understand the difference between private and public non-profit programs where, in order to be eligible, Canadians in need must be paying more than 30 per cent of their income for accommodation. She continually referred to RRAP, and then talked about a two-bedroom apartment. She put forward the proposition that someone in her home community of Hamilton, earning around \$16,000 or \$16,500, would not be eligible for any—I think if the "blues" are checked the word will be "any"—assistance from the federal Government. If the rent the individual or family is paying for affordable, uncrowded, adequate accommodation is more than 30 per cent of their income, that is one eligibility criterion for assistance under the new policy.

The Hon. Member referred to several areas of Canada with different income thresholds. The reason the program was designed that way is apparent to a blind pig riding a horse. It was designed for regional concerns. It is not the policy of this Government, as it was the policy of the former Government and the Member opposite, to centralize so that everyone in