

Private Members' Business

central activities of the band, including support for band government and the youth of the community.

This concept has received praise from every corner of the country but nothing has happened because there is no money and the elders are just expected to remain in their own home or on the couch in the living room of the home of their son or daughter.

The Ahtahkakoop elders' lodge was designed to meet certain needs. Let me quote from its proposal:

Currently the elders are living in relative isolation from each other and the rest of the band due to the remote nature of their homes and they are restricted in their mobility by age or disability. This isolation has resulted in incidents of mistreatment and neglect. There is no capability for native people to service the needs of the elders and infirm within their own communities. As a result the sick and the elderly are removed from their homes and family to be treated or admitted into facilities capable of providing the longer term, higher care required.

The Ahtahkakoop study and proposal was done in 1990. It has had no movement from the federal government since then. I might add that other proposals along the same lines have been developed on numerous reserves in my own constituency and across Canada, concepts that include the ability of the community to best meet the needs of the elders who are living within that community.

We have heard about the money problems in housing. If Sandy Lake or the Makwa Sahgeihcan Band in my own riding near Loon Lake, or the Sweetgrass Band near Battleford, also involved in wanting to build and support an elders' lodge, want to do this they have to use all of the money that is allocated to the Band for housing for three or four years.

That means that the only means available to properly treat aboriginal seniors on reserve is to take away all the renovation and all the new housing money available to everyone else on the reserve, including new families, returned Bill C-31 Indians and the disabled.

I would like the federal government to do some soul searching today in its deliberations on housing programs and its response to the need for greater aboriginal control and increased financial support. I also ask the government to consider the special and immediate needs faced by Indian elders.

• (1745)

It would be appropriate for the federal government to establish a new program that would make special financing available specifically for the construction and operating of elder's lodges so that the elders do not continually have to compete with others on the reserve for the housing dollars that do exist. The Minister of Indian Affairs has admitted that housing will be his priority in 1991.

We have heard the minister comment in the Chamber and to the media outside the Chamber about the royal commission on aboriginal affairs. When the minister was asked if he thinks the money is being well spent on the royal commission, his response was if he had that money to spend, he would rather spend it on housing. I think that acknowledges that even the Minister of Indian Affairs recognizes the priority nature of the crisis in aboriginal housing.

This is a new Parliament and there is a new government in office. The previous House was told by its own committee that action must be taken on aboriginal housing issues. At this early date, just one year into this Parliament, I urge prompt consideration and recommend that we cannot afford to wait for a better time to act. It is indeed, as the title of the House report stresses, a time for action. Too many people are suffering as we speak.

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak on the motion introduced by the hon. member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake on aboriginal housing.

I begin by thanking the member for bringing this matter before the House. I can assure the House that the government and I share his concerns. I can also assure the House that we intend to address this issue as quickly as possible and in a manner that is socially and fiscally responsible to Canadians.

As the hon. member has made clear, the housing situation in many aboriginal communities has become extremely difficult in recent years. In some communities the quality of shelter is truly appalling for a nation such as ours. In others the shortage of housing has reached crisis levels. These housing problems affect not only the elders, as was stressed in my colleague's remarks, but all sectors of the population including the rapidly growing proportion of young people.

A clear and decisive plan of action is required to correct these inequities which are contributing to many health and social problems on reserve, again as the member said.

My colleague is also correct in stating that in 1992 the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs recommended a number of very specific actions to address the shortage of adequate shelter in aboriginal communities. However, due to the dissolution of Parliament none of these actions were taken.

The election that followed the dissolution of that Parliament gave Canadians the opportunity to vote for change, for a new approach to issues that face our nation. As we all know, Canadians took advantage of that opportunity in an overwhelming manner.