

Supply

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the housing needs of more than a million Canadians who are under-housed, either homeless or living in inadequate accommodations, and the Hon. Member seems to be stuck on some architectural notion about L-shaped living and dining rooms. Given his defence of the Government's RRAP program and his unfortunately incorrect perception that those people who have been cut from RRAP are people who are somehow living in the lap of luxury, does he believe that it should be the right of Canadians like Mr. Dawson from Saskatchewan to have running water and a heating system in their homes? If he does feel that it is their right to have running water and heating systems, could he tell me why Mr. Dawson contacted the office of the Minister more than a month ago about specific funding requests and was put on a waiting list at a time when he was facing the possibility of construction during the winter in northern Saskatchewan? Are these the people the Conservative Government intends to cut out from RRAP eligibility because they are living in the lap of luxury?

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, that was spoken like someone who grew up in Hamilton or Toronto. When I was growing up, I carried in the coal, I carried in the water, I carried out the slops and I used an outdoor privy. In my generation, most of the people in my region lived like that. There is nothing inherently wrong with accommodation of the kind the Hon. Member describes. There may be something very difficult about it.

The Hon. Member may be describing someone who lives in a city and has health problems or she may be describing a millionaire living in a cabin in the woods by choice. We do not know. However, one thing we do know is that any Canadian who meets the core definition of needing 30 per cent or more of income to provide decent and adequate housing in the community is eligible for this program. There must be something very strange about the isolated case which the Hon. Member has presented to us.

Quite consistently in the House and in committee, we hear partial stories designed for media interest rather than any kind of considered public policy debate. We heard not one single, decent public policy principle enunciated by the Hon. Member in her 20-minute speech. That is typical.

Mr. Gormley: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to commend the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes) on his comments. I would like to offer a further comment on Saskatchewan housing. It is odd that the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) is speaking on behalf of Saskatchewan. As one whose constituency comprises fully one-quarter of the Province of Saskatchewan and who travels a great deal in northern Saskatchewan, I personally have a great interest in northern housing.

I would like the Hon. Member to know that last summer I took an extensive northern tour of 14 communities located above the 17th base line. There are obviously many problems,

both social and economic, endemic to far northern communities, but one concern that was articulated repeatedly was the concern for housing, first for its availability in very remote northern communities, and second for the construction and financing requirements.

At that time, I was able to approach my friend and colleague, the Minister responsible for housing, to talk to him about this, and we discussed the idea of having a northern housing forum at which all of the mayors and councillors from northern Saskatchewan communities could get together under one roof to talk about construction requirements, such as the suitability of log housing in northern communities, and about financing. I think the Hon. Member for Hamilton East should be very pleased to join with me in applauding the fact that on June 7, the Minister responsible for housing in all of Canada will be in northern Saskatchewan to meet with northern representatives and to talk about northern housing. I would like to commend the Minister for that.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased with that intervention. It identifies in a very clear-cut way that many people in Canada live in isolated areas, and when we talk about the North, we are usually talking about high costs. We may be talking about high wages and we may be talking about poverty, but we are always talking about high costs. Part of the genius of the Minister's program is that a person could be making a big wage but may indeed be needy if he lives in a high-cost area. We are trying to provide housing for the North, for the South, for Toronto and for Yukon. The Minister is to be congratulated for that attempt.

Mr. Heap: Mr. Speaker, apparently the Hon. Member was not here when I spoke today nor when I dealt with the matter earlier. In Saskatchewan, no money is available for rural RRAP. There is not one cent available to anyone, and that is the information I received from the Minister's office today. The money has been postponed and postponed. Even though the Minister said on Tuesday in an E-Mail note to all offices that the money is available today, his office had to admit that that is not true and the money is not now available. It is not a matter of some eccentric millionaire, it is a matter of anyone in Saskatchewan who might be eligible for RRAP but who cannot receive it today.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for not being here during the Hon. Member's speech, but I was working on an immigration matter. What I should do is to ask the Hon. Member if, when the money is available, he thinks it will go to the right people and if he thinks it might be available tomorrow. I do not think the problem has existed for very long. There is always an administrative lag.

It may very well be that people in Saskatchewan are not getting the money today, but will they be getting it tomorrow? When they get it, will it be going to the people who need it the most? The primary public policy principle before us is that when the money becomes available, it goes to the right people, those who need it.