

There are also programs for assistance to non-profit organizations, for co-operative housing assistance for neighbourhood improvement for rehabilitation of existing family housing for Indians living in reserves and a research and development program.

• (1640)

[English]

The last feature of these amendments, as outlined by the minister, covered the question of purchaser protection of homes. The amendments proposed will protect purchasers from the insolvency or bankruptcy of the contractor. In such cases, funds for the completion of houses would be advanced to the buyer through the mortgage insurance fund. The minister has stated that he expects to announce a national system of warranties for house buyers "before many months". Recent experience indicates that this is indeed a field parliament must look at closely. While I believe that protection against insolvency and bankruptcy are important I would like to see the federal government make strides to improve purchaser protection in areas which are clearly within its jurisdiction.

I realize that only 40 per cent of housing is financed through the National Housing Act and that housing is also subject to provincial legislation. The fact remains that builders are hungry for CMHC loans and that with its leverage CMHC ought to be in the forefront of exacting high building standards and eliminating shoddy workmanship which so often entails high maintenance costs and, at its worst, turns a dream house into a house of financial horror for the purchaser.

I recently read a booklet put out by CMHC called "What you should know about the inspection of your House". According to the booklet, and I quote:

The inspection routines are designed to make sure that the complete house will be adequate security for the NHA mortgage loan. They are not intended to police builders or to provide comprehensive supervision of construction.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that this kind of statement is not in keeping with the spirit of the legislation presently before this House. What we are interested in providing is decent housing at a reasonable cost. That is the prime objective, and if we reach that objective, NHA loans will be adequately protected. It is sufficient to say that the homeowner who has agreed to meet payments on a mortgage over a number of years, must be confident that a CMHC-inspected house means much more than that CMHC has looked after itself.

The question of purchaser protection can only be solved through interaction of provincial and federal governments. I am delighted that the minister proposes to pursue this matter with speed. But let me say that while additional legal safeguards for the purchaser will be most welcome, we all know the burden which legal action to enforce rights of this nature may place on low and middle income families. Strict enforcement through inspection by the appropriate authorities which would permit the identification of defects at an early stage would be a more satisfactory way of attacking this problem.

National Housing Act

[Translation]

Which is to say, Mr. Speaker, that the minister's initiative in taking the first steps to protect the purchaser is a most laudable one.

It is easy to see how far our concept of a housing policy has evolved since 1968. Not so long ago, the role of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was that of a banker. It was thought then that the way to solve Canada's housing problem was to build up a stock of available housing, rather haphazardly and without reference to specific needs. In the light of the changes that have taken place since 1968, it is hardly surprising that our total stock of new houses at reasonable prices for low income families is far bigger than similar stocks in the past. The initiatives that the minister has announced show how much progress the present government has made in this field.

A housing policy must offer stability, so that private enterprise, whose job is to build quality housing, can work in close collaboration with the three levels of government, whose job is to ensure that the new buildings go up in a healthy environment where Canadian families will be able to live the sort of life they want.

A housing policy must also have flexibility, if it is to adapt to our society's evolution. The measures that have been applied by the government since 1968 show that it has succeeded in combining these two essential elements of a sound housing policy.

[English]

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I take pleasure in rising to add my comments to the debate this afternoon. I shall again draw from my experience in the municipal field as I relate the act governing national housing, as well as the proposed amendments and the requirements of the National Building Code, to the needs of those in the care of municipal governments. In particular, I intend to refer to those areas which are sometimes deprived of special attention due to their geographic location. I am thinking of areas and municipalities, relatively small in size, located in the central and northern regions of our land.

At the outset, Mr. Speaker—and this may shock the hon. minister—I wish to say that even though the proposed amendments do not go nearly far enough to meet the needs and demands of Canada's population, they are most certainly a step in the right direction. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I wish to compliment the minister and his department. They have certainly recognized the need, and they have certainly been very imaginative in designing policies to fill that need.

However, there remain two areas of grave concern to me. Again, it is because of my involvement in municipal politics that I have learned to recognize certain shortcomings—the result of being frustrated so often in attempting to implement the national policies, such as they are. My first concern, then, is that we have not invented a workable solution to communicating to people in need of such programs and services the criteria for applying and qualifying.