

Edmonton Tornado

To those bereaved, our thoughts and heartfelt sympathies are with you at this sorrowful time. To those injured, we offer our best wishes for a full and speedy recovery.

Immediately upon hearing of this disaster, the Prime Minister of Canada telephoned Premier Getty expressing the condolences of the nation and offering the resources of the Canadian Government in providing whatever assistance was required. As well, the Prime Minister and I had the occasion to visit personally the area struck by the tornado, and witnessed directly the power and the fury of this terrible storm.

It is indeed difficult to find words that adequately describe the extent of the damage and the destruction caused by the tornado. The Prime Minister and I saw homes, trailers, rail cars and steel and wooden buildings twisted almost beyond recognition. Yet, in our conversations with those who endured the storm, we found that one thing had not been broken, the human spirit and the resilience of those determined to rebuild and to renew.

Mankind has not the means to prevent such natural disasters. However, we do have the ability and the responsibility to assist in the recovery when a disaster strikes.

Immediately following the tornado, the emergency planning teams from the civic, provincial and federal Governments swung into action. Resources were mobilized in an unprecedented, co-ordinated and co-operative manner.

For the federal Government's part, on-site actions were co-ordinated by Mr. Jim Hoffman, the Regional Director of Emergency Planning Canada. Numerous federal departments played a part including Canada Post, the Department of National Defence, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Health and Welfare, Employment and Immigration, Industry, Science and Technology, and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Specifically, the federal Government made Department of National Defence helicopters and ambulances available to provincial officials to assist the medical response. As well, emergency housing was provided by Canada Mortgaging and Housing and immediate accommodation was provided in a quick and orderly fashion. Some 62 families were given accommodation in this manner.

A victim assistance centre involving all three levels of Government was opened on August 3 as a single-window centre to help individuals and families. The centre registered losses and property damage, assisted with housing needs, provided immediate clothing, food and emergency financial assistance, and arranged distribution of various federal payments such as family allowance, UIC and Old Age Security, as well as unemployment insurance registration.

A second centre was opened in Leduc on August 4 and a special centre to assist employees and employers whose businesses were damaged also opened on August 4. Federal financial assistance will be provided under the disaster financial assistance arrangements and through Industry,

Science and Technology to help businesses re-establish and rebuild.

Throughout, co-operation with the provincial Government and civic officials has indeed been excellent. I want to express our gratitude to the Premier and the mayor and I also want to compliment the Hon. Dr. Ian Reid and the Hon. Ken Kowalski, the Alberta Ministers involved, for their efforts in ensuring a quick and co-operative response.

Canadians from coast to coast who saw the effects of this disaster on their television screens and in their newspapers have truly opened their hearts to the victims in a Canadian spirit of generosity and compassion. Whether it be those many volunteers who assisted in the immediate aftermath or those Canadians who have generously donated money, food and clothing, the response of individual Canadians has been truly remarkable and in the best tradition of Canadian generosity.

In closing, I wish to convey once again, on behalf of all government Members, our sincere and deepest sympathies to those who lost loved ones or suffered personal injury in this tragedy. I pledge, on behalf of the federal Government, to continue to provide all possible assistance to those rebuilding their lives, their homes and their businesses. We have already seen evidence of the determination and courage of Albertans in dealing with this tragic disaster. This Government will be there to help and assist in their efforts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1430)

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians feel great sympathy for the people of Edmonton. We grieve particularly for those who lost family and friends in the disaster. In large part our country is formed psychologically by our climate and geography. As much as any people in the world we have reason to respect the awesome power of nature. While over the years Edmontonians have endured the challenge of severe winters, they could not have expected at that northern latitude that, out of nowhere, a violent, unpredictable tornado could lay waste part of their community. No amount of experience ever quite prepares any of us for a disaster of that magnitude.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, we find a measure of comfort in the fact that Canadians from coast to coast reacted generously to this situation of which the people of Edmonton were the victims.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) will of course have our support in any measures the federal Government takes to help alleviate the suffering of the people of Edmonton. We also want to assure Mayor Decore of our full support.

While we know that as human beings we can repair and rebuild our homes, and restore our roads, we can never recover