

*Private Members' Business*

The newspapers are also full of stories concerning the situation of the Big Cove Band in New Brunswick where the council has reported that it has more than 500 people on a waiting list for housing. The band council has said that the response of the minister of Indian affairs to their problem—Indian affairs approved the construction of six new units this year, if you can believe this—is criminal.

Earlier I referred to the report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, an all party committee that travelled extensively and heard from First Nations people throughout Canada. I urge all members and particularly government members to have a look at this important and definitive report. Despite the fact that committee members expressed a sense of sorrow and helplessness in some of what they saw and heard, they worked to write a report with recommendations “intended to provide a path to resolve the housing problems that exist for native Canadians in order that they may achieve suitable, adequate and affordable housing”.

Prior to writing the recommendations the committee noted: “There is inflexibility in federal housing programs, limited economic spinoffs for aboriginal and northern communities, lack of co-ordination between governments and programs, and difficulties assessing programs”.

The committee went a long way to resolving these problems. First, the committee recommended that the federal government conclude the review of aboriginal housing that has been kicking around the department of Indian affairs since 1975 and to get on with the business of addressing the problems that are all too evident.

Second, the committee recommended that the government deliver all its funding for aboriginal housing through one agency and then transfer control of housing programs along with sufficient resources to aboriginal people.

An important part of the solution is sufficient resources. To this end the committee recommended that the necessary funding be provided. It particularly singled out the special needs of seniors, the homeless, the disabled and the victims of abuse. I will have more to say about this in a moment.

The committee also stressed that aboriginal people's cultural and practical needs have not been addressed in existing programs: “The committee recommends that the Government of Canada recognize that the only way to provide the flexibility that aboriginal people need to ensure the delivery of the kind of housing best suited to their particular needs is through self-government for aboriginal people”.

Every group that appeared before the standing committee urged aboriginal participation and control over housing programs.

Before I leave the work of the committee I want to bring to the attention of this House the words of just a couple of witnesses: “One of the things so very important in community life, whether in Sioux Lookout, in British Columbia, or anywhere else is housing. It is important because it has all the ingredients to make the family work”. That is a quote from Mr. Eno Anderson, executive director of the Shibogama Tribal Council.

From Bob Decontie, housing co-ordinator with the Assembly of First Nations: “Many of the communities have large numbers of houses that are overcrowded close to urban centres such as Calgary. We hear stories that there are 20 people in one house. These are things that have to be addressed. We have to address issues such as if you don't have a place to study what are the chances of you going to or doing well in school”.

Even Canada's Auditor General in his 1991 report criticized the federal government for its handling of Indian housing issues.

• (1740)

I would like to quote briefly from the Auditor General's report, 1991:

Inadequate and overcrowded housing, among other things, can contribute to societal and health problems, such as sickness, marriage breakdown, alcoholism and child abuse. The financial results can be measured in terms of higher cost of health care, social assistance benefits, policing and penitentiary services. Solving the housing problems on reserve could reduce the cost of health services and social assistance by improving social and health standards.

Again, here we are in follow-up three years later with a new Auditor General's report and still no action in this regard.

My motion today also specifically singles out the difficulties faced by Indian elders. I want to go beyond what has so far been debated on the issue, to look at the special needs faced by the growing population of elders living for the most part on reserve.

Non-Indian society has spent a great deal of time in the past 40 years developing a social security system that benefits our seniors. When it comes to aboriginal elders, we have forgotten they exist. From my own experience, I am proud of the seniors' special care homes that have been built in smaller rural communities across the prairies. When I visit nearby reserves I see nothing that compares. Indian elders who need special living arrangements or special care are often moved off reserve, away from their closely knit families and moved into the completely non-Indian environment in the nearest community with a seniors home.

On reserve where housing dollars are limited elders are frequently unable to obtain sufficient funds to upgrade their homes or move to a newer home because the money is not there to do that. In this case I would like to single out the work of the Sandy Lake or Ahtakakooop First Nation. Indian leaders have done a fine job of developing the elders' lodge concept where Indian elders are cared for in a family and co-operative way, given independence in their day to day life and included in the