

John's, Newfoundland, where we have one designated NIP area.

St. John's is unique in many respects, not the least of which is its housing stock. This is due in part to the fact that practically all the houses are of wooden construction. They are of a type and quality that is rare in North America. A large number of these fine old family homes are in urgent need of repair. As the gabled roofs and the bay windows rot, the occupant's income only enables him to go to the hardware store to buy cosmetics to replace the rot. That, of course, is no solution to the problem facing a large number of people who live in and try to raise their families in some of these old houses.

Having regard to the fact that in the majority of cases these homes are occupied by families with limited financial resources, it follows that with the absence of the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program or some other government assistance, these homes will within a very short time deteriorate to a point where they will be beyond hope as far as rehabilitation is concerned. That is why it is essential that the amendments to the National Housing Act which I propose in my Bill C-227 be accepted and implemented by the government as soon as possible.

I firmly believe that the government must recognize that in many of our urban and rural areas the benefits of the rehabilitation program are badly needed. Today there is hardly a major city in Canada that is not threatened with almost total destruction of older neighbourhoods under the guise of urban development. So-called progress has destroyed the old and unique and often aesthetically pleasing but deteriorating communities and has replaced them with parking lots, commercial development and municipal infrastructure designed to service industry and the automobile.

In many parts of Canada a visual sense of the past is rapidly being destroyed. It will continue to fall victim to the bulldozer unless and until the government assumes its responsibility to all Canadians, not just those who live within the NIP areas. In a large number of cities—and I can speak with some authority about what is happening in the historic city of St. John's—a lot of housing stock that should have another 15, 20 or 25 years of life is falling down. These homes are being threatened by the bulldozer and by people who want to buy the property and speculate, and are able to do so only because the occupants are unable to raise sufficient money on their own to bring the houses up to an acceptable standard.

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This is why it is important that the government should initiate a program extending the present arrangements, whereby Canadians living on low and middle incomes can qualify for assistance as is now the case under the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program under which a person can borrow up to \$5,000, half of which is forgiven and the other half of which is amortized over a number of years at a reasonable rate of interest. The only alternative presently open to these people is to try to obtain money under the home improvements section of the National Housing Act. I am finding that in my own city the banks are not co-operating as they should with people who apply for assistance under this section of the act. The banks are

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endeavouring to persuade them to apply for a conventional loan at the regular rate of interest.

I think this is grossly unfair since people in the income brackets I have mentioned find it extremely difficult to pay off their loans even at the rate of interest prescribed in the Home Improvement Loans Guarantee Act. They are being invited to borrow money at higher rates and this, to my mind, borders on the criminal. Be this as it may, the home improvement section of the National Housing Act is not working: it is not filling the role it was intended to fill. The people I have in mind are not financially capable of meeting the payments or of retiring even a \$5,000 loan in a reasonably short amortization period when it bears the rate of interest regularly charged by the chartered banks.

Not all our people wish to live in suburbia. Not all our people wish to live in new bungalows in subdivisions. Many Canadians still want to live in the older parts of our cities. Some of them cannot afford cars; they cannot afford the cost of private transportation to their jobs. I think it essential that they should be given an opportunity to remain in the neighbourhoods with which they are familiar and which are convenient to them. This is why it is important that serious consideration be given to removing the discrimination which presently exists.

There is widespread approval of the principle that all Canadians are entitled to decent housing. Why should people in all parts of our cities not be entitled to the assistance in rehabilitation of housing which is now available to those living in designated NIP areas? In Newfoundland, where approximately 500,000 people live, I can only think of two designated neighbourhood improvement areas. One is in the riding of my hon. friend from Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), at Cornerbrook, and the other is in St. John's West, the constituency which I represent. No one in other parts of the province can avail themselves of this assistance.

I realize there are certain exceptions and that the governor in council has the power to designate other areas, but this arrangement is not working either. This morning I had occasion to talk with a person who worked with CMHC in a rather senior capacity. He told me his office was swamped with people trying to get assistance under the rehabilitation section of the National Housing Act to enable them to undertake necessary repairs to their homes. They had to be turned down because only those living in designated areas could receive assistance.

In conclusion, I would again strongly recommend that the government and its supporters allow this motion to come to a vote. It is important for the future welfare of a large number of Canadians: I believe there are around a million who are living in homes under conditions which are unacceptable. In St. John's, I suggest there are a couple of thousand houses which are not up to acceptable Canadian average standards. These are homes which could, without any great expenditure, be brought up to an acceptable standard and provide another 15 or 20 years of usefulness with a little help from the government along the lines of that provided under the RRAP program. I hope the government will see fit to accept the proposal I am making, and that having done so it will implement the changes in the act as soon as possible to enable people to provide themselves and their families with better accommodation.