

Discussion on Housing

President of the Treasury Board) for committee of supply and the amendment of Mr. Chatterton (p. 2710).

HOUSING—ALLEGED FAILURE OF
GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. J. B. Stewart (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, we have before us this afternoon a motion to the effect that the present government does not enjoy the confidence of this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stewart: I see, Mr. Speaker, that I have summed up the situation reasonably accurately. The arguments put forward by hon. gentlemen opposite in support of their motion have centred around the important problem of housing. The house is being told by the opposition that the high cost of housing can be traced to high expenditures made by the government. The high cost of land for building, the high cost of developing building lots, the high cost of building materials and the high cost of labour for construction we are being told can be traced to expenditures made by the government through such things as higher pensions, assistance to education, additional payments to provinces and the like.

We are being told that the genuine top priority in the Canadian political spectrum in the last five years ought to have been housing, and that this genuine top priority has been neglected. We are being told now that more money ought to have been put into the housing field by the government, or that the government ought to have expended less money for other purposes.

At the time of the adjournment yesterday I had placed before the house figures showing the financial input into the housing field through C.M.H.C. during a span of years. The figures I placed before the house showed that this input has grown from approximately \$245 million in 1962 to a budgetary estimate of \$962 million in the present year. In the light of these accelerating expenditures we must assume that what the opposition is alleging is that less money ought to have been spent on other programs.

● (3:20 p.m.)

What would lend credibility to that argument of the opposition—indeed, the only thing that would lend credibility to their argument—would be if one of their spokesmen rose at this point in the debate and put

before the house a list of the major expenditures made during the past four years which the opposition now believes were mistakes. I invite one of their spokesmen to rise at the appropriate time and put before this house and the country just such a list of major expenditures. I refer to major expenditures, because clearly there would be minor expenditures about which there would be disagreement among the ranks of the opposition and perhaps even on this side of the house. We are talking about considerable sums of money here, so if their argument is to be of any importance at all it must rest upon a list of major expenditures they believe ought not to have been made.

The opposition simply cannot have it both ways. They cannot plead for increased government expenditure for various kinds of pensions, for greater assistance in the field of education, and for a better share of the Canadian tax dollar for provincial governments, and then say that these expenditures are improperly driving up the cost of housing. I invite the next spokesman or some other member of the opposition to resolve the dilemma in which their argument, as so far developed, has placed them.

The need for housing, the need for shelter, is so great that at times like this we are sometimes deluded into ignoring certain major, fundamental economic and social facts and considerations. What I want to do this afternoon is to put before you very briefly three or four of these considerations.

The first of these is that if the amount of housing land is limited and if the bulk of construction equipment and construction skill is being used, no additional amount of money poured into the housing field will produce more homes. All this money will produce will be genuine inflation.

Yesterday the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich quoted from the fourth annual review of the Economic Council of Canada. He referred to page 264 of that review, and I should now like to read the paragraph to which he referred because it bears directly on this point. The review states:

Of all the major sectors of the economy, none will have to grow more rapidly than housing—at least to 1970, and perhaps even throughout the 1970's. This is a matter of major national importance if a growing housing shortage is not to become a serious national problem. Greatly increased physical resources will therefore be required in this field, including a substantially enlarged working force with appropriate skills and