

Private Members' Business

The government's lack of action is indecent. The minister in charge of social housing is telling us his cupboard is bare and that we must wait for savings that the CMHC could manage over the next few years. The Liberals keep us waiting and waiting. They are in favour of a wait-and-see policy. They sit back and wait for some heaven-sent manna. We must admire the strength, courage and inventiveness of this new government.

It is not ten years from now that we need social housing, Madam Speaker, it is right now. All the organizations, all the municipalities, all the big cities are asking the government to reinstate and increase funding for social housing. The Liberals are deaf and blind. They have been in place for six months now, and they still ask the people to be patient.

We on this side of the House want the government to release public funds immediately so that we can start projects now. You do not have the money? Well, cut the fat, put public finances on a sound footing and get rid of tax shelters for the wealthy. If you had any guts, if you had the political will, you would do your homework and find the money.

In Quebec, the situation is more problematic because more people live in rental accommodation. The problem is more acute, more urgent. The federal government is renegeing on its commitments and the provincial Liberals are not putting up much of a fight.

Nevertheless, the federal government still has a role to play in this area. We in Quebec pay federal taxes and we are entitled to our fair share. We want the government to give Quebec its share of those taxes and we will take care of our own social housing. The Société d'habitation du Québec has all the tools and expertise it needs to develop its own programs.

Soon Quebecers will decide what their future will be. We will then be able to administer our own social and economic development. Meanwhile, give us our share and stop ignoring the demands of the poor and people living in substandard housing across this country. Patience may be a virtue, but not enough is enough.

• (1850)

[English]

Mrs. Georgette Sheridan (Saskatoon—Humboldt): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise in the House today on behalf of the Government of Canada to speak to this motion.

[Translation]

I am pleased to have an opportunity to stress the commitment of this government in the area of housing. This government acknowledges the right to adequate and affordable housing for

all Canadians, not only in Quebec but all over Canada. This is a most important commitment for this government.

I am sure every single member in this House thinks housing is important for our quality of life and for the prosperity of our communities.

Our government intends to keep contributing to housing and working hand in hand with its various partners so that as many Canadians as possible can find adequate and affordable housing.

This government also strongly supports social housing and keeps its promises but it has to consider the present fiscal situation.

[English]

Our approach balances the need to pursue fiscal restraint with the need to recognize and respond to the social needs of the more vulnerable members of our society.

The federal government is committed to a national co-ordinated approach to ensure that Canadians are well housed. The federal government has maintained its commitment of approximately \$2 billion in annual expenditures on social housing assistance. Through this funding we are able to provide support to some 659,000 low income households across the country. These include singles, families, seniors, persons with disabilities, aboriginals and fellow citizens who are unable to meet their basic housing needs on their own.

Given the difficulties presented by the deficit, this is a serious commitment that reflects the concern of the government for the plight of society's most vulnerable citizens.

Let me underline as well that these expenditures provide a powerful economic stimulus, generating considerable employment in communities across the country year after year.

As my colleagues know, we have taken immediate action to reinstate the residential rehabilitation assistance program. Again this is a program that helps low income Canadians meet their basic housing needs. RRAP grants are used to help people bring their homes up to minimum standards of health and safety.

The federal contribution of \$100 million over two years will go a long way toward helping low income Canadians make basic repairs to their homes.

This significant commitment of resources will also generate a much needed economic stimulus by creating thousands of jobs both directly and indirectly in the construction industry, real estate, manufacturing and related services.

[Translation]

However, to meet the challenges we are faced with in the area of housing, we need more than mere financial assistance. We need a commitment from all levels of government and from all stakeholders in the housing sector.