

Government Orders

I say to the minister with great sincerity that a lot of those individuals may be over the allowable limit a small fraction and hence denied the opportunity to apply for the grant.

I do not think there would be too many members in this House who could argue that one of the things that governments ought to do for senior citizens is to provide them with the necessary wherewithal in order to remain in their own homes. I think from a cost-effective perspective that is certainly the best route to pursue. In terms of attitude, in terms of quality of life or in terms of one's own well-being, they would prefer to remain in their own homes. But the problem is they do not have sufficient resources, either publicly or privately, to make the necessary renovations to their homes.

This is the point we tried to make with the minister's predecessor and it fell on deaf ears. In fact we raised this issue in the House and his predecessor dismissed all the recommendations and sound interventions made by all sorts of members of Parliament from the various political parties.

It is absolutely essential that within the next period of time, hopefully by September, the Government of Canada could avail itself of putting a much higher priority to giving greater amounts of money under RRAP.

We are talking about such renovations as new roofs on various homes. I know hon. members opposite, particularly the minister's predecessor in that portfolio, may or may not understand that senior citizens require them for their housing stock.

It may be the necessity of putting in a second wash-room downstairs in an older home. It may be a request to put a new electrical system into a home. It may be the addition of a ramp for a person who has to use a wheelchair, a cane or a walker. It may necessitate renovations with regard to new windows and perhaps a new chimney. Those are the kinds of things that RRAP has been able to do over the years.

I do not think there is a place anywhere in the country where the need is greater than that in Atlantic Canada. That is not to suggest that such a program could not or would not be utilized in other regions of the country. In point of fact I think the need has been demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that in Atlantic Canada RRAP is needed.

In my own district, in the county of Cape Breton, there is in excess of 2,000 applicants who are awaiting the possibility of making an application for the purposes of funding under RRAP to make the kinds of necessary repairs that I alluded to in my previous remarks, as well as on previous occasions to the minister's predecessor. However that fell on deaf ears with his predecessor. I would hope the minister will show more initiative, more concern for those individuals who are seeking funding under RRAP.

RRAP, as we know it and as we understand it in Atlantic Canada, could in many ways be enhanced by other government agencies. Perhaps later in the debate the Minister of Employment and Immigration will join in to give his views, but I am somewhat concerned that we have under his auspices a program called Community Futures. I would hope the minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing would share with his colleagues that a Community Futures organization in co-operation with Canada Mortgage and Housing ought to give careful consideration to the housing needs of a particular community, both in the short term as well as the long term.

However, if we talk to chairpersons of various Community Futures groups across this country, and in particular in Atlantic Canada, we find that very little—and I underline very little—is being done under the auspices of Community Futures. That is not to say to the minister that no Community Futures group is doing anything with regard to housing needs, but by and large they are not. I would hope the minister would give careful consideration to having that agency of the Government of Canada attempt, as best it can and within the resources of the federal government, to expand its horizons with regard to RRAP.

There is another advantage to RRAP that I am sure members must be aware of. I have heard my colleague from London East on numerous occasions and I know what a tremendous debater he is.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Dingwall: Hon. members opposite agree. He has made repeated interventions in the House to the predecessor and to the present minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing that moneys put into social housing, particularly those which focus on RRAP, the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program, add immensely to increasing employment opportunities in rural and urban Canada.