

Oral Questions

who is also the minister responsible for the status of women. I wish to pursue the questioning which has just taken place and press the minister in terms of last Wednesday's with meeting the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

While the meeting was a friendly one, the council was very critical of the minister's programs for women's training, especially as they failed to meet the needs of older women and women with children, stating that these two groups were virtually ignored. I wonder if the minister has had time to reflect on these specific criticisms, and in light of today's government announcement that the depression is upon us, what specific direction will he take in the programs that he has indicated he will be announcing to assist older women and women with children?

● (1440)

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I am not sure what announcement the hon. member is referring to, but I can tell him that as a result of the discussions we had with the Advisory Council we have, as part of the review procedure, established a very specific group to look at the problems raised relating to women's needs, particularly those of older women.

As I indicated to the Advisory Council at the time, it is my intention to try not to bring in single, individual programs to respond to those issues but, in order to provide for a proper comprehension of the entire employment needs of women, to establish a comprehensive program. It would be much better to do it jointly, rather than in an ad hoc way. That will be part of our plan in this review procedure so that Parliament will be able to consider by next fall.

Mr. McLean: Madam Speaker, the minister will know that the Advisory Council was addressing the minister's employment strategy which was introduced in this House, and they were making specific comments on its failure to meet these two areas—older women and women with children. Their comments were that it will do little more than any earlier programs and strategies.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I must remind hon. members that, especially on second questions, their questions must be brief and as much as possible supplementary.

Mr. McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question is: will the minister accept the council's recommendation that minimum participation rates for women be established before the initiation of any employment programs? Will he introduce quotas?

Mr. Axworthy: No, Madam Speaker, I will not introduce quotas. That is not the way to proceed. The best way to proceed is to provide guidelines for the counselling, employment and training of women. Once you begin setting quotas, you begin a system of reverse discrimination. What we must do in these types of programs is establish the kind of opportunities that are not there presently.

As I indicated to the Advisory Council—and the hon. member was at the meeting—the community services program that we established is designed to do exactly what they recommend, that is, to provide for additional support in the child care area and provide for opportunities for older women to come into the work force for the first time. If the program works as we think it will and as it is designed to do, we will then be able to expand the program and build upon it. However, these programs are introduced in order to test certain ideas. Once those ideas are confirmed, we will be able to build upon them.

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HOUSING

ASSISTANCE IN RENTAL SECTOR

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Madam Speaker, my question is for the minister of housing. Figures the minister released yesterday show that effectively private sector rental housing starts ground to a stop in Canada and we now have vacancy rates below 1 per cent in some of our major centres. The minister yesterday indicated that his response to that problem would be to increase the non-profit and co-op program by 5,000 units for approval this year.

Can the minister tell this House whether that is the entire program of the federal government for this year to help the rental housing sector, when rates are as low as they are?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, as hit upon by a number of people today, the response of this government is to achieve a number of things with our very limited budget in view of the large deficit. Our answer to the problem of areas of tight rental markets is to target our response to those particular areas.

We well appreciate that in a number of areas across the country the situation is quite tight. We feel, with some confidence, that with the input of all members of this House and the officials of the corporation, the response of the 5,000 units tailored to those areas which are particularly tight—and I know this from representations made from the opposite side—should be and would be a welcome relief to a number of communities. We think it is a modest relief, but such that it will indeed be welcome in many areas.

Mr. Bosley: Madam Speaker, I well remember the minister in the previous incarnation commenting upon speeches like that as being inadequate. May I direct the following supplementary to the minister. Will the minister now face one small fact about a mortgage deductibility scheme, that is, that what it does do above all else is encourage those tenants who wish to own to move out of apartments and own them? Will he face the fact that such a scheme would go much further to creating an increase in vacancies in rental housing in this country than an additional drop in the bucket of 5,000 units approved by his ministry?