

National Housing Act

and social limitations, the aim of government policy should be to generate sufficient housing stock of various forms so that all Canadians may exercise their freedom of choice as to the style and tenor of housing in which they live.

• (2020)

We need, above all, flexibility and adaptability which should be utilized when dealing with the various regions of Canada, taking into consideration the different problems and needs of each region. You cannot apply the same rigid policy to Newfoundland as to the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, western Canada, or indeed British Columbia.

We need the immediate creation of a new department of urban affairs. This department should not be handed over to the minister—I say this with the greatest respect—who is trying to do a good job. Housing should be the responsibility of a minister of urban affairs. We should make the CMHC responsible directly to the minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: I think that high interest rates have been one of the main causes of the high cost of serviced land. We should catalogue land banks by taking full inventory of all land surrounding urban centres which would be suitable for development and servicing. Above all, we should set up a planning secretariat made up of members of the federal government, members of provincial governments and municipalities across the nation so as to break down the bureaucracy which is slowing down development. We should transform raw land into serviced land so that development can take place now. Above all, as I said this afternoon, we need a liberal interpretation of the constitution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: For all too long the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and those around him have hidden behind the constitution. I can guess what kind of a fight ministers have had in the cabinet. The Prime Minister says all too often that certain things are the responsibility of the provinces and that he cannot rock the boat, yet I recall the great message which the Prime Minister carried across the country when dealing with questions pertaining to the cost of land and to housing. He said he was going to amend the constitution and make it serve the people, not leave those matters to legal interpretation. We need administrators who will interpret the constitution in times of crisis, such as the national housing crisis which we are experiencing now, to give power to the federal government to freeze prices, wages and costs. We need leadership to roll back prices.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Oh, come on.

Mr. Woolliams: My friend says, "Oh, come on". He must be satisfied with present prices, but I am sure the people are not. That is what we need—above all now, with the high interest rates set by the government, by the Bank of Canada, by chartered banks and followed by CMHC on uninsured loans. To this is added the 11 per cent sales tax

[Mr. Woolliams.]

on all building materials. I hope the minister will fight the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) and tell him that it is time we repealed this unnecessary tax which is placing an extra burden on all Canadians who are purchasing a house.

An hon. Member: Next.

Mr. Woolliams: He says, "Next". I do not know my friend's riding because he has never risen here to make a speech, but I say to him that I have made a careful study of this matter and I have no apologies to make to him who feels no sense of responsibility toward the people of Canada.

An hon. Member: Think of what you say, don't say what you think.

Mr. Woolliams: I am very happy the minister has agreed to the amendments that are now on the order paper regarding the setting of a ceiling on interest rates. I hope that some plan can be worked out. I realize that we must work within the constraints of the international economic picture, but we must set a ceiling on all interest rates in Canada so that people can once again afford to buy shelter and live with their families in dignity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) for seeking the floor before him, but I think it would be appropriate for me at this point to confirm what the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) has said about these amendments in that they have been worked out between us. The government supports amendments Nos. 3, 5, 9 and 11. Having listened to the hon. member's speech, I would hate to think what kind of speech he would have made if I had not agreed to the amendments.

Amendments Nos. 3, 5, 9 and 11 relate to putting a margin on the interest rate that CMHC can charge over the government's long-term borrowing rate. We agree that it should be one half per cent and, therefore, speaking for the government, I have indicated to the hon. member for Calgary North both in committee and in the House that we accept those amendments.

I do not want now to answer every point the hon. member has made in his wide-ranging speech which covered all aspects of housing. He indicated at one point when I spoke about the one half per cent difference that he wished there were no difference in percentage between the government's long-term borrowing rate and the CMHC interest rate. We will have the opportunity to discuss that matter when the next set of amendments, Nos. 4, 6, 10 and 12, are dealt with. I think there are very sound reasons why that suggestion should not be followed, and I know those reasons commend themselves to the hon. member and to members of his party.

With regard to the much wider issues that the hon. member raised, all I want to say at this point is that when we were discussing the very specific amendments which relate to the margin between the government's borrowing rate and its lending rate, I made it very clear in statements