

• (2040)

The reverse mortgage is a provision for people who own their own homes. These people have a lot of capital locked into their own homes. People perhaps have their own home as their only investment, but it is a very major investment. These same people may very well be living on extremely modest incomes. A lot of senior citizens are in this category. They are asset rich in their homes but they are income poor in the amount of money they have to look after themselves. As a result, even though they have this great asset locked in, they often have to live below the poverty line.

The reverse mortgage concept would allow senior citizens, and others for that matter, who have this capital locked into their own home to get it out while they are alive. They could still live in their own home, but get their investment out either in a lump sum, several lump sums, a monthly payment, or a yearly payment on a program basis. This would allow them to improve their own standard of living, allowing them to live affordably and decently while still in their own home.

There are such things as reverse mortgages now. There are one or two mortgage companies in Canada that provide for reverse mortgages, but other financial institutions are very reluctant to get into the reverse mortgage business because there is no such thing as reverse mortgage insurance.

This bill could very well have given the authority to CMHC and the mortgage insurance fund to allow them to insure reverse mortgages. I had hoped that this bill would have allowed that but, unfortunately, that is not the case. There will be a lot of Canadians right across our country who will be disappointed as a result of that fact.

I hope once again that the government, CMHC and the minister are looking very carefully and still examining the possibility of introducing a reverse mortgage insurance program. It would be a great boon to Canadians and most helpful to many senior citizens who are living below the poverty line and have this great asset locked in that they cannot access without getting rid of their own home and having to suddenly move into circumstances they do not want and which would be unfamiliar to them.

Government Orders

Finally, I would like to comment on a statement by the hon. member for London East when he was referring to the condition of public housing across Canada. I am trying to recollect from memory, but I think there are some 300,000 public housing units across Canada that are assisted by the federal and provincial governments.

It is quite true that a study found that there were things that had to be done to improve that public housing stock. By and large that study found that the public housing stock we have is generally in good shape, that the residents of that public housing are very happy and that it has been of great benefit to them.

I can say that there are people across this country who live in public housing projects, people such as Margaret Mitchell in Vancouver. That is not the Margaret Mitchell who sits in this House but another Margaret Mitchell in Vancouver who would be shocked by the comment that there is something wrong with public housing. She is so enthusiastic about public housing that she is the president of a public housing tenants association in Vancouver. She is so enthusiastic about it that she wants the government, CMHC and the minister to build a lot more of the same thing because it does such a great job.

The last thing I would like to do on that subject is to draw the attention of the House once more to the fact that about two weeks ago in the city of Toronto, there was an international conference held entitled the Organizing for Social Change Conference, sponsored by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres.

The delegates to that conference toured public housing projects in metropolitan Toronto. After touring those projects they made comments such as the following: "If that is inner city, it is nothing like we know inner city to be" said one American. "We do not see that in Cleveland." "I have yet to see any slums in Toronto."

That speaks for itself as far as public housing is concerned. It has been and continues to be a great triumph. There is no doubt that improvements can be made. Improvements can be made in everything and should be made. I trust that the minister and CMHC are going to be doing that. By and large, we have done an enormous amount in the area of housing in this country.