

National Housing Act

go of it themselves, how is this fund to be administered? It is obvious that the Government will have to have a large say in the control of this fund. But surely the institutions who put up the money would want some say in the administration thereof so their premiums, for want of a better word, can be kept to a minimum. I would not want to see that fund, as it builds up, used for government purposes. Their government would pay 4 per cent interest the way it does with the Canada Pension Plan funds.

● (1520)

A question that arises, Mr. Speaker, is, if the issuer of the mortgage-backed securities goes bankrupt or finds itself in grave financial difficulties, how will the Government exercise its guarantee to the small investor in the securities? Will the monthly return of principal and interest be made in a continuing manner, or will the Government want to keep to itself the option to pay out on a lump sum basis? I can see where that might be of advantage to the Government or the administrators of what might be called the insurance fund, if that is indeed the way the Government wishes to go about this program. Again, it would be necessary to hear the advice of those who wish to appear before the committee.

The third issue dealt with in this Bill is that of enhancement of the Rural and Native Housing Program. If I might summarize the provisions, the first is an increase in the funds available for these purposes. I do not know if this is included in the Bill, but it is certainly referred to in the Minister's press releases that went out with the Bill. The second point is the removal of the provincial contribution requirement. That could have good and bad points about it. The third is an initiative to allow subsidization of utility and fuel costs in remote northern areas.

I now have some comments on the Rural and Native Housing Program changes contemplated by Bill C-37. I do not pretend to know much about the situation as it exists in the provinces, so I will speak mainly of my practical experience in the Northwest Territories. It seems to me that the delivery of the services, whether they be health, education or, as in this case, housing, or any type of service, can better be done by the lowest level of government involved. They are the ones who are the most sensitive to local needs and conditions. When housing services are delivered to the public, my experience has generally been that the territorial government has done a better job of it than the federal Government. In the Territories this is done through the instrument of territorial government called the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Despite difficulties it has had in the past, this corporation has on balance done a pretty good job. It is constantly looked at by members of the legislature, and I understand another study is going on of this corporation. But it is a sign of the interest the legislators take in matters of housing and in design of programs, which by and large are delivered in an effective manner.

If the federal Government is to get involved in housing programs of this nature, then it is probably better that it be

through block funding rather than the actual delivery of services. I know that is very difficult to accept, especially by Members on the Government side, because you do not get the political credit and they are always anxious to receive that credit. If you just transfer funds in block from the federal Government to a territory or provincial government, you do not get that credit, but they like to think that they do if they deal with individuals.

As to housing in remote rural areas, I think one of the things that we should focus on is not so much the individual housing itself but the provision of proper municipal services such as water, sewers and paved roads. In much of southern Canada things are taken for granted, but in my area of the country there are very many residences that do not have sewers or running water.

The Minister of Public Works (Mr. LeBlanc), in his presentation this morning when this Bill first came up for discussion, talked of the need to improve health standards through improving housing standards. One way you do that is to have proper running water and sewers. It does not matter how fancy a house you have, you still have problems unless you can hook up to a proper sewage network. So perhaps a better role for the Government in these circumstances would be to help in the financing of these municipal-type services which, in the north in particular, in permafrost areas, are extremely expensive. It can cost eight to ten times more to lay a mile or kilometre of sewer there than it would in southern Canada. Perhaps public funds are better spent in this area rather than trying to do something for every single individual.

In the Northwest Territories, again under the surveillance of the territorial government, the SSHAG, commonly referred to as SSHAG housing projects, have been fairly successful. My predecessor from the Territories, a gentleman by the name of Wally Firth, advocated this type of program for some time. One of the very few things he spoke on in this House was his advocacy of building houses out of local materials using local labour. As a result of his representations and those of many more people, this program came into being and has been reasonably successful. The idea is that you get a grant of maybe \$15,000 to \$20,000 and build a house out of local materials such as logs using your own labour. That is the theory. Sometimes in practice the amount of government funds which have gone into these things has been way in excess of the amount stipulated.

These are some of the things I wanted to talk about. There was a lot more, but there is not enough time, so I will give you the benefit of my other observations in the future, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): A ten-minute period is now provided for questions or comments related to the remarks of the hon. gentleman. Are there any questions? Debate.

Mr. Gordon Taylor (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for giving us this opportunity to discuss housing generally under this Bill. Housing is a very important part of our life. I would not say everyone, but most