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we decided that we would not unilaterally impose housing policies on Canadians and on the provinces. The hallmark of the Liberal Government was to impose, unilaterally and without consultation, housing policies. I suggest that the results were somewhat wanting. That is why we undertook the most extensive and intensive consultative process throughout Canada when we came to office. Some 8,000 people and groups were consulted representing financial institutions, mortgage companies, social housing groups, co-operative housing associations, contractors, and all people who are directly or indirectly interested and involved with housing.

We incorporated into legislation the fundamental message which we received, that is, that all the housing funds of the Government should be directed toward those most in need. One can say that we have abdicated leadership because we have consulted. I take another view, as I think Canadians do. Canadians want a government which wishes to secure their participation and receive their advice on what is appropriate for all parts of Canada. We have put in place national policies which responds to the advice we sought. This is reflected in a tremendous improvement in the number of housing starts in Canada since 1984.

For example, in 1987 there were 246,000 housing starts in this country, the largest number of housing starts in the last decade. There has been an increase in housing starts in every year since the Government took office in 1984. We have had an average of 204,000 housing starts per year since 1984 compared with 141,000 in the three years prior to 1984. Sixty-two per cent of Canadians own their own home. Indeed, it may be fair to say that Canada is a housing leader and that if it is not the best housed nation in the world it is certainly among the best. People come from all parts of the world to seek advice from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on our programs and our policies. They see that this Government is getting a better bang for its buck in housing policy.

● (1620)

I might note, with respect to the rental market, that the national vacancy rate rose from 1.6 per cent in 1986 to 2.5 per cent in October, 1987. That indicates that with the tremendous number of housing starts and with government programs we have relieved some of the pressure in some places in Canada where there has been that adverse experience.

Let me turn to the co-operative programs with our provinces. It was suggested that there has been an abdication of responsibility and leadership in this area. We have formed agreements with every province in Canada, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, with a view to delivering more funds to those most in need. I say to the housing critic for the Liberal Party that we are the first Government to direct all of its funds in this area to those most in need. How does that constitute an abdication of leadership and responsibility?

She spoke at great length about the homeless and our failure to respond. I can say that 550,000 social housing units have

been constructed in Canada to respond to that particular constituency. I can say that during the past 20 years more than 400,000 houses have been assisted by way of rehabilitation and renovation.

I suggest to my hon. friend that in 1988 this Government increased its Budget by \$100 million, to \$1.7 billion. Again, all of those funds are directed to those most in need.

As a result of entering into agreements with the provinces, we have been able to lever some \$300 million more of provincial money to complement the federal program. The amount contributed by the provinces in addition to our \$1.7 billion means that more than \$2 billion of funds are going to house and help those most in need in Canada. Substantially more people are being helped through these programs than ever before.

Contrary to the housing programs of the previous Government, 30 per cent more Canadians who are in need are getting help by reason of the federal-provincial agreements and because of our policies.

My friend commented on the International Year of the Homeless. This Government made available funding in the amount of \$1.7 million for the establishment of programs which might serve as instructive for other programs for the homeless. We invited people from all over the world to Ottawa to explain how the global problem of homelessness might be dealt with, because the problem is not peculiar to Canada. Indeed, our problem in this regard may be less than that faced by any other nation in the world.

The message we received and the brunt of the report that will be made available is that homelessness is indeed a multidimensional problem which includes such causes as socio-economic, lack of proper economic and entrepreneurial skills with many of our young Canadians, violence, drugs and mental problems. All of these contribute toward homelessness and must be addressed by all levels of Government, not just one in isolation.

My friend spoke of the problem facing our native people. We agree with her that this has been a long-standing problem for many years. I suggest that Governments of all Parties have tried to accommodate this very difficult situation which is unacceptable to our Government, to all Parties and all Canadians.

There is much to do. Let me point out that 50 per cent of all the rural funds were directed to native people on a priority basis. There are 1,000 additional units each year to meet the needs of urban natives.

In co-operation with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, we have ongoing programs on reserves. Last year, 1,240 new units were put in place with an additional \$9 million in RRAP funds.

My colleague commented enthusiastically on the changes we proposed to the National Housing Act for mortgage insurance.