

of extremely bad housing conditions. This is most appalling among the children of many native families. With bad housing it is often very difficult for these children to be in good health so as to take advantage of the available educational opportunities. Without a reasonable level of education and health that one would like to have at home, it is difficult for many native people to obtain steady employment and the income that is needed to enable meaningful participation in society.

● (1610)

Good housing would also help curb alcoholism. For many native people living in miserable housing conditions, alcohol is too often used as a substitute and relief. It is a hideous crutch to lean on, but people in that desperate situation have few choices in life. When a person can scrape together a few dollars, he can choose to buy a bottle. He has very little or no choice, in most cases, over his housing situation.

When the native people first advocated the rural native housing program they envisaged other social benefits as well. More points in favour of a good housing program. The housing program would provide employment in areas where there was very high unemployment. For a long-range benefit, their participation in the house building industry would enable these people to acquire skills that would be of long-lasting value to them in entering the Canadian wage economy.

In proposing the program in the 1960s, the native leaders saw this as much more than replacing log and tar paper shacks with more modern housing. They also hoped that the program would be the principal vehicle for upgrading their communities and enriching the quality of life of their people. Let me briefly review a number of the broad goals and aspirations the native people had when this program was announced. It is important that we realize what native people envisaged if we are to understand the present housing situation.

First, the native people at the community level would have had the responsibility for planning, organizing and conducting their own housing activity. Local non-profit native housing societies or co-ops would be formed and would be the vehicle for the delivery of new houses, purchasing of existing units and the rehabilitation of housing units. This local society would mainly assess the housing needs in its local community, and set priorities. It would also decide on housing designs. This is extremely important for native people as their homes would help to preserve their lifestyle and traditions.

Time and again I have referred to a program that should be put into effect, especially in the Mackenzie district of the Northwest Territories. I have mentioned this in committee, I have mentioned it in this House on more than one occasion and in interviews with the press, radio and television. Even though a number of people agree that it is a good suggestion, it seems to be falling on deaf ears. That is sad, Mr. Speaker.

About a year ago in this place I suggested a program that I hoped the then minister of Indian affairs and northern development would look at for the Northwest Territories and other parts of Canada as well. I mentioned the Mackenzie district of the Northwest Territories because many people

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there believe it is a good idea and should be implemented. The program I have suggested would make use of a local, renewable natural resource in helping to alleviate the housing problem. I have suggested houses made with logs. All across the Northwest Territories, and the Mackenzie district in particular, there is a good stand of timber. There are many points in favour of such a program. First, it would be cheaper than bringing material from the south to the north to build homes there.

Another point is that the program would use a local, renewable natural resource. Log housing in the territories would be easier to maintain than a frame house; the maintenance would be reduced. Log houses would fit in very well with the local environment of the Mackenzie district. Such a program would provide local employment. The most important point in favour of a log housing program is that a log house lasts much longer than an ordinary frame house. I have made this suggestion several times. I understand that some people in the Northwest Territories government administration are generally in favour of it, but not enough is happening in the area to implement a program that would be of benefit to people in the north. Such a program could also be put into effect in other parts of Canada, with as many benefits.

Second, local native housing organizations should ensure the maximum involvement of the native people in solving their own housing needs. It would also help the local organizations in general community development. The native associations recommended that the CMHC provide professional personnel to assist in the establishment of native housing organizations, and also the development of native housing leaders to ensure the meaningful involvement of the native people in resolving their housing needs. It was an ambitious program and high hopes were expressed. Why is this program not working as it should? I have recommended before in this House that the government make a serious effort to determine why the program is not working. They may find out a few things that are embarrassing. However, the program could be made to work and it would be of benefit to a large number of people in this country.

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Where is the minister?

Mr. Oberle: I, too, would like to see the minister. I would like to tell him that never in my experience in this House of Commons have I seen a more disgraceful, arrogant and contemptuous performance than we witnessed here this afternoon.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Oberle: He left the ministry a few months ago because he was in contempt of court. Today he was in contempt of parliament, taking advantage of the privileges of every member of this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!