

Supply

It is important for all of us to recognize the need to improve housing within native communities. It is also important for us to recognize, that, through the joint effort of the Government and the Indian bands, very substantial progress has been made these past few years.

Over the past five years for instance, there were 14,000 new housing units built on Indian reserves and 17,000 rehabilitated. The National Housing Code standards have been applied to all new housing units.

Direct native participation to housing policy development has markedly improved these past few years. Most Indians bands also play a more active role in the implementation of housing programs within their communities.

The administrative changes to the program and an increased control by the natives over their own destiny have resulted in a definite improvement in the number and quality of housing units available on the reserves.

Almost all housing construction is run by the Indian bands themselves, using native labour and, whenever possible, native suppliers. The economic benefits and jobs created have had an impact on the community as a whole.

The overpopulation problem, therefore, has eased off. In 1977, on the reserves, there were an average of 5.9 occupants per housing. In 1984, this number has declined to 5.1, and we foresee that it will be further reduced to 4.5 by 1990, which is much closer to the national average.

Mr. Speaker, this means that every year, some 60,000 native families have access to better living conditions than the previous year. And I do not mean just housing but homes of which adults can be proud, where children can invite their friends, and where lasting family traditions can be developed.

Native people are also involved in the development of new quality housing construction procedures.

For instance, some residents of 11 faraway communities, members of the Island Lake Tribal Council, are now taking a course in high-energy performing housing construction techniques. Under supervision, these residents will build 9 new houses and will improve the insulation in 9 others.

We are confident that the project will show that remote communities are in a position to acquire highly energy-efficient housing at a relatively low cost. When the pilot project is completed, the students will make up the base group which will carry on with the construction of highly energy-efficient housing. I think that this is a way to enable the Indians to develop.

While substantial progress has been made, the Government recognizes the need to amend the provision of housing services in Indian reserves. We have launched negotiations with Indian leaders with a view to setting up a mechanism for co-operation in order to develop new approaches to the financing of housing in the reserves.

In addition to housing, Indian bands are actively trying to increase their control over social programs and education.

The House knows that welfare services come under provincial jurisdiction. However, Indian children committed to the care of foster homes are eligible to federal assistance when they live on a reserve.

Federal expenditures for the care of Indian children and families have almost doubled in the past five years, from \$35 million in 1981 to \$63 million today. Most of those funds are managed by the Indian bands.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, we note a substantial increase in the number of agreements on child care and agencies offering services to Indian families during the past few years. This shows the concern of Indian communities for their children and the survival of the family as a unit.

In Nova Scotia, for example, an agency has been set up to deal with the needs of children and families on reserves all across the province. The jobs will go to Indians and the agency will be managed by Indians. In addition to providing the requisite child care services, the agency will focus particularly on the preventive aspect of social services. Agreements on native child care in Manitoba and Alberta have also shown that Indians want quality programs that respect their culture.

• (1750)

Mr. Speaker, this Government fully endorses the resolution passed by Indian bands to provide for their own social services. When necessary, we consult with the native peoples on ways to improve existing arrangements. This is an area where it is essential for Indians to become responsible for their own future.

It is also important for Indians to continue exercising increasing control over elementary and secondary education. Thirteen years ago, the federal Government started transferring certain responsibilities for education to the bands. Today, 60 per cent of the Indian Affairs budget for education is managed by the local bands. Enrolment of students at the elementary level, school attendance and academic results have all improved dramatically during this period. About 80,000 Indian students are now enrolled in the school system. In 1984, the Canadian Education Association stated there had been a definite improvement in academic results and retention levels among Indian students.

More Indian bands are involved in administration at the local level, and more Indians are teachers. In Manitoba, for instance, only six or seven native people had a teaching certificate in 1970. Today, there are nearly 450. Increasingly, these teachers are incorporating traditional values and Indian precepts in their basic curriculum. Indian youth clearly have everything to gain from the bands taking over responsibility for education. Because of their commitment to local schools that teach traditional Indian values, parents and adults generally are also benefitting from this local autonomy that has renewed their pride and enhanced community involvement.