

41st PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION
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Human Rights

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from constituents of mine from the Ukrainian community and supporters of the Ukrainian community.

The petition is for equity and fairness at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. They call upon Parliament to ensure that the government ensures that the Holodomor and Canada's first national internment operations are permanently and prominently displayed at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in their own galleries, and that the government suspend any further funding to the museum until issues surrounding the governance of the museum are reviewed and addressed in a transparent manner.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Government Orders]

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Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the bill does not take into account the fact that the people we are discussing are human beings and that there are special cases. I would like my colleague to talk more about that.

I am thinking of some very specific cases. We have heard the government's outrage over the treatment of the former prime minister of Ukraine, who is in jail for fraud or something. Everyone agrees that the charges were bogus.

If she were to seek asylum tomorrow for health reasons or in order to escape certain death, because she will spend her life in prison and she has health problems, the government would say that she is a criminal who has been found guilty of fraud and she cannot enter Canada. If my colleague is unable to answer, I would like the minister to explain what he would do in that specific situation.

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine:  

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

If we give the minister this discretionary power without establishing objective criteria and relying on a committee, people who have a criminal record because they took part in protests or were identified as political criminals could be denied refugee status. In my colleague's example, the claim by a person who flees persecution and imprisonment in their country would be denied even if, after checking, his or her criminal record proves to be bogus.

Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I address the motion before us. Affordable housing has been an issue for a long time.

The member referred to CMHC which is one of the cornerstones in terms of providing affordable housing for all Canadians. It was created shortly after World War II. As soldiers returned and started families, the need for additional housing was recognized. CMHC in essence set the groundwork. Nothing has changed. Whether it was after World War II or today, there has always been a very high demand for housing.

With respect to this motion, most people would recognize that we need to support the housing industry in a very direct way. I would like to provide a different perspective. I was housing critic for the Liberal Party a number of years ago. I have some fairly hard thoughts and opinions about our housing situation. In some provinces there is virtually a housing crisis. In some corners of Canada there are housing crises, and they vary. On many of the first nations reserves there is a huge demand not only for houses but for houses to be fixed. In municipalities of varying sizes it becomes an issue of affordability because of the cost of housing, especially in some of the larger cities, where there is a need for the government to get directly involved.

There are many different ways in which the government could help with housing. Shelter allowance programs have always intrigued me. They were initially talked about by Lloyd Axworthy in the late 1970s. He advocated for the establishment of shelter allowances for renters. He focused on seniors and families. There is a strong need today to support programs of that nature. It is one of the ways government could work with the private sector to ensure there are more affordable housing units. That would go a long way toward addressing the needs of many, whether they are homeless or individuals who are living in other situations who are trying to find a place they can call their own.

There are many different organizations. **What I like about Winnipeg North is that it spans the spectrum. There are the wartime houses that were built, and just a few weeks ago I was talking to members from St. Mary The Protectress Villa, a wonderful Ukraine-run community housing facility. It was created because of the Ukrainian community in Winnipeg. It has provided homes, apartments with balconies, for a number of people in Winnipeg North. Its members have done incredible work in providing alternative housing for seniors who live in the north end. Not only did the members build the facility, but today they are looking at expanding it. They are looking for some support from the government, federal, provincial or municipal, to enable them to do that. That is the type of housing we should be looking at. We should be looking for organizations that are prepared to get involved with the communities, whether it is being involved in the expansion of a project or developing new projects or something of that nature. What I especially like about St. Mary The Protectress Villa is that it is managed by individuals primarily from the Ukrainian community. They have provided shelter for a good number of years.**

I could talk about Ivan Franko Manor, St. Josaphat Selo-Villa, or the Canadian Polish Manor on Selkirk Avenue. These are wonderful housing facilities, many of which rely on the Government of Canada to subsidize the units.

When we talk about the \$1 billion-plus that has already been spent on housing, that is not new money. We have been spending billions of dollars annually to subsidize literally tens of thousands apartments and housing units across the country. This is an ongoing expense.

Quite often there are agreements between provincial jurisdictions where the federal government subsidy is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80%, and I suspect it varies at times maybe even between provinces. In reality, individuals who live in such a community are obligated to spend somewhere around 30% of their household income on rent and the government covers the rest. This way individuals are able to have shelter. They can establish homes for their families and hopefully become more engaged in the economy. They might eventually be able to search for a permanent home and afford to buy a house.

It is more than just the issue of money. We need to look at many of the tens of thousands of units. Why are we not investigating ideas such as converting some of that housing stock where the government is the landlord and citizens are the tenants to ones that are tenant managed or housing co-ops? I would love to see the government play a leadership role and look at ways in which that could take place. There are so many units and it would be wonderful to look at the possibility of converting them into housing co-ops.

There are other ways in which government could directly get involved. We have seen in the past things such as infill housing. The housing stock has a profound and dramatic impact on an entire community. Two or three houses that are boarded up on one block have a negative impact on the whole block. Quite often a boarded-up house will catch fire or be torn down. This is where the government can play a role and provide the incentives, where possible, for infill housing. New houses pop up in some of the older communities which have a great deal of heritage and character. To do things of that nature would do wonders.

When we talk about providing more housing for our population and supporting low-income renters, we have to take a broader look and develop an overall strategy that takes into consideration things such as direct subsidies. This is a non-profit housing complex in which government provides the money to housing co-ops, to 55-plus lease programs, to the idea of infill housing. Also, there is the idea of shelter allowances, where the government would provide dollars for individual renters to look to the private sector for housing.

In conclusion, there are many different options. We need to see strong leadership from the national government and a sense of commitment that goes beyond the status quo in fulfilling what it is already obligated to fulfill. That is the money that has been spent to date. That is the status quo.