

***An update on Bill C-304: An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians:***

Good news; the need for affordable housing and targeted efforts to reduce homelessness was the focus of much debate in the House of Commons yesterday, October 20, as Bill C-304 was debated. CHRA was referenced by MPs during the debate as a key supporter of the bill, and proponent of the view that greater investment in affordable housing is urgently needed. As is the process, after the debate, the bill was dropped to the bottom of the order paper. It will now make its way back to the top of the order for a second and final hour of debate. We expect this will happen very soon, so stay tuned!

**Show your support for a national housing strategy and Bill C-304 by contacting your MP and urging them to support Bill C-304!**

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**Wednesday, October 20, 2010**

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Copy of part only...

### **Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker:

There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

### **Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP)**

moved that Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, as amended, be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker:

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

(Motion agreed to)

### **Ms. Libby Davies**

moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak at third reading stage of Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians.

There has been tremendous support for this bill right across the country. Yesterday on Parliament Hill many folks came out with their red tents. They were taking part in a campaign organized by the red tent campaign to end homelessness in Canada. Rallies were held yesterday in Halifax, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, and right across the country. The reason was because people know that there is a housing crisis in this country, whether in large cities or smaller communities.

Anybody involved in the housing business, average people on the street, will tell us about people they know who are homeless. They will tell us about families they know who are paying 50% or 60% of their income in rent. They cannot find an affordable place to live. They will tell us about people who are threatened with eviction.

About three million Canadians live in what we call housing insecurity. One of the reasons we have this predicament is because we do not have a national strategy and a national framework around affordable housing in this country.

Canada has had a history of good housing programs, but many of those programs have been lost. I do not want to go into the history of that today because we do not have time.

Suffice it to say that the efforts that we have made have been piecemeal. Even the money in the last budget that was related to the recession was only one time stimulus money for housing and that money is not getting into the local communities. There has been a real vacuum in this country. There has been a social deficit around a housing plan. People understand that.

This bill is very straightforward and clear. It calls on the federal government, in partnership with the provinces, the territories, first nations, municipalities and stakeholders, to develop a strategy that could take us forward and move us into a situation where we have a real plan with objectives, targets, outcomes, and deliverables. That is why so many people have signed on in support of this bill.

The list of organizations that are supporting this bill is really quite phenomenal. The organizations are non-partisan and are located across the country. The list includes: ACORN Canada, Amnesty International Canada, Assembly of First Nations, Campaign 2000, Canada Without Poverty, Canadian AIDS Society, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Canadian Federation of University Women, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Citizens for Public Justice, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, National Aboriginal Housing Association, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Social Rights Advocacy Centre, Wellesley Institute, and YWCA.

These are national organizations and they represent millions of people in this country. These organizations have signed on to support this bill because they know that work needs to be done. They know that the federal government needs to take a leadership role in bringing the partners together in developing a plan.

I am proud that in my own community in Vancouver East, where this began, key organizations like Pivot Legal Society and the Citywide Housing Coalition did a lot of organizing to support this bill. I want to thank those individuals who have worked so hard to bring this bill now to third reading in the House.

(1840)

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the House from the Bloc, the Liberal Party, and there have even been some Conservatives who have supported the bill. The support across the House, across parties, is a reflection of the work that has been done at the grassroots. Right across the country there has been tremendous campaigns to contact members of Parliament to let them know about the bill and the work that needs to be done.

I am very hopeful that this broad support will continue for the bill. I would like to thank the members who have supported the bill and say that we can move this forward. We can realize an achievable plan. We can get the federal government to work with the partners across the country to truly develop a national strategy that builds on the success that we have had in provinces.

The province of Quebec has a tremendous housing program. It can build on the success that we have had in local communities because many municipalities have done tremendous work in providing affordable housing. However, we will not get where we need to be unless we have the federal government showing that political leadership.

I have seen letters from the government saying, "Do not worry. We are doing what needs to be done". Unfortunately, that is not the case. All of these organizations recognize that is not the case, otherwise they would not be supporting the bill.

I want to suggest to members today that we can move the bill forward. We can adopt the kind of strategy that we need and we can say that housing is a fundamental right. We can say that wherever we live in this country, we should have access to safe, appropriate, and affordable housing. No Canadian should be on the street destitute. No Canadians, no families, should worry about whether they can pay the rent, whether they will be evicted, or whether they are living in substandard housing that they cannot get upgraded. To me, this is just such a basic issue and it is the reason I ran in 1997, to bring forward the issue of the need for leadership from the federal government on housing.

Let us build on the programs that we used to have. Let us build on the success story that Canada was with social housing, co-op housing, and special needs housing. We did have tremendous programs. The bill does not actually create those programs. The bill

creates the debate, the discourse, and the plan, led by the federal government in partnership with provinces and territories, first nations and municipalities to actually develop that strategy.

This is a very basic thing we need to take on, so again, I want to thank members for their support. We are now at a very critical point in the bill. It has gone through second reading. It has gone through committee. We heard great witnesses. We made some changes to the bill and we are now at third reading.

Let us recognize the support that it has. Let us listen to our constituents. Let us listen to the people who are on the front line every day, dealing with people who are in desperate situations and do not know where they will go. Let us listen to the people who are trying to find that affordable housing for families in large cities as well as in smaller communities.

We have a responsibility to do the right thing. The bill is not rocket science. It is not earth shattering. It is very straightforward. It is very clear. It is calling on the federal government to work in a way that is delivering a mandate for those fundamental human needs.

I am very pleased that we are here debating Bill C-304 and look forward to what I hope will be ongoing support from the members of the House to make the bill a reality.

(1845)

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for the work she has done on the bill. I know she would acknowledge that members of the Liberal Party have been supportive of it and have helped to steer it through. I specifically reference the member for Parkdale—High Park who put in a number of serious amendments.

However, I want to ask her for a comment. One of the big issues in the fight against poverty and homelessness is the question of the cost of poverty and the cost of homelessness. I will reference a study that the hon. member would be familiar with which was commissioned by the British Columbia government in 2001. It is cited in the Senate report “In from the Margins: A call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness”. It stated:

The study concluded, based on the experience of study participants, that costs for services for those who were homeless at the time of the study was 33% higher than for those who had been homeless but were then housed.

In other words, this is good economics as well as good social justice, and I wonder if she might just comment on that.

**Ms. Libby Davies:**

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is entirely right and that study in British Columbia showed the economics of what is before us. I would also like to reiterate my thanks to the members of the Liberal Party who have supported the bill, both in committee and in other ways. I know they have had a keen interest to move the bill forward. I am very appreciative of that as I know many of the organizations are.

The fact is there has been so much research that has been done on housing issues to show what the astounding cost is of homelessness, both in terms of the impact on individuals, their lives and families, and local communities, but also the impact economically. The report the member cites from B.C. and others across the country show us that the cost of not housing people properly is enormous both socially and economically. This is something that we should pay attention to.

I have another report from SPARC B.C. and the CCPA B.C. office that shows that in B.C. alone there are more than 13,000 people on the waiting list. There are about 11,000 people who are absolutely homeless. The numbers are just staggering when we go community by community and it is a growing problem. We can look at this through the lens of human compassion. We can look at it through the lens of human rights. We can look at it through the lens of an economic cost. On all three counts it is clear that we need to do something much more and move forward on the bill.

(1850)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver East has done a phenomenal job of bringing this forward. Hopefully the bill will receive the support of all four corners of the House.

However, I want to get back to the issue around the CCPA report and the modest amount of B.C. social housing that has been constructed more recently. Now of course as the member knows from Vancouver East virtually all of the funding for social housing in British Columbia over the last few years came from the famous NDP budget of 2005 federally where the tax cuts were rolled back and rolled into housing funding that eventually went through to the B.C. Liberal government and created housing units including in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster.

I want to ask the member for Vancouver East to what extent she thinks the NDP budget of 2005 helped to address at least in a small part, this massive deficit of good quality accessible housing in the country?

**Ms. Libby Davies:**

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the budget allocation of \$1.5 billion was very key in ensuring a distribution across the country that some housing could be built. I know in British Columbia the small number that we did see actually came from Bill C-48, as we so well remember.

One thing that we have to remember is that when we have those transfers, we also need to have transparency because it is sometimes very hard to track where that money went. So again, part of a national strategy is to ensure that there is accountability. People want to know that housing dollars are going to housing. They want to know that it is actually getting into local communities. This has been one of the problems we have had with the economic stimulus money that, as we have heard from the government, is meant to go to housing. However, it is very difficult to track where it is ending up and whether or not the housing is being built.

The key thing is we need an ongoing commitment. The \$1.5 billion from that particular budget that the NDP was responsible for, we were very proud of that, but we want to see a program and a strategy that moves us forward in terms of a decade or more. We want to see a continuity in the housing supply and housing development, so that we do not fall into these deep crises in local communities where people end up not knowing where to go and what to do.

That is what we have to avoid. Bill C-48 was a good place to start. We have to now continue moving forward.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing Bill C-304, the NDP's bill for a national housing strategy.

It has been reviewed by committee and returned to the House with amendments, but it remains a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation.

The amendments proposed by the committee do nothing to alleviate the government's concerns with the bill.

The NDP members have gone to quite a bit of trouble to craft a bill just so. In fact, they had to take great care to ensure the bill did not run afoul of the rules of royal recommendation and they succeeded, barely.

They had to take all that care because they know as well as anyone that actual implementation of their national housing strategy will cost billions upon billions of extra dollars every year.

As the Speaker has ruled, this bill may go forward if it has sufficient support, but it is certainly not without cost. So, we will not indulge the opposition with that bold fiction. The truth is that the bill would cost us quite a lot and I think far too much.

Our country is still recovering from the recent recession. What it certainly does not need at this time is coalition-driven spending and tax increases, which is what would result with the passing of this bill. This is something they cannot deny.

It seems every time the opposition members speak, they are calling for billions in more spending and more tax increases.

To say they have some big ticket items in their policy hopper would grossly underestimate the price of those other items. As I said earlier, this bill is no different.

Mr. Peter Julian: Prisons, HST, fighter jets.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:**

Mr. Speaker, it seems that the member across the way would like to debate whether or not people who commit violent offences on innocent civilians should go to jail.

I would be happy to debate with him why violent criminals should be behind bars and not on the streets of Canada, but I do not think that is what we are debating here right now. However, I will take him on that debate any time he wants. In fact, I will go to his own riding and debate it with him if he likes. I have no problem with standing up for justice. The member can heckle me if he wants. I am just going to continue talking about why this piece of legislation is as wrong-headed as virtually everything else we see coming from the NDP.

This bill calls for billions of dollars to be plucked out of thin air, magically--that is NDP math--and spent at the direction of the federal government in the area of fundamentally provincial jurisdiction. It would be interesting to see what the Bloc does with a bill that steps blindly into the provincial jurisdiction.

It is mind-boggling. Where do the NDP members think they are going to find the money if it is not in higher taxes? Governments do not have money. All they have is what they tax from Canadians. The NDP members do not understand that. We do not have the ability to create money. We do not have a magic money tree that we can get money from. The NDP members have a special mathematician who works with them who does wonders, I suppose.

They want to create a new bureaucracy but how do they think the federal bureaucracy can be as aware, as knowledgeable and as responsive as provincial and territorial governments that already work closely with us? Why do they think Ottawa knows better than our local, provincial and territorial governments and more than our local stakeholders, the people on the ground who understand the issues well?

Even further, why do they think the government in general is the only solution? Why do they insist on one size fits all solutions? Fundamentally, the answers to these questions come down to ideology. The left-wing, tax and spend, money is no object ideology of the NDP often, and frankly really often, is supported in Parliament by the Liberals and the leftist Bloc, the coalition. That is their ideology. That is what is behind this bill: higher taxes and more spending is the only solution.

This bill, through the implementation of its strategy, would require billions in increased taxes, which is no different from any of their other proposals. In fact, I am not even sure the opposition members have any idea exactly how much the bill would actually cost, and they certainly do not know how to pay for it, apart from unspecified need for higher taxes.

I do not think they particularly care that the money needs to come from somewhere and that that somewhere is the pockets of hard-working Canadians. The price tag for their ideology and for the bill is, in this case, unaffordable.

(1855)

They live in a bubble. Do they not watch the news and see the difficult decisions that governments are making right now? They continue to bring irresponsible, uncosted bills before Parliament and suggest that it is somehow responsible. It is not responsible. They bring forward uncosted bills that impact the Canadian books to the tune of billions of dollars of new spending and suggest that they are there to help people. The outcome of this would be less employment, fewer jobs, less opportunity, more people homeless and higher taxes. That would be the outcome. They do not understand economics.

Mr. Speaker, their heckling is really quite encouraging, so I would ask that you not do anything to curb the NDP's heckles because I am really quite enjoying it.

We can and do debate the merits and wisdom of policy choices. What I am talking about is a pure spending aspect, especially given the financial circumstances of the global economy and of the Canadian economy. The spending envisioned by the implementation of this bill cannot reasonably be seen as anything but reckless.

The coalition may not care about sane financial policy, but our government does. We simply cannot afford to start throwing billions of dollars around without a care. That is what this bill is instructing us to do.

It is remarkable. I am not that old, but I have been around a little while and I can say that right now there is a significant number of affordable housing projects going on from coast to coast to coast. That is because this government made it a priority to invest in affordable housing, to renew the housing stock, build new units, invest from one community to another from coast to coast in each and every territory and province, and to invest in aboriginal housing on and off reserve. We have made these investments.

The one remarkable consistency is that the movers of this bill, the irresponsible economists of the NDP that I am listening to right now, they are the ones who voted against all those measures. Any affordable housing that is being built, any improvement to the housing stock, the people who are being lifted out of poverty, the jobs that have been protected, the special measures in EI, all of these things that have been done, that have guided the Canadian economy through unprecedented difficulties--in fact, we have

not seen a downturn like this since the 1930s--this government moved to protect them and the NDP voted against all of that, including the measures for homelessness.

There is a new YWCA shelter in Peterborough that protects vulnerable women. It got funding from some of these programs. Let us remember that the NDP voted against it.

Then those members stand in this House and suggest that their ideology is quite different from ours and they want to help people. We have been there to help people, and we have done so in a financially responsible way.

The fact is federal support for housing is very robust. Our support is multi-pronged and our current system respects the jurisdiction, different needs and circumstances of our provinces and territories, something this irresponsible NDP bill would not do.

I talked earlier about how their own inflexible ideology causes problems. When all they want is more spending and more programs, they drown out reality. They drown out innovations that could be much more effective than simply more money, more programs, more taxes, more government and—

(1900)

**The Deputy Speaker:**

Order, order. The hon. member has just over a minute left and I am having an increasingly difficult time hearing what he is saying. I see some side conversations. If other members want to have other conversations, maybe they could sit a little bit closer so members on this end of the chamber could hear what the parliamentary secretary is saying.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:**

Mr. Speaker, it is remarkable that when we talk about financial irresponsibility and tax-and-spend, which is something I think they would be proud of, judging by the bills they bring in, when it is pointed out how financially irresponsible and wrong-headed the NDP is, they get all excited. They do not like being called on it.

The reality is there is no magic money tree in Ottawa. The NDP believes that there is, that we can create money out of thin air or they would not bring irresponsible bills like this to the House. Similarly, when they call for more spending and more programs, they distract Canadians from clear thinking. This certainly hurts more than it helps.

The opposition's solution is this bill, a new layer of bureaucracy and taxes and spending. It would take the form of direct cash transfers and incentives and building more spending and more programs, but they ignore the fact that one of the best ways to increase the amount of money that Canadians have in their pockets for themselves and their families is action through the tax system.

Lower taxes increase take-home income. Our government has brought in tax measures to help people who need it, the working income tax benefit, WITB. Mr. Speaker, it is regrettable that my time is coming to a close, because I have so many things to talk about that our government has done.

**The Deputy Speaker:**

We could always see if there is unanimous consent to give the parliamentary secretary more time, but we will resume debate with the hon. member for Dartmouth--Cole Harbour.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-304. The Liberal Party has supported Bill C-304 from the beginning.

Like many private members' bills, the bill has had issues and challenges. I am very pleased that the Liberal Party has strengthened the bill. I want to commend the work of a number of Liberals on the committee. I have been at the committee and we have been very supportive. I want to commend my colleague from Parkdale—High Park who has brought forward amendments to this bill that make this bill more applicable to persons with disabilities, that bring not for profits to the table in a stronger way, that set targets and standards and take into account strengthened environmental needs of affordable social housing in the country.

This is a way that we have worked to make sure that this bill is even better, but we support the bill. We want this bill to pass. We think this bill is important. Contrary to what the parliamentary secretary was implying, we think this is a very strong bill from an economic point of view.

This bill does not require a royal recommendation. It is about having a housing strategy and governments would make choices about what would be included in a housing strategy. There are recommendations in this bill, but first and foremost, it says that we should have some kind of a national strategy on affordable housing. I think most people would agree with that. Certainly the people in the not for profit community, many economists, many social scientists, people from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, who have become more and more involved in the need for affordable housing, would echo the sentiment that this is a bill that has real potential to make a difference in Canada.

I want to speak about the need for affordable housing. I referenced earlier a Senate report. My colleague from Sault Ste. Marie in the NDP, my colleague from Chambly—Borduas in the Bloc and others on the government side who have been part of an anti-poverty strategy would know some of this, but the Senate released a report on poverty and homelessness in December. The House of Commons has a report that is ready to go, but as it is only in draft form, I will not quote from that. I will, however, quote from the Senate report.

The Senate report opens a section on homelessness by saying:

The most visible sign of the failure of our income security and housing systems and programs to meet the basic needs of individuals and families is homelessness. By definition, homelessness is difficult to measure, but witness after witness reported increases in demand for shelters and food banks, even among those who are employed.

It goes on to reference a specific study in British Columbia, but it is echoed by other studies across the country. I will quote again:

The study concluded, based on the experience of participants, that costs for services for those who were homeless at the time of the study was 33% higher than for those who had been homeless but were then housed.

In other words, it costs money to have people homeless. It is a classic lose-lose situation.

My colleague from Yukon gave me a very good report the other day from the Wellesley Institute. I want to quote from its introduction:

People's ability to find, and afford, good quality housing is crucial to their overall health and wellbeing and is a telling index of the state of a country's social infrastructure.

I do not think anything could be more true than that. There are a lot of people who need more affordable housing who could benefit from a national housing strategy. One of the groups that would most benefit is people with disabilities.

In April or May, a press release came out from the Council of Canadians With Disabilities, from Marie White, the national chairperson. She is one of the great advocates in this country on social issues, not just on people with disabilities but on many other things as well. She calls on all parties to support Bill C-304:

Adequate housing is essential to the well being of persons with disabilities.... Canadians with disabilities disproportionately live in poverty and finding affordable housing is a huge challenge.

One of the great advocates for disability issues in this country is Steve Estey, who lives in my community of Dartmouth. He was a negotiator when Canada went to the United Nations to work on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. If he were here today, Steve would point out to us how important it is to recognize our international obligations to people with disabilities, the part of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding the right to housing, and the important need that we have to provide that housing to people with disabilities.

There is another issue that I want to mention briefly. People are concerned about housing, not just for the really poor, to whom we really need to be responsive, but many

other Canadians are awfully nervous and are not that far away themselves from having issues regarding decent shelter.

(1905)

I want to provide a statistic from RBC Economics in September. It stated, "Today the typical Canadian family must devote 49% of its income to own a standard two-storey home while mortgage rates are at their lowest point". Another statistic was that 58% of Canadians are concerned with their current level of debt, averaging \$41,470 per person. That means many people are not that far from being under-housed, at the very least, and perhaps even some being homeless.

The statistics and evidence of the need for housing is coming from all kinds of quarters. Recently TD Economics released a report on the Toronto area economy's hidden recession. It stated, "Looking ahead, little improvement in the jobless rate, social assistance case loads and social housing wait lists can be expected over the medium term".

The news is not really very positive. We need to take action on poverty overall, specifically homelessness. Let us look at the groups that have endorsed Bill C-304 recently such as the YWCA Canada, the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Canadian Federation of University Women. which is a fabulous organization. It has great advocacy. I happen to know that because my mother-in-law is an active member of the Canadian Federation of University Women and I would never go against her advice.

Other groups that endorse the bill include the Canadian Medical Association, Canada Without Poverty, the Red Tent campaign and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. As I mentioned, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has been very active on the need for getting into the housing business on a national level, bringing everybody to the table and asking what we can do, not just because it is an issue of social justice but because it is an issue of good economics as well.

I hosted a round table in my constituency last week, along with my colleague from Halifax, on palliative, or end of life care. We spent a lot of time talking about the importance of people choosing to die at home. Somebody stood and asked, "What about the people who don't have a home to die in?" When we think about the very basic needs of Canadians, one of the most important ones is that people have homes, not only where they can live but where they can die when that time is upon them.

In my constituency many times I visited the Metro Turning Point Shelter, where 70 or 80 men at a time live in one room. I think the beds are surplus prison beds. The men line up and spend the night there. We are all familiar with that in our constituencies. They go to the mission or, in our case, to Hope Cottage in the morning to get their meals. They wander around and return at night to try to get a bed. There is some really innovative stuff going on. We just need to encourage more of it.

Also in my constituency Affirmative Industries is an organization that has built housing for mental health consumers. Not only do people pay rent, but as part of the program they build up equity in those houses so eventually they actually have a few dollars invested. It gives them pride in home and when they leave, they have some place to go and a little money. More important, they have the dignity of knowing that it belongs to them.

We can do innovative things in housing. The Canadian Co-operative Housing Association has some fabulous projects that could benefit from the national housing strategy. There is no lack of ideas. There is a lack of a national strategy and commitment from the federal government. We need to do more.

On our federal anti-poverty hearings in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, everybody who came, from Mike Kirby with the Mental Health Commission to people with disabilities, people from the aboriginal community, they all said the same thing. The first and most important step is to have a house. In Canada, where we pride ourselves on social infrastructure, we need to do better.

We can make the case purely from a social justice argument, but we can also make it from an economic argument. There is more and more evidence telling us that if people have a house, they are less of a burden on the health, justice and social welfare systems. This is where we have to go. It is time that we have some kind of national system that looks at this really important issue and asks if we can do better, if people in Canada should be housed, if everyone should have shelter. If they should, they can start here and this bill can play an important role.

We are happy to have made it better. We congratulate the member for Vancouver East for bringing it this far and we hope the House sees fit to adopt it.

(1910)

[Translation]

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):**

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the subject of social housing. I noticed earlier—and this is where I will begin—that our Conservative colleague does not understand the first thing about social housing. He knows nothing about the money that could be invested in it. He does not realize that social housing does not cost so much in reality. We are currently paying for people who are living in the street. We are paying to look after them. We are paying for their well-being and we are paying huge bills for their health. All that costs much more than social housing would. The Conservative colleague does not understand the math. He understands absolutely nothing about it.

The Bloc Québécois believes that social and affordable housing is needed across Canada, which necessarily includes Quebec. Why does UNESCO regularly say that Canada is a rich country that does not take care of its least fortunate and does not build social housing, when my colleague says that social housing is not necessary and that it constitutes reckless spending? “Reckless” is the word he used earlier. I think he has never been to the many poor neighbourhoods in Canada. I have gone into Canada's cities and I have seen where first nations people live and I have seen the housing conditions. It is awful. Some places are scary and people live in the street. According to the Wellesley Institute, as my colleague was saying earlier, if they are not living in the street, they are paying a lot of money in places like Toronto. My colleague was saying that people spend up to 85% of their meagre income on housing for the sake of their children. How are they supposed to have enough left over for food? They become sick and then the government ends up paying to keep them alive and well.

It is such a mistake not to realize that we need social housing immediately. Furthermore, I do not understand how the Liberal Party could have put an end to that in 1991. Not to mention the fact that children who are homeless and raised on the street are not being educated. They are living in poverty. What is the best crime school? Poverty. The main motive for crime is poverty. The Conservatives are always talking about law and order. Yet they have no problem letting people live in poverty. It is unbelievable.

The Bloc Québécois has always defended and will always defend social housing. I am not sure if all the groups that support Bill C-304 are aware that this government will not want to implement it. Do those groups realize that even if the Conservatives do implement it, studies will drag on for years before there is any money for social housing.

Money is needed right now, which is precisely why I introduced another bill, even though the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-304, which would provide a much-needed strategy. Canada lags behind when it comes to social housing.

The purpose of Bill C-304 is to establish a national housing strategy. There is the problem, since Quebec already has a strategy. The Société d'habitation du Québec is handling all the needs quite well. What we do need, however, is money. We would have liked this bill to include full compensation from the beginning, and a real opportunity to get out of this situation. If that had been the case, we could have supported it immediately. However, although it is not yet a done deal, we still have hope.

(1915)

The Bloc has always taken a constructive approach to this bill, which is not ours, but it believes the bill would serve as a wake-up call for the public, even though it would not necessarily provide any money. What we really want is compensation, though. Every region and every first nation has its own needs, and Quebec is no exception.

Quebec has developed widely recognized expertise. Earlier, I quoted the Wellesley Institute, which says that Quebec is ahead of all the other provinces because it has the

Société d'habitation du Québec, which puts up energy-efficient buildings and has the same standards that UNESCO claims to have. We are not saying that the rest of Canada should not have such a body. We agree that the rest of Canada should have one. All we are asking is that this bill provide a way to recognize our own institutions. Then, Quebec would agree to let the rest of Canada come up with its own strategy.

I move, seconded by the member for Chambly—Borduas, who is present here today, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, be not now read a third time but be referred back to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for the purpose of reconsidering Clauses 3 and 4, or to add new Clauses, with a view of clarifying the role of provinces, specifically Quebec, within the jurisdiction of the Bill.

(1920)

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:**

The amendment is in order. The debate will be on the amendment.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the amendment for the simple reason that Bill C-304 itself is so fundamentally important. The amendment must be treated at committee and then the bill can be brought back and receive a majority of support from members of Parliament.

Why is that important? We are dealing with a fundamental national crisis, as members well know. Tonight, there will be upwards of 150,000 Canadians who will be sleeping in parks, on main streets and in homeless shelters. Up to four million more, as the member for Vancouver East said so eloquently just a few moments ago, are families that are on the margin. These are families that are living from paycheque to paycheque as to whether or not they can actually keep their home. They have to make those tough choices every day between paying the rent and feeding the kids. This is a fundamental reality in Canada today. This is a land of so much wealth and richness, and yet we have millions of families that are on the cusp of becoming homeless and tens of thousands of Canadians who are living in the streets of our cities. This is a national shame.

If this Parliament cannot deal with the crisis that exists in housing in this country, then to say the least, we have to wonder about the priorities of this House. This has to be the

number one priority. This is why we are supporting the amendment. This is why, of course, we are supporting the bill brought forward by the member for Vancouver East.

When I was growing up in the 1970s in Burnaby—New Westminster, my English grandmother, who was an orphan and as a teenager travelled halfway across the world to come to Canada because she wanted to start a new life, used to tell me about the Great Depression. She used to say that in this city, in this community, there were dozens of people living on the streets. She used to say, back in the 1970s, how wonderful it was that in Canada no one had to sleep outside anymore.

And yet we know what happened in the 1990s when a former government, a Liberal government, decided to balance the budget. It did so not on the backs of the wealthy, the pampered and the privileged, who had the resources to absorb perhaps a bit of sacrifice for this country, but on the backs of the middle class and on the backs of the poorest of Canadians. That is the fundamental reality that we live with today, that those decisions made in the 1990s have led to this housing crisis, this affordability of housing crisis that exists in our country today.

Families are obliged to pay more than half of their income just to try to keep a roof over their heads, families like those who live in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, in the area around Richmond Park. When I knock on their door and ask them what their priorities are, they say they wish that they could have affordable housing, that they could feel comfortable that, in a month or two or three, they will still be able to pay the rent with their decreasing income and the struggles they have. Whether people are laid off because of disability or whether they have lost their jobs, they are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. They are all frightened about what tomorrow may bring, that they may be sleeping in the parks and on main streets like so many other Canadians.

When we go to the east coast, to areas like Tracadie-Sheila in northern New Brunswick, we see families that are struggling to try to keep a roof over their heads. I am pleased to see that among the many endorsers of this bill we have the mayor and the municipal council of Tracadie-Sheila. When we go to the far north to Pond Inlet, as I did two years ago, we see a one-bedroom home inhabited by 15 or 20 members of a family, in the sub-zero temperatures and the darkness, because there is not adequate housing available.

Anyone who is out travelling the length and breadth of this country must be aware of the severity of the crisis and the impact it has on ordinary Canadian families and ordinary Canadians' lives. It is very difficult for people to concentrate on schooling or improving themselves or retraining when they are just struggling to keep a dry roof over their heads.

(1925)

Those who have fallen out of that, who have fallen into the streets, who have to live in the homeless shelters, who have to live through that daily struggle just to get enough food together, they will not be able to think about retraining or their contribution to this

country. They are just trying to survive. That is the fundamental reality that exists today for tens of thousands of Canadians, and there are millions of Canadian families who are just on the edge.

Today we have the member for Vancouver East bringing forward a housing plan that actually starts to address that issue, a very important first step that forces the federal government to sit down with stakeholders and community groups and move forward and put back into place what we never should have lost in the first place: the right to housing that should exist in this country.

The bill has been endorsed by a wide spectrum of society. It has been endorsed by the medical profession: the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Nurses Association; by the labour movement; by the business associations as well: the Burnaby Board of Trade and the Victoria Chamber of Commerce; by cities across the length and breadth of this country; by churches and faith groups; by the labour movement; by women's groups; by aboriginal organizations.

I have not seen, in the six and a half years I have been in the House, a more complete list of endorsers who are all saying with one voice to every single one of us, all 308 members of Parliament, that we must adopt the bill. They are doing that because they are aware of the depth of the crisis, of the national shame that is homelessness in Canada today. In a rich and wealthy land, so many have to go without that fundamental right to housing.

I heard earlier a member of the Conservative Party saying that this will cost Canadians to have housing. What an absurd concept, particularly from a government that has been so wasteful with the public purse, building prisons for unreported crime, building fake lakes for 72-hour meetings, putting in tens of billions of dollars in corporate tax cuts to banks so they can take their money down to the Bahamas or Panama, and perhaps most egregiously now with the fighter jet contract that has doubled in price, not taking a look at that, not trying to even go to any sort of tendering process. Billions and billions and billions of dollars are wasted, yet the government, or at least that Conservative member who stood up, is somehow resenting the fact that to put a national program back into place may cost some money.

The reality is that, for each and every homeless Canadian, the costs to our economy and the costs to those communities are enormous. The report that was cited earlier said it totals \$55,000 in emergency medical costs and social costs to keep somebody on the street. It is absurd that Canadian taxpayers have to pay to make sure we do not have a national housing program.

The Conservatives might say they have established this gated community principle of building prisons. The average cost of keeping prisoners in prison is about \$200,000 a year. To say that those are more important expenditures than making sure all Canadians have access to housing, all Canadians have a roof over their heads, all Canadians can then turn their tasks to contributing to this country, to help build this country, to help

contribute to their community is absurd. To say that somehow it is more important to keep people on the street at \$55,000 annually than to build housing units that cost a fraction of that amount is an absurdity that I think most Canadians can see through in a moment.

The truth is that we have the resources. The truth is that what we need is a commitment. The member for Vancouver East has brought forward a bill that finally deals with our national shame after 20 years. She brings it forward with the support of the business community, of the aboriginal community, of labour activists, of people across the length and breadth of Canada. All those organizations, the dozens of them that have endorsed this bill, are crying out with one voice tonight, and they are crying out to implore parliamentarians to vote yes on the bill, to vote yes on Bill C-304 and to start the process of ending homelessness in this land.

We can do this in the next few days. I implore all members of Parliament to hear these voices and vote yes on the bill.

(1930)

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address this bill today. I want to congratulate my colleague opposite for his impassioned speech. While it may be devoid of certain facts and principles, it was a very passionate speech.

I would like to compliment the Deputy Speaker for the work he does in the Regina area on housing and homelessness. I have relatives in the Deputy Speaker's constituency who talk about the great work he has done on homelessness and housing and the great work our government has done by providing 625,000 homes to the underprivileged.

I am told by my relatives that the Deputy Speaker talks often about the importance of a job as the best thing that one can truly do for somebody. My first nations constituents, constituents who live in northern Alberta, people who are scraping to get by, people in this country who work two and three jobs are looking first of all for jobs and then higher paying jobs. That is exactly what our government has been providing for the last four and a half years. Unfortunately, that member has opposed most of these things.

If we are going to talk about groups of people who are scraping to get by and are threatened with homelessness day after day, we have generational farms in my area that face some of this. These farmers tell me day in and day out that they need more markets. They need to expand access to other parts of the country for their cattle and hogs. The Deputy Speaker has this in the Qu'Appelle Valley as well.

The problem I have with the member is that he has consistently opposed free trade. I would like to get off topic for a second and talk about that member and the NDP. This is not about Conservatives. This is not about Liberals. This is not about the NDP—

(1935)

Ms. Libby Davies:

No. It's about housing.

Mr. Brian Storseth:

This is not partisan, Mr. Speaker. This is about people's homes. This should be about people's jobs, about the economy. We do not need heckling and ranting from the other side. This should be an impassioned debate and a respectful debate by both sides.

In my area people talk about free trade. They talk about the importance of a Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, the importance of a Canada-Panama free trade agreement. We cannot have members of the NDP consistently blocking these important initiatives for agriculture and for many other areas and sectors in our country, but in my community, particularly agriculture. These are men and women, farmers, who are struggling to get by, who are—

Mr. Jim Maloway:

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you can hear that the member is not talking about Bill C-304 at all. Bill C-304 talks about affordable housing and the member is talking about free trade. It has absolutely nothing to do with what we are supposed to be talking about here.

**The Deputy Speaker:**

I will urge the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul to remember that this is debate on an amendment to a motion at third reading. The Standing Orders and the usual practice of the House are usually very strict on keeping one's remarks as close as possible to the substance before the House.

**Mr. Brian Storseth:**

Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep my remarks as close as possible, but I think my remarks are about homelessness. They are about this amendment. The problem is that the NDP members do not see that. They do not see how important it is that Canadians' number one priority is the economy, flat out. If they are not listening to that, then they are not listening to Canadians. It is the economy, and the economy has a direct impact on homelessness. I think we can all agree on that.

I would like to move forward and talk about the oil sands for a second and how they absolutely affect—

**The Deputy Speaker:**

I think I know what the member for Burnaby—New Westminster will be raising. Perhaps we can revisit this the next time the bill is before the House. We are getting toward the end of the hour for private members' business. If it is all right with the

member for Burnaby—New Westminster, I will move on to adjournment proceedings unless he is raising another issue. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

**Mr. Peter Julian:**

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just wanted to know what time warp the member was in, speaking about the oil sands and free trade. This is about housing.

**The Deputy Speaker:**

I am sure the member for Westlock—St. Paul will remember that the next time this bill is before the House.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.