



LIBBY DAVIES, M.P.  
VANCOUVER EAST

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October 23, 1997

The Honourable Alfonso Gagliano  
Minister of Public Works and Government Services  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

I am writing to express the grave concerns of my constituents in Vancouver East regarding your government's abandonment of the development of social and cooperative housing in Canada.

There are thousands of residents of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver who are living in substandard single occupancy rooms (SROs). Deplorable as this housing is, it is at least providing shelter. Many residents are one step away from homelessness as development pressures increase gentrification of this low income community, resulting in the conversion of SROs to commercial, condominium or short term tourist uses.

Until 1993 the federal housing program, through CMHC, helped contribute to the stabilisation of the neighbourhood through the development of social housing. Regrettably, the devolution of housing as a federal responsibility has meant that this vulnerable community is increasingly defenceless, with more and more people becoming homeless.

One example of the devastating impact of the federal government's abandonment of housing is the lack of federal support to build cooperative and social housing components into the redevelopment of the Woodward's building. I know you are aware of the community's efforts in this regard. It is a source of great frustration that this much-needed community initiative may go unrealised while the federal government remains uninvolved.

The impact of the federal government's withdrawal is offset somewhat by the B.C. provincial government's commitment to the delivery of social housing. However, the abdication by the federal government has made it much more difficult to come anywhere near meeting the desperate need for affordable, safe and secure housing.

On September 26 I attended a public forum at Simon Fraser University on "Affordable Housing and the Gentrification of Communities", sponsored by SFU, the Bronfman Family Foundation and the Koerner Foundation. It was attended by over 200 people. Participants repeatedly expressed their dismay over the lack of federal presence in the development of affordable housing.

I believe the provision of safe, secure, affordable and appropriate shelter is a fundamental human right -- something that every Canadian is entitled to. Lack of affordable housing is a major cause of poverty faced by aboriginal people in the urban environment, HIV infected injection drug users, poor families, low income seniors, the unemployed, low wage earners as well as people with disabilities.

A recently completed report on the epidemic of HIV infection among injection drug users cited the lack of housing a key issue that must be addressed if the epidemic is to be stopped. I recently wrote to your colleague the Minister of Health, The Hon. Allan Rock, on this issue, with a copy to you. (I have attached another copy for your easy reference.)

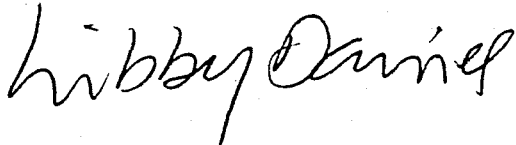
I have several specific questions I would like to raise -- particularly in light of the throne speech commitment to "**devote one-half of the surplus in this mandate to addressing the social and economic needs of Canadians.**" They are:

1. Will your government commit itself to providing financial support to a national social housing program as part of the ongoing development of our social infrastructure?
2. Will your government agree to define housing and shelter as a basic human right, supported by federal resources to ensure that no Canadian is homeless and living in poverty?
3. Will your government consider exempting affordable housing initiatives from the GST, as a means to stimulating housing development?
4. Will your government extend and increase the RRAP program to help stabilise and upgrade SROs in urban core areas, such as the Downtown Eastside?
5. Will your government become directly involved in community efforts to include cooperative and social housing components in the Woodward building?
6. Will your government conduct consultations with housing stakeholders and provincial and territorial governments to consider **national standards** for the development and maintenance of affordable not-for-profit housing, including the option of third sector management as proposed by the Cooperative Housing Foundation of Canada?

7. And finally, will you please outline what else your Ministry is prepared to do to meet this most basic and critical human need for shelter?

Thank you for your attention to these urgent and pressing matters. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Libby Davies, M.P.  
Vancouver East

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cc.

Mike Farnsworth, B.C. Minister of Housing  
Louise Hardy, NDP housing critic  
Jim Green, Community Development Unit, Ministry of Employment and Investment  
Tim Stevenson, MLA, Vancouver Burrard  
Jenny Kwan, MLA, Vancouver Mount Pleasant  
Jim O'Dea, Chair, B.C. Housing Management Commission  
Vanessa Geary, Tenants Rights Action Coalition  
Lesley Stern, B.C. Women's Housing Coalition  
Viola Thomas, president, United Native Nations  
Tom Laviolette, Carnegie Action Project  
Ian McCrae president, Downtown Eastside Residents Association  
Kathleen Boyes, Main and Hastings Community Development Society  
Judy Oberlander, SFU Institute for the Humanities  
Dimitri Roussopoulos, President, Société de développement communautaire de Montréal  
Karen O'Shanncery, Vancouver Urban Core  
Participants in the public forum on "Affordable Housing and the Gentrification of Communities".