



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 25

HOUSING

Statement by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

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Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, I rise today to draw attention to a national campaign launched in October by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities urging the federal government to work with provincial, territorial and municipal officials, and those in the private sector, to develop a long-term housing plan. This campaign is in response to concerns that municipal officials have across the country. They warn that the cost to rent or purchase housing is becoming increasingly less affordable to a growing number of Canadians.

Here are some of the numbers. The average home price in Canada has increased by 67 per cent since 2000, compared to a 13 per cent increase in household income. Rising home prices have not only pushed personal debts to record levels; they are putting home ownership outside of the reach of many Canadians. This is putting pressure on crowded rental markets. Overall, one in four Canadians is paying a disproportionate amount of their income to keep a roof over their heads, and it is families who rent that are most likely to be in this position. Ultimately, this pressure is forcing the most vulnerable citizens onto the streets, with an estimated 300,000 people without a roof or in homeless shelters.

In my province of Alberta, an expanding economy and population growth are putting pressure on the housing market.

A shortage of adequate housing has resulted in rapidly escalating housing prices and low vacancy rates. In fact, coming out of the recent floods, the city of Calgary has an effective vacancy rate of 0 per cent. Calgary is expected to see the largest percentage increase in Canadian housing prices between 2013 and 2015, followed by Edmonton.

An estimated 5,300 households are on the waiting lists for social housing in Calgary and Edmonton alone, and thousands more elsewhere in the province are similarly waiting.

This growing household crisis is a fundamental problem that can be linked to many issues. Individuals who do not have adequate access to housing are often denied adequate access to other basic needs, like education, health care and sanitation.

Adequate housing is also crucial for a healthy economy. The rising mortgage debt that Canadians are carrying is a significant economic risk, and the lack of affordable housing is becoming a problem in many communities for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, particularly in Western Canada.

Honourable senators, investments in affordable housing provide benefits that far outweigh their costs. To have a thriving economy and a successful country, it is essential that we have safe and affordable housing for all Canadians.
