

Thank you for writing to me on C-400.

The NDP's Bill C-400 called for the establishment of a new national social housing strategy. This Bill was voted upon and defeated in the House of Commons on February 27, 2013.

This program would be on top of the \$12 billion dollars the Government of Canada transfers to the provinces each year under the Canada Social Transfer. And, it is on top of the hundreds of millions of dollars the Government spends on affordable housing and homelessness each and every year.

Even though this legislation was defeated, I will continue to work with both the City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta to focus growing our community and to provide strategic investments to sustain our way of life and look after those in need. I appreciate your comments and viewpoint on this bill.

Thank you once again for writing. It is my honour and privilege to be your voice in Ottawa and it is a responsibility I do not take lightly. If there is any other way that my office can be of assistance to you in the future please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Hon. Laurie Hawn, PC, CD, MP  
Edmonton Centre

Thank you for your letter regarding Bill C-400, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians. The private member's bill, sponsored by my colleague Marie-Claude Morin, MP for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, was tabled in the House of Commons on February 16, 2012, but unfortunately was defeated by the Conservative government on February 28, 2013.

The bill would have required the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to work with provincial ministers responsible for housing, municipal representatives, Aboriginal communities, non-profit and private housing providers and representatives from civil-society organizations to establish a national housing strategy.

The right to adequate housing is an integral part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Canada in 1976. Today, Canada is the only country in the G8 and in the industrialized world without a national housing strategy. Yet, the development of affordable housing remains key to countering poverty and homelessness, and improving the quality of life of Canadian households.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which represents more than 2,000 cities across Canada, has made housing its top priority. The FCM believes that access to suitable housing at a price Canadians can afford is the cornerstone of a strong economy and vibrant communities. Unfortunately, the global economic downturn of 2008 created a housing crisis that has affected and weakened communities across the country.

Household debt has reached a critical point. Several international organizations, including the International Monetary Fund, have warned our government, but it does not seem to be listening. The Bank of Canada and the IMF have warned that Canadians' household debt level of 158% is too high. This debt ratio is unprecedented. Mortgages account for 68% of that debt.

The economic downturn resulted in higher property prices. Those who were able to buy a home ended up with a mortgage they could not afford to pay. Those who cannot afford to buy a home are forced to turn to a rental market that cannot keep pace with demand. On the one hand, we have renters who are inadequately housed and are paying too much and, on the other hand, we have fewer and fewer homeowners with increasing debt levels.

Changing global economic conditions are reflected in the changing housing needs in Canada. These conditions have created a void in the construction and housing sectors. The municipalities are doing everything they can to maintain, preserve and expand their stock of rental housing, but they cannot manage on their own.

Despite the unsuccessful vote in the House of Commons, you can rest assured that we will continue to make issues surrounding the housing crisis a priority, and urge the Conservative government to adopt a national housing strategy to ensure that all Canadians have secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing. On behalf of New Democrats, I would like to thank you and the Edmonton Coalition for your work in combatting the issue of homelessness and fighting for affordable housing for all Edmontonians.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Duncan, MP  
Edmonton—Strathcona

This was the response from James Rajotte:

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding Bill C-400, a Private Member's Bill introduced to the House of Commons by Ms. Marie-Claude Moring, Member of Parliament for Saint-Hyacinthe – Bagot) entitled the *Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act*. For your information, this bill was defeated at Second Reading in the House of Commons on February 27, 2013.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain why I voted against Bill C-400, and highlight some of the key work that our Government is doing to ensure that a broad range of housing and homelessness programs are available for all Canadians.

Since forming government in 2006, we have invested more on affordable and supportive housing than any other government in Canadian history.

Through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), the government contributes to Canada's strong housing finance system by ensuring that mortgage financing is available for all types of housing in all parts of Canada. Thanks in part to CMHC's mortgage loan insurance and securitization guarantee programs, 80 per cent of Canadians are able to meet their housing needs in the marketplace, without direct support from government.

At the same time, we recognize that the government cannot turn its back on those whose needs are not met by the marketplace, including low-income families, people with disabilities, first nation households living on reserve, the homeless and others in need. That is why we are working with provinces and territories, municipalities, national aboriginal organizations, the private sector and not-for-profit groups to deliver a full range of housing support and assistance, from providing emergency shelter for those at greatest risk to assisted housing for low-income households.

Regardless of what form federal assistance takes, our government believes that local housing challenges require local solutions. We believe that the people closest to those requiring assistance are best positioned to develop and deliver effective lasting solutions. Our government's approach recognizes the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces and territories in this area of assisted housing, as well as the need to work with a variety of different partners in order to deliver results. Bill C-400 would have implemented an additional national social housing strategy that would go against the collaborative local solutions model which is already in place and delivering results for Canadians.

When Canada's economic action plan was announced, our government immediately sought the engagement and support of the provinces and territories to deliver housing-related stimulus funds to the economy. Working through the CMHC, in record time, we negotiated amendments to existing housing agreements to ensure that the bulk of federal investments in social housing could be delivered quickly and effectively by provinces and territories. The results speak for themselves.

Through our Economic Action Plan, our government has created 46,000 new affordable housing units and renovated 104,000 more. Every year the government is providing support for over 605,000 individuals and families with subsidized housing.

Since 2006, over 8,900 new rental units have been committed under the on-reserve non-profit housing program. In addition, under Canada's economic action plan, over 10,800 new units were created on and off reserve. These projects not only improved living conditions for tens of thousands of Canadians, they also put people to work quickly and stimulated local economies.

All of this was made possible because our government recognized the provinces and territories were in the best position to deliver housing-related stimulus funding quickly where it was needed most and where it would have the greatest impact. This philosophy is also reflected in the investment in affordable housing 2011-2014 framework that the government jointly announced with provinces and territories in July of 2011.

CMHC also works closely with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and first nations leadership as well as housing organizations to deliver federal funding to address housing needs on reserve, including supports for new construction and the renovation of existing homes on reserve.

These are all important initiatives carried out in partnership with a range of housing stakeholders. They are key components of the multi-pronged approach I mentioned at the outset.

Since 2006, our government has invested some \$13.1 billion in housing and homelessness programs. Working with our partners, assistance has been provided to about 755,000 Canadian households, including low-income families, seniors, persons with disabilities and first nations people.

For more information on the work that our government is doing to address housing and homelessness needs in the country, please access the following website:  
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/homelessness/index.shtml>.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your views with me; I hope that my response is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future should you have any further questions or concerns.

Yours truly,

James Rajotte, MP  
Edmonton-Leduc

JR/dah