

Now let me turn to what is probably the most important single subject of our concern: the expansion of our housing resources, particularly for low-income citizens. As in the case of urban renewal, I urged last year a construction goal of 125,000 public housing units each year in both new and rehabilitated units for a 4-year period, but the Congress only authorized an amount sufficient to provide approximately half this number of units. At the present time, the city of Philadelphia alone has an application filed with the Public Housing Administration for 5,000 units of new and rehabilitated housing. We expect to submit similar applications for an equal number of units in each of the next 3 years for a total of 20,000 units. In greatly increasing the supply of good homes for low-income, needy families, these new units will displace no one. They will be provided through the rehabilitation of presently vacant existing structures and the construction of new houses on vacant lots which blight so many of our neighborhoods. Such a program could be useful in many of the cities across the United States, but only if the magnitude of the total public housing program is great enough to allow its full utilization.

Many other improvements in the public housing program are also necessary. Funds should be specifically provided for the rehabilitation and modernization of existing public housing projects, many of which are now more than 25 years old. Funds for this purpose should not have to be taken out of limited normal maintenance money.

More funds are also needed for social services to be provided to tenants, more and more of whom suffer not only from economic problems but social and physical problems as well, over which they have little control. Such problems include age and physical disability, lack of education, or unsalable employment skills.

The present statutory limits on construction costs per rental room must also be eliminated if new public housing units are to be able to be constructed in the high-cost situations which exist in almost every big city. The leasing program, enacted last year, and for which I personally hold great hopes of providing needed units in a rapid and flexible manner responsive to changing needs, should also be amended to provide for longer term leases, perhaps as long as 5 years, in order to both reduce administrative redtape and to encourage property owners to rehabilitate their properties up to public housing standards in return for promise of guaranteed rentals at fair market rates. I am happy to note a suggestion along these lines in one of the administration bills now before your committee. There is one change in the public housing program I would like to beg with special emphasis because, Mr. Chairman, I must say that I and the people of Philadelphia, feel specially mistreated. Last year the Congress agreed that the public housing program could be greatly strengthened if local housing agencies were able to sell single-family units to their occupants on favorable terms in an effort to create greater homeownership. Ironically, however, and at the last minute, the conference committee decided to change this provision. It eliminated row housing units from those which could be sold. This meant, in effect, that Philadelphia was unable to utilize this new provision. I assure the committee that we have no intention of selling off units which are needed for public housing families. We are, however, proud of Philadelphia as a city in which homeowners make up nearly two-thirds of the population, and believe that homeownership produces positive attitudes of responsibility and good citizenship. It is for this reason, that we would like to be able to devise means of selling public housing units to lower income families. In this way, we not only create homeowners, but we are able to use the public housing program as a renovating tool for the city.

Finally, with regard to public housing, I would like to again urge that the Congress authorize the Public Housing Administration to make grants to local agencies for land acquisition in the same way and to the same extent as is now possible through the Urban Renewal Administration in renewal areas. This would make it possible as it is so often not at present, to build new public housing units on land which grows ever more scarce within our cities.

However, housing is not only a problem for low-income persons in our cities. Many people who cannot qualify for public housing are also unable to find satisfactory housing. I know that the Congress has worked for many years to solve this problem and I certainly do not have all of the answers to it. However, I respectfully urge that the sections 220 and 221(d)(3) programs be revised and improved to remove the many impediments to the development of projects under