

## **MEDIA**

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### **“Affordable housing deal finally reached”**

By Chip Martin

A long-sought deal that will commit an additional \$585 million to affordable housing in Ontario by 2009 will be signed today.

“Hallelujah,” London West MP Joe Fontana said yesterday as he confirmed the deal he’s been working on for two years has finally been reached with his provincial counterparts.

The federal and provincial governments each will put up to \$293 million in a deal that’s expected to help 20,000 households now struggling with housing costs.

“It’s incredible news,” Fontana said. “People who have been on waiting lists for months and years now have a glimmer of hope.”

Fontana, who is the federal minister of labour and housing, will sign the deal with David Caplan, Ontario’s minister of public infrastructure renewal. The announcement will be made in London, Kitchener and Toronto.

Municipalities don’t have to contribute to the program but they, along with the province – which is responsible for housing – will share the money based on population and need.

Fontana said that because the money can go directly to rent supplements, some Ontarians could get relief relatively quickly. Others will have to await construction of affordable housing units in non-profit and co-operative housing ventures that are on the drawing board.

London has nearly 4,000 households on a waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing. More than 15,000 households have been identified as being in desperate straits because more than half their income goes for housing.

City council set aside \$4 million for affordable housing that could only be unlocked once the senior levels of government reached their agreement on Fontana’s housing strategy.

Coun. Susan Eagle, a housing activist and chairperson of council’s housing leadership committee, said she was thrilled the deal is finally done.

"It's incredible. It's fabulous," she said. "We have been waiting a very long time for this."

She said council on Monday will be asked to approve existing reports on the need for affordable housing from a task force and the London Homelessness Coalition.

Eagle said she welcomes the province back into social housing and the agreement being announced today "is a very good start between municipalities and the province."

Ontario was slow to sign on to the affordable housing program because the previous provincial Conservative government had abandoned social housing and downloaded it to municipalities.

Fontana could not contain his glee at getting Ontario on board with the program that by 2009 will see a total of \$773 million put toward affordable housing in the province.

"I was very, very frustrated" at Ontario trailing other provinces, he said. "I was determined to start spending money."

Fontana said that today's deal would not be affected in the event the minority government is brought down because the money was set aside three years ago in a former budget.