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Immigration

Feds consider buying hotels to house influx of asylum seekers

By **Quinn Patrick, True North Wire** • July 4, 2024

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Immigration Minister Marc Miller said that Ottawa is toying with the idea of buying up hotels to house the exponential influx of asylum seekers coming to Canada.

The rationale behind the decision is to save money on the cost of block-booking hotel rooms, which is how the Trudeau government is currently dealing with the situation.

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the government has taken out prolonged leases on hotels over the past several years to accommodate asylum seekers, with taxpayers footing the bill for some 4,000 hotel rooms to house those who've been transferred from provincial shelters and churches.

Miller said in an interview with the Globe and Mail that among the government's potential ideas for more affordable and long term ways to house those claiming refugee status is buying up hotels and retrofitting them.

The move has been criticized for not getting to the root of the problem with large numbers of people claiming asylum in Canada.

"As a matter of principle, I don't think the federal government should be buying properties in the private sector for the purpose of advancing their program aims," Sergio Karas, specialist in citizenship and immigration law told True North.

"Housing refugee claimants whose cases have not been adjudicated when we do not know if they are deserving of refugee protection, at a high cost to taxpayers is a really bad idea."

Karas said providing housing on this scale would only "incentivize" more asylum claimants. "Instead of trying to find solutions to provide housing, they should try to address their mismanagement of the refugee program and reduce the number of refugee claimants coming to Canada," he said. "They should look for ways to disincentivize the refugee program instead of always being behind the eight ball because the program has grown exponentially. There are currently more than 138,000 claims pending on the refugee board."

Canada is currently the fifth largest recipient of asylum claimants in the Western world.

This increasing number of asylum claimants is a problem that Miller himself acknowledged, saying that the government's previous efforts to "stabilize" the numbers haven't worked, saying "these numbers aren't going down drastically anytime soon."

One idea being considered involves having federal and provincial officials on site at the converted hotels to provide front-line services to asylum seekers who are waiting to have their cases processed.

The Trudeau government spent nearly $94 million on hotel bookings for asylum seekers from September 2021 to January 2023, according to its own figures.

An additional cost of over $100 million was spent on hotels for asylum seekers in Niagara Falls, Ont. between February 2023 and 2024.

Housing asylum seekers is a provincial responsibility, however, the federal government began paying for hotels at the onset of the pandemic to relieve provinces whose shelters had overfilled.

The Liberals' latest budget allocated $1.1 billion over the next three years to municipalities and provinces to meet the increasing costs of housing asylum seekers.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau pledged $750 million to Quebec to help the province deal with its influx of asylum seekers as it has taken the lion's share of refugee claimants.

The Conservatives have previously chided the Liberals for allowing the problem to get as bad as it has.

"Conservatives consistently called for the Liberals to fix these problems but the Liberals charged ahead, breaking the system with their failed policies and inaction," said a spokesperson for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. "Now their failure is needlessly costing Canadian taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars."

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