

*The Address*

It is important at this point in time to realize that this government now is opening up debate in the House of Commons to allow members of Parliament to bring forth every concern they have from their ridings before the legislation is formulated and put in front of us. It is a total change of direction to allow members to represent the people in their ridings in this place and have some input ahead of time.

I am not into the Reform policy directions. I am not buying into its directions. I do believe our directions are those of openness, consultation and acceptance of ideas before we take action. That is extremely important. It gives the members of Parliament more power in this place and it gives the people they represent a way for their voice to be heard before the legislation comes down.

**Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise before this House for the first time and give my maiden speech.

I would like to also express my gratitude to the constituents of New Westminster—Burnaby for choosing me on October 25, 1993 to represent them in the House of Commons. Mr. McVey, a grade school teacher of mine, must be smiling today.

● (2140)

New Westminster was the former capital of British Columbia. In fact it was given its name specifically by the Queen. It is now proudly referred to as the royal city. The city of Burnaby is a large urban community and residential area lying between Vancouver and New Westminster.

Situated on the banks of the Fraser River, New Westminster has seen history pass its shore. There was the gold rush of 1858 and the massive town fire that unfortunately destroyed its downtown core. In more recent years it has been a centre for the processing of forestry products. With the prospect of urban sprawl New Westminster's geographical significance was eclipsed and now the revitalization of the waterfront and sky train connections brings a tremendous amount of growth to the city.

New Westminster is a city of proud history from the early days of the province to its re-emergence as a prominent place in British Columbia. Burnaby has seen a tremendous amount of growth in recent years primarily with the emergence of Metro-town along with a pleasant mix of parks, recreation centres and libraries.

I am pleased to say that while there is snow and freezing temperatures in Ottawa today, in my riding the lawns are green. The flowers are starting to come up. Although we have not seen snow in my riding this year let it be known that it does not rain every day in New Westminster—Burnaby.

Like other communities the issue of safer streets and the equitable performance of the justice system to properly balance the issues of the victims as opposed to that of offenders continues to fester.

To focus my remarks I wanted to comment on a paragraph in the throne speech referring to community safety and crime prevention. Listening to the throne speech my reaction was one of stunned disbelief for misplaced priorities. Across Canada one particular issue has been the Young Offenders Act, yet it did not rate a mention in the speech from the throne.

There was no outcry in New Westminster—Burnaby for changes to the human rights act or demands for the court challenges program to be restored. It took questioning of the minister from our side to hear any comment to do with the Young Offenders Act. I heard that in just the last few hours the justice minister did hint at a direction but not very precisely.

Let me say clearly that in my riding the folk are upset about deficits and the conspicuous consumption by government and the lack of fiscal leadership by example. However, if one wants to identify one particular statute that is in disrepute then it is the Young Offenders Act.

As a criminal justice professional I participated in the national consultations leading up to the act being passed in the late days of the previous Liberal administration. I recall that in 1984 the government of the day was quite verbose in promoting the efficacy of the compromise achieved with the provinces. However, I also recall other voices predicting that it was a flawed piece of legislation.

The verdict of my community is in. There is little community support. In fact I have never met one policeman who supports this legislation. We have now had about ten years of implementation and during that time the act has acquired very few defenders.

The flawed act was subject to a number of court appeals for clarification. It was also amended several times by the Conservatives. However, the Young Offenders Act remains today the single piece of legislation that is most vilified by the public.

The Young Offenders Act has a title which implies its application. I say to the government as a professional who has been left in the community to administer this act, let the Young Offenders Act truly deal with young offenders and not youthful adults.

If the justice minister does nothing else about this act and all its tangled provisions, it can do one thing to change the mood of this country concerning young offenders. Consider specifically section 2(1) under definitions of a "young person". What if we change the number 12 to 10 and the number 18 to 16? It is just two numbers.