

Government Orders

With respect to Motion No. 3, I am very surprised when the member for Crowfoot talks about cost cutting in conjunction with the Canadian Police Association and wanting to save money by doing away with alternate measures. The inmate population is exploding. The years between 1989-90 and 1993-94, four years, the federal inmate population increased by 17 per cent, with total expenditures in 1993-94 at \$880 million for federal corrections and \$990 million for provincial corrections.

The annual cost of holding an inmate on average in medium and maximum security was \$39,000 per inmate per year for federal institutions and \$35,000 per inmate per year for provincial institutions.

• (1935)

That indicates the dramatic increase in the actual cost of incarceration. The member for Crowfoot says we should not have alternative measures. If we do not start working toward alternative measures what we will have is people in incarceration costing an extremely large sum of money.

Many are in incarceration. One-third of the people in incarceration are there for non-payment of debt. We want to get away from that. Who is being punished in a case like that when we have people in incarceration for non-payment of debt?

In many cases they cannot afford to pay. It is of no purpose to put them in incarceration. The alternate measures have been in federal legislation for many years in the Young Offenders Act. The experience of the provinces in administering alternative measures programs has been sufficiently positive that they have asked us in the Department of Justice, the Minister of Justice in particular, to include similar measures within the Criminal Code for adults.

Deleting those provisions would go against a perfectly reasonable request being made by the provinces. The availability of alternative measures exercised under the programs authorized by the provincial attorney general within enabling federal legislation respects the division of powers between the Government of Canada and the provincial government and recognizes provinces are in the best position to develop and administer programs related to the offenders targeted by those measures.

The availability of alternative measures will better enable provinces to manage their costs in respect to court time and the use of correctional facilities and resources. It seems inconsistent that the Reform Party, which has focused much of its attention on bringing costs under control, would deny provinces the tool to better manage cases appearing before their courts.

Deterring and deleting alternative measures would reduce the scope of action available to the courts and to the provinces as they administer criminal justice and would not strengthen either this bill or the criminal justice system in general.

The member for Crowfoot, on behalf of the Reform Party, said he put forward federal standards. We want to have some kind of standards but alternative measures are looked at in different ways in different provinces.

The problem with the program is some areas do not have the facilities to provide the alternative measures. That is a severe problem and it means in some areas of the country alternative measures provisions or possibilities are either non-existent or severely curtailed.

We could say because of that we will scrap alternative measures altogether so they are not put in place anywhere in the country but that really does not achieve anything. It denies the people in the areas that have the alternative measures possibilities from utilizing these possibilities.

Also, we could say if one has created a certain seriousness of offence that person is not eligible. When we are dealing with cases, with human concerns and with human considerations, who is to say that where somebody who has been flaunted and taunted in incarceration would be better put back in incarceration than into a program where he would have to spend some time working in the community or for the benefit of the victims?

• (1940)

Also we want to be able to offer the program in a positive nature and to improve on it. We heard in committee that one problem with the alternative measures was that when young people were involved in this they were not being supervised. That is the case in some instances. We have to strengthen these programs. I think there are various ways of doing that.

It has also been stated by the Reform Party that we should have a central registry because there is no record of those who are put on alternate measures and we do not know if they have been before the courts before or if they have been on alternative measures. If there is no record the next time they appear it would be considered a first offence and they would be on alternative measures again.

That is not the case. It is not CPIC, it is not on a national computer but it is in local court files. There is a general record on alternate measures programs.

Alternate measures programs work in different ways in various provinces. It is used as a diversion program in Nova Scotia. Offenders are put on the diversion program before they come to court and a record of this is kept in the police files. In other provinces they appear before the court and instead of being sentenced after the case is heard they are put on the alternative measures program. The programs are working. Young people have been rehabilitated to prove it.

We are not saying we will have the same success rate with adults because the older a person becomes the less the possibility of rehabilitation, but we do feel there will be success. Quite often incarcerating these people costs the Canadian public up to