

Adjournment Debate

While in Edmonton and discussing these types of issues, mostly related to previous escapes from custody but not confined to that, I had an opportunity to deal with case management officers, security officers, and one employee incognito who did not wish his name to be known. The themes that came up at that time, the issues which also bear relevance to the question put that day in June to the Solicitor General, are threefold, I believe.

First, in dealing with the question as put to the Solicitor General on the issue of staff relations, I believe that Corrections Canada can do better in its employee relations. As I look at the field I see shades of the post office, the way we used to discuss management-employee relations in the post office. The ministry and Corrections Canada have to improve the way they deal with their employees. As Corrections Canada itself changes, they have to make sure that the pace of change does not outstrip the ability of employees to train themselves to adapt to new situations.

I remember one individual at the institution yesterday making that point very clearly. He said: "Mr. Lee, I have been here 19 years and I have never seen so much change as we have gone through lately. Please take my message from other people here that you cannot change things so fast that we fail to do our job properly", and a very important job it is too because if they make a mistake dealing with some very dangerous commodities we all as a society have to bear those risks.

The second area was public relations. Corrections Canada has done a woeful job of its own public relations. In the communities where it has institutions there is a very high, ultra sensitive threshold of sensitivity here. The communities are worried and in some cases have reason to worry that the institutions are not properly dealing with the communities that surround them and that they are not taking into account the risk factors existing inside the institution when dealing with the public.

Lastly, the issue I have already touched, Corrections Canada has to make sure that the training it makes available to all of its personnel is properly delivered and that the service properly carries out the functions, mandate and mission statement of CSC.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent Della Noce (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State and to Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I respond to my hon. colleague. As you know, I am also interested in that issue since there are five prisons in my constituency, plus the largest correctional facility. But there is also the best training centre for French-speaking guards in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Solicitor General, I am pleased to address the question raised by the hon. member during Question Period on June 17 regarding labour unrest, low wages, reduced staff levels and insufficient training of correctional officers.

First, I would like to assure the hon. member that the Solicitor General takes his responsibilities with regard to public safety very seriously. As a matter of fact, today, the Solicitor General introduced a bill that shows how important public safety is and how the government is determined to restore public confidence in the correctional system.

• (1820)

[*English*]

With respect to labour unrest I would like to remind the hon. member that federal correctional officers are designated as essential employees for obvious security reasons. As the hon. member is aware, there were some disruptions during the recent strike but public safety and operations were not jeopardized.

The hon. member expressed concern over low wages paid to correctional officers. The member should know that their salaries compare very favourably to their counterparts in other jurisdictions. They are paid 6 per cent more than the average maximum rate earned by their provincial counterparts.

With regard to reduced staff level the members should know that the ratio of correctional officers to inmates with the Correctional Service of Canada is 2.5.

It may interest the hon. member to know that the ratio in the U.S. federal system is one staff member for eight inmates.

[*Translation*]

I would have liked to go on, Mr. Speaker, but I see that my time has already expired.