

Government Orders

● (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Saint-Hubert for sending me a copy of this amendment. I believe the motion is in order.

[English]

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona—Tobacco packaging; the hon. member for Oxford—Urea formaldehyde foam; the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle—Magazine industry.

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill C-37 and respond to the long awaited changes to the Young Offenders Act.

The Young Offenders Act in its operation is critical to Canada's view of the justice system. Its implementation touches at the very heart of the future of our society. Freedom from fear ranks with food and shelter as one of our basic needs. Our communities today are crying out in their fear for the safety of innocent people walking in our neighbourhoods. They are deeply concerned for the safety of their children in playgrounds and schools, even in their homes. Every week we hear another horror story involving young offenders and violent crime.

Ottawa police arrested young offenders after the drive-by shooting death of Nicholas Battersby.

Three young offenders in St. Jerome, Quebec, were arrested after a shooting spree. They were in possession of rifles, handguns and hand grenades.

In British Columbia, Jason Gamache was found guilty in 1992 of rape and murder of a six-year old girl. When she was reported missing Gamache aided in the search for her and spent hours babysitting her siblings. Gamache was just 16 years old when he committed this offence and had been previously convicted of sex offences involving young children. The public had no way of knowing. The Young Offenders Act prohibits publication of details which might identify such an offender.

Just over a month ago an Edmonton woman was stabbed in her home by teenage burglars while trying to protect her children. A few weeks ago a 14-year old was stabbed with a pair of scissors in the hands of a 10-year old boy during a soccer game at Medicine Hat, Alberta.

In a small town near Kelowna, B.C., a 44-year old family man is recovering in hospital after being hit on the head with an axe. Two 16-year-olds have been charged.

A 72-year old man was murdered outside his home in Saskatchewan by a young offender. The sentence: the maximum, three years in custody.

In Edmonton last month a teenager was shot in the back of the head with a stolen handgun. The alleged killer is a 16-year old repeat offender who was on probation for another crime.

In 1992 a man had his car totally demolished by six young offenders. The penalty for this group: none. They were let off scot-free.

Two weeks ago the father of a 10-year old girl was out for a walk in his own neighbourhood in suburban Mississauga when he was viciously beaten to death by young offenders. The motivation: a robbery attempt.

As we struggle with social programs to address the causes of our youth turning to crimes such as alienation, family breakdown, and drug and alcohol abuse, we must also address the effect youth crime has on our families in our communities. By failing to take bold action to correct what has largely not worked and introducing legislation just to mollify a restless public and fulfil an election promise with the call of trust us, the government has fallen short and let us down despite its well intentioned effort.

The Liberal red book speaks of safe homes and safe streets as a basic right and a distinguishing characteristic of Canadian society, while pledging to combat the 40 per cent increase in violent crime that has crept in to threaten that basic right.

The proposals brought forward in the bill are woefully inadequate to reverse the current trend I have mentioned. Tinkering with the internal mechanisms of the act does not rally community confidence. Nor does it reflect an attentiveness to community concern. It is merely a top down, we know best answer to an increasingly aware and justifiably demanding populace.

It is said that the proposed amendments to the Young Offenders Act will improve public protection by improving the act's ability to deal effectively with serious crime.

● (1640)

I have heard the government's side today. We in this corner of the House take government members as sincere. However it is possible to be sincere but sincerely wrong. I applaud the government that the bill today is not going to be the last word on amendments to the act during this Parliament. The two stage approach offered by the government is indeed welcome.

I have said a lot in the House about the shortcomings of the Young Offenders Act. I have made very specific and pointed suggestions both on paper to the justice ministry and in a speech in the House. One wonders if anyone ever listens. Certainly folk at home wonder if the government does any adjusting at all to public grassroots input as distinct from the bilateral negotiations with the provinces and those on the inside of the justice system community.