

*Government Orders*

This is not to say that any of those factors justifies any kind of violent crimes or should contribute to saying that young people have the right to commit crimes. These are mitigating factors. These are things that make it very difficult for young people to have a life that is well, a life that is healthy and a life that keeps them from the negative side of life, so to speak.

Socioeconomic misery and crime are two sides of the same coin. By addressing these problems in our society we will be tackling the root causes of youth crime and ultimately adult crime. It does not take any stretch of the imagination to see how such socioeconomic misery fuels anger, frustration, anti-social behaviour and criminal activity among young people.

I would like the House to consider the adverse conditions that many of our aboriginal youth face as they walk through the perilous path to adulthood. Unemployment among aboriginal people is twice the Canadian level. It is the number one problem facing aboriginal communities and they have the lowest incomes of anyone in the country.

The illiteracy rate among aboriginal people is twice the national average. High school dropout rates can be as high as 95 per cent in isolated northern communities; 57.7 per cent of aboriginal people are under the age of 24. The aboriginal population is very young, growing fast and on the move.

The majority of aboriginal peoples do not live on reserves and the migration of on-reserve aboriginal peoples to urban centres particularly in western Canada is increasing. In Manitoba it is estimated that one out of four new entrants into the job market will be of aboriginal origin. In Saskatchewan it will be one out of three.

Are they destined for a life of unemployment, social problems, crime? The odds seem stacked against them but this need not be the case. Five to six times the number of aboriginal peoples are incarcerated in provincial and federal institutions as compared with aboriginal peoples in the general population. Yet aboriginal peoples only represent approximately 3.7 per cent of the Canadian population.

The state of many aboriginal peoples in Canada is not a pretty picture. Despite these socioeconomic problems, progress has been made in health, education, economic community development and social services.

Such progress is often linked to aboriginal peoples having culturally appropriate services controlled by aboriginal peoples. I am proud to be a part of a government that recognizes the enormous potential that our young people have to offer and that is prepared to invest in their abilities and to give them hope and opportunities for the future.

This government has implemented a number of programs and services we feel will help aboriginal youth and other youth as

well recognize their strengths and grow to their full potential and to see the sun on the horizon in an optimistic manner.

I, as Secretary of State for Training and Youth, and the Minister of Human Resources Development have announced a youth strategy. This strategy will attack some of the root causes for turning youth into young offenders.

In my riding last month we made a contribution to a youth program with the Gwich'in people. The Gwich'in people have taken it upon themselves to build their own healing centre, to deal with many of their social and justice issues, many of their health issues. They have done so along with the partnership they are building with people who have the expertise in and outside their own communities.

• (1615)

Last month we announced 37 projects as part of the first wave of Youth Service Canada. We believe it is necessary to send a signal that young people can contribute to rather than take away from their communities. Many think of young people very negatively because young offenders tend to get all the stories, all the ink. The news media always covers them. However many young people are doing wonderful things but are not being celebrated or recognized.

Youth Service Canada aims to help 18 to 24-year olds gain work experience, develop their skills, learn good work habits and improve their self-esteem through community service projects. Youth Service Canada should provide opportunities for youth to break away from the socioeconomic factors which have held them back and have seduced some to become involved in a life of crime.

Recently I attended the University of Calgary's graduation for its native students. It has graduated 18 native students with university degrees, some of them with a Bachelor of Social Work, some of them with a Bachelor of Education. A young woman graduated with an engineering degree. Those young people are very healthy models of outstanding citizens who will help their communities and this country.

So far it is not all bad news. These 18 students from the University of Calgary graduated under the leadership of Mr. George Callion who works with native students across Canada. He works on the Calgary Police Commission and contributes in a number of ways.

It takes leadership. It takes caring. It takes generosity. These must be expressed to our young people to encourage them and to let them know that the government cares and the people in their communities care. We must let them know that we in this House care about them and are directing our efforts to deal with those things.