

Government Orders

I suggest that Mr. Rock cancel his gun registration program and use that money, if necessary 10 times over, on a program that will produce a child sex offence registry and the country will be far better off.

The Deputy Speaker: We are all recently back in the House. I would ask all members not to refer to ministers by their surnames, family names or first names, but by the name of the ministry.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the debate on the amendments and I felt I had to say something on behalf of Canadians, particularly those in my constituency whom I met with over the summer and Canadians in Atlantic Canada whom I met with recently.

Canadians are saying they want our justice system changed to give more protection to its citizens. They never talk about changing the system to give more protection to the criminal. They do not want that. They are not particularly concerned about spending more money to rehabilitate criminals although most want rehabilitation to take place where possible. Canadians want a justice system that protects the people.

The amendments presented by the hon. member for Wild Rose provide more protection at least for a certain group of people, in this case children. The amendment should certainly be supported by all members of the House. I just do not believe that all members of the House are not willing to put in place an amendment which would allow more protection for children. I find it hard to believe that they would not pass this amendment.

• (1215)

Specifically these amendments would put information on a police computer system, CPIC. It would allow information to be entered in the computer system on the modus operandi used by sexual offenders who commit sexual abuse on children. That is what the amendment would provide. It would make this information available to all peace officers across the country.

In that way, if police were investigating a sexual offence against a child, they would have quick and ready access to information across the country which would point out if a similar type of a crime had been committed in another part of the country in the past.

Also the amendment would give information to peace officers again on CPIC. Specifically it would give the location of the prisons in which offenders are imprisoned and the date of release of any offender who has committed a sexual offence against a child. Because the information would be on CPIC it would be readily available to all police officers across the country.

Therefore it is very difficult for me to understand why the amendment would not be supported by all members of the House. For that reason too I thank the hon. member for Wild Rose for bringing the amendment forward.

There is much more that can be done. It is necessary to clearly redefine the priorities in our justice system. Through a conscious effort made by Liberal governments starting in 1972 with Solicitor General Goyer, the priorities of the justice system were shifted from a system that put the highest priority on the rights of the people in the country to be safe and to feel safe to the rights of the victims. They shifted the priorities to a situation where the top priority has become the rights of the criminal, the poor criminal; we have to do everything we can to protect the criminal, the rights of the criminal and the rehabilitation of the criminal. I do not think most Canadians believe the criminal should be the top priority in our justice system.

The amendment proposed by the hon. member for Wild Rose will do something to shift the focus back again to the victims. For all the talk I have heard across the country about the need to care for the victims, I have not seen legislation in the House that has done much in terms of giving the victims more say, making them a higher priority within our justice system.

The parliamentary secretary to the solicitor general has said that the amendment cannot possibly go through because we cannot afford it. We have to always be very conscious of spending. The Reform zero in three plan which we presented across the country during the 1993 election campaign laid out in some detail a plan which would lead to a balanced budget in three years. In that plan we allowed for spending in the justice area. If we are to have the deterrents in place and the deterrents sometimes are longer prison sentences—other deterrents can be used as well—it costs money. It is a matter of prioritizing spending. In our zero in three plan we did that. Justice is such a high priority that we allocated money to it.

In our taxpayers' budget presented before the finance minister's budget last February we put aside money to put in place systems like the one proposed by the member for Wild Rose.

• (1220)

We are always conscious of spending money but we also know how to prioritize. It is important to know where Canadians are willing to spend money and where they are not. In most cases the government has those priorities completely turned around. It does not know what is important to Canadians and it does not know in what areas Canadians are willing to spend money and what areas they are not.

It will take a continual reminder by us on this side of the House for government members of what is important to Canadians. It seems the government is out of touch. Perhaps I am being a little unfair when I say that all members of the governing party are out of touch, because I believe it is mainly the cabinet, the old boys who have been around for years that are out of touch.