

The Address

[English]

Last year a subcommittee of the standing committee on justice released a report on a recodification of the Criminal Code. We will be considering those recommendations, and we will undertake an assessment of the question of whether the present code is serving the interests of criminal justice in the modern age.

We shall also introduce legislation to deal with the sentencing aspect of criminal law. The legislation will clearly set forth the purposes of sentencing, provide for a full range of alternative sentences, focus on the desirability of non-custodial sentences for non-violent crime, and provide for a range of intermediate sanctions where they are appropriate.

The agenda I have described very briefly this afternoon is a broad and a challenging one. Nonetheless it is equally clear that the issues we seek to address are urgent and important. May I say that I look forward to working with my colleagues in government, my colleagues throughout the House of Commons, in meeting the challenges this agenda presents. In doing so, may we recommit ourselves to what must be our ultimate objective in justice: to furnish, provide and maintain the fairest and most effective system of justice for Canada and Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I was just taking notice that many members are seeking the floor. I would remind all members that we will begin a 10-minute period of questions and answers. As short as the questions are is as many of you who will participate.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Naturally, it will be brief.

The Minister just announced in his speech the creation of a national crime prevention council. As everyone knows, councils such as this are often made of up of experts who are slow to report, so much so that when they do finally get around to releasing their report, all one can do is comment on the findings.

My question is this: Who will be appointed to this high-profile council?

● (1725)

Does the minister intend to take into account in the appointment process certain new elements which may not have been considered in the case of past councils. I am referring here for example to appointing certain individuals who through their work are familiar with criminals, indeed with hardened criminals. While it is natural that the council would include people whom we have come to expect to serve on such bodies, people such as lawyers and professionals who provide services to individuals in the corrections field, maybe it should also be made up of people who work with criminals every day. I am thinking about correctional services officers who in the course

of their day-to-day jobs deal with those who have committed crimes and are serving time.

I know from experience that those who work inside correctional facilities are somewhat bound by professional secrecy. Understandably it is quite natural for them not to disclose everything that goes on. Some of what goes on is not very pretty and there is no need for everyone to know the details. The people who work inside these institutions and see firsthand how people in need of assistance live are, we have to admit, often overlooked initially, when in fact they may be in the best position to make a contribution to this high-profile council and to propose more pragmatic solutions.

Therefore, I will repeat my question to the minister. Has he given any thought to the make-up of this body? Who will be appointed to serve on the council?

[English]

Mr. Rock: Mr. Speaker, the question the hon. member has raised strikes really at the heart of this council. If it is going to be effective, if it is going to achieve the objectives I have described, it cannot be academic or remote. It cannot be slow to report. It cannot simply research and write. It has to be community based. It has to be pragmatic, and it has to be government supporting communities to get action under way.

I am sensitive to the dangers he has identified. We cannot burden the council with a mandate that will result in it going on forever and achieving nothing.

Let me tell my hon. friend that my department will be mailing out during the next week or so to dozens of individuals and organizations throughout the country a discussion paper raising many of the questions he has touched upon. My hon. friend talked about the structure and composition of the council and the mandate of the council itself.

We will be seeking the views of police forces, community groups, other levels of government and individuals with the kind of practical experience to which my hon. friend referred in coming to grips with the design and creation of this council. We will also be grateful for his suggestions. I will be sending the discussion paper to my colleagues in the House as well. We will look forward to having the benefit of his views as we put it together.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for the consideration he has shown me when we first met and had a short exchange of ideas. I would also thank the minister for keeping the door open for submissions on the Young Offenders Act. I believe Canadians certainly do want input into this particular piece of legislation.

The question I have for the minister is in relation to his crime prevention program. I am aware of the document of which he speaks and the direction in which the crime prevention program is going. Was it not supported by all parties last year?