

Supply

The government in line with its red book commitment is putting various measures in place to improve the parole process. Among them are better training for National Parole Board members, legislative changes to better deal with those who are not performing satisfactorily and the requirement that members' appointments be based on merit, competence and integrity. After all, parole board members have a difficult and demanding job and only the best qualified people will be considered for future board positions.

In recent years a relatively small number of well publicized cases involving high risk offenders on conditional release have done much to erode public confidence in the institutions that have been entrusted to protect society.

In the parole system the Solicitor General is working to rebuild that public trust and restore that confidence. I believe the government's commitment to work to improve public safety from high risk offenders and to improve the parole process are firm examples of the type of action that will put us on the right track to win back that confidence.

Another example is the government's commitment to address the issues of youth violence.

[Translation]

I can of course only be concerned about the marked increase in violent crimes committed by young Canadians in recent years. We have all heard or read media reports on youth gangs and their criminal activities. Most incidents occur in large cities such as Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, but small communities are not completely immune to the problem.

We do not yet know the real scope and seriousness of the problem of violence and criminal gangs among young people in Canada. According to some research on criminal justice, the crime rate among young Canadians is rising, but the rates for homicides and serious offences involving violence have remained relatively stable.

The number of charges for minor assaults such as slapping, punching and kicking has significantly increased. However, we do not know if this reflects an actual increase in the number of violent offences, or if it simply means that victims are more inclined to go to the police, or that the police is more likely to lay charges.

I want to be clear: I am not trying to minimize the problem of violence among young people, which is unfortunately worrisome. As a concerned citizen, I know how acts of violence can generate fear and intimidation in our communities.

In its program to promote justice and fight crime, the federal government clearly states that one of its priorities will be to take action on the increase in violent offences and delinquency

among young people. Canadians of all ages should be able to enjoy the fundamental right of being safe in public and private places.

[English]

Last, I would like to turn to the issue of victim's rights. When the hon. member for Surrey—White Rock—South Langley tabled the motion we are debating she was obviously unaware that victims have more rights under today's criminal justice system than at any other time in Canadian history. Victims of crime are now formally recognized as legitimate and essential players in the federal corrections and parole process.

• (1335)

This recognition ensures that victims can be kept informed of an offender's prison and parole status if they so do request. Information from victims can now be considered at parole hearings and the victims may now attend parole hearings at the discretion of the parole board. No longer is their attendance dependent on the agreement of the defendant.

Aside from these changes police services and courts across the country are now much more sensitized to the needs of victims and this sensitivity is embodied in guidelines and new police policies which reflect an understanding of victims and the emotional trauma that they have often suffered.

These are positive and much needed changes. The government also recognizes that further change to accommodate the needs of victims is still necessary. As I said in my opening remarks we are not going to act in haste only to have to repent at leisure. When the government brings about change to the criminal justice system it will be lasting change, change that will stand the test of time.

Last year we travelled across the country meeting and listening to thousands of Canadians and seeking their input as we built our electoral platform. We did not spend all that time reflecting, consulting and listening just to turn our backs on Canadians the moment we were elected to office.

Canadians told us then and they are telling us now that they want change based on a thorough examination of all the issues, consultation with all interest groups, and a calm and rational appraisal and weighing of all the facts.

That is the type of change that we are committed to bringing to the criminal justice system and that we are working for even as I speak. It is the type of change that Canadians expect and deserve and the type of change that the government will deliver.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the hon. member's speech. I found it an affront that this member would suggest we are asking for a quick fix.