

Private Members' Business

I could quote many others where the penalty imposed was inconsequential. Consequently the message that is sent is one that almost condones this activity.

I notice a number of my friends from Alberta are in the House and I will quote some Alberta statistics. Mr. Speaker, you will appreciate this, a representative from the province of Alberta.

To an idea of the seriousness of this, in 1990, 1,538 cattle were reported stolen as well as 138 horses. In 1991, it was 1,515 cattle reported stolen and 156 horses. In 1992, 1,230 cattle were reported stolen and 172 horses. In 1993, 1,427 cattle were reported stolen as well as 98 horses.

In British Columbia from the area that I represent, approximately 200 cattle a year go missing. They call it missing and in all cases it is agreed that these cattle have been stolen or rustled. Many cattle are shot and butchered on the spot. Remains are located later. Many cattle are shot and simply abandoned. These are the unscrupulous types, presumably using someone's cattle for target practice.

Again, the use of firearms as part of this is a concern to many of us. This legislation addresses that as well.

To say that these numbers actually reflect the state of this problem is misleading. This is the thin edge of the wedge. This is sort of the tip of the iceberg. Ranchers are reluctant to report cattle from their herds being stolen or rustled because it would indicate that their territories are vulnerable to this kind of activity.

• (1415)

The RCMP are responsible for various stock divisions and it says the ratio is probably 1:20. For every cow which is reported stolen there probably are 20 which have actually been stolen but have not been reported. It is partly because they do not want to publicize these events which perhaps would encourage others to participate in this type of easy illegitimate activity. The concern also is that once you start this process where does it end.

Interestingly enough, in attaching finances to this, in the central part of British Columbia we are talking of about one-third of a million dollars annually which is lost to cattle rustling that we know of. The figure is well over \$1 million in Alberta. Of course if you use the 1:20 ratio we are talking many, many millions of dollars which cattlemen lose.

When you consider that many cases are small cattle operations, if they lose 20 or 30 cows, that is it for their profits for the year. That might make the difference between making the payments on their loans or not. It is that type of seriousness.

There is another element which I think you in particular, Mr. Speaker, will find interesting. That is the number of cattle that are stolen and the number of cattle that seem to be stolen. This is determined by brands during cattle sales. During cattle sales brand inspectors make sure the brand on an animal belongs to the person selling that piece of livestock. Interestingly enough there is a wide discrepancy in this situation. When the cattle is sold if that ownership is not clear in terms of the brand allocation, the moneys will go to the actual brand holders.

Here is an example. Moving a little bit further east, in Saskatchewan in 1987 money was redirected on nearly 800 head of cattle. In 1990, 2,239 cattle were identified as having ownership different from the person actually selling the animal. Therefore the money was rerouted back to the legitimate owner.

There is a whole element of literally thousands and thousands of livestock being sold when for all intents and purposes they have been rustled and stolen. Of course people shrug their shoulders and say: "Well I guess they just wandered in with the rest of my herd. I am sorry I missed that one". One of the reasons for this activity is that the judges, the courts and the justice system do not take this seriously at all.

Bill C-211 suggests that we do two things. One is that we impose a serious fine making it an indictable offence for anyone caught using firearms while participating in cattle rustling or cattle thievery. It suggests that we have a minimum fine as well.

When it comes to fining individuals we often have a maximum fine but we do not have a minimum fine. If a person is out there shooting cattle or in a position where they could shoot cattle or packing a firearm when participating in this thievery we should have zero tolerance for this. As a matter of fact I suppose you can make the case that we should have zero tolerance for this when it comes to people as well.

We should just say: "Listen, if you are participating in a criminal act and you are in possession of a firearm, even if you do not use that firearm there is an automatic sentence of 10 years on top of anything else you will receive". There would be no plea bargaining available, just an automatic sentence in terms of possessing a firearm.

Perhaps a first step is to have this associated with animals. It seems odd that we would have a tougher offence when we are dealing with shooting animals or carrying firearms around animals than we would around people, but my bill deals with cattle rustling today. Perhaps I could bring in another amendment to the Criminal Code dealing with human beings later.

Therefore step one is that we would identify that using firearms in cattle thievery or livestock thievery—we are talking about horses and I suppose now in your part of the country, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about alpacas, llamas, ostriches and all