

Government Orders

strong response by Parliament. We must give our front line people, who struggle valiantly to protect the community, the tools and legal terms to do their job.

I notice that in the first version of this bill, the Conservative one from the 34th Parliament, the amount of cannabis that is to be considered the demarcation line between schedules—serious consequences or not so serious consequences—in Bill C-85, schedule VI, it was one kilo of cannabis. That was the amount. Now in the same section of Bill C-7, that demarcation amount is raised to three kilos. What is the message here?

Maybe there are some arguments, such as fewer cases leading to jail terms, a cost saving measure. Perhaps pressure has come from certain social groups who believe in using pot as their religion. Whatever the reckoning, it is quite a message to send to the community.

What are the effects of the proposed legislation with reference to schedule VI? Those dealing in drugs could do so in shipments under three kilos. Should they get caught it would mean not as heavy a penalty as it would if they were caught with a quantity exceeding three kilos. This change might embolden what is happening on the street, especially in our high schools, and result in an increase in the drug trade. Traffickers will think that the law is getting soft.

How much is three kilos? It is three bricks, three bundles, about 6.6 pounds. It is about the size and weight of my newborn son, 6.6 pounds. What will 6.6 pounds buy or bring the children of our nation? Three kilos or 6.6 pounds would make an awful lot of joints.

As a criminal justice professional I have seen firsthand clients who have lost business careers because of closet marijuana habits. Years ago I saw a cabinet minister of the provincial government light up. How sad. I have dealt with sexual offenders on probation. Some of their excuses for molesting the children in their household was that they were high on cannabis.

The car accidents, the industrial accidents, the misjudged business deals leading to bankruptcy and many needlessly unemployed, the loss of general social judgment, the loss of the desire to work, the loss of the desire for academic excellence, these I have observed firsthand as a probation officer, officer of the court and family court counsellor, the direct result of the relatively tolerant attitude toward marijuana use. There we have some of the underlying principles of Bill C-7. These are the flags of direction that the bill takes.

In summary, first I say clearly that Bill C-7 is criminal law. Let us not slip it by as merely health legislation. Second, what a signal is sent by the threshold of three kilos for cannabis. This bill on that specific seems to go in the wrong direction.

The government may try to send a signal that we now are a mature, sophisticated society and that we can handle drug use in a tolerant and enlightened way under the guise of health but the

community knows otherwise. The school authorities in my riding are not looking for a loosening of drug enforcement. The local crown counsel is looking for clear, tough, workable legislation that holds up in the courtroom.

My community wants legislation that gives clear authority to the duty constable when he pulls over a driver. It should give appropriate powers of search and seizure for drugs. I say it is not technically hard to do but it requires political will to send a clear signal which way we are going with this legislation. Let the community absorb what is being proposed. Let witnesses come forward. Let the people speak, not just the experts.

I challenge the government to not only proceed with its top down attitude telling the community what is good for them but let the implications of this bill simmer in the community and then have the courage to adjust its efforts into what the community expects from its leaders.

In closing, Bill C-7 is significant legislation. It is 71 pages worth. It remains to be seen what is the essential thrust, where it is going. I look forward to seeing it referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and give it the character and the intent that it deserves.

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member made reference to marijuana and a particular threshold of three kilos without making reference to that as being simply a procedural matter in the act and having nothing to do with substance.

The new legislation in dealing with cannabis, which is marijuana, puts the substance into the same schedule, schedule I, that opium, codeine, morphine, cocaine are in, some of the worst drugs that we have. Marijuana and its derivatives are in the same schedule where reference is made that marijuana, its preparations, derivatives and similar synthetic preparations are all included in schedule I.

● (1255)

How can the hon. member indicate that this legislation is not legislation that adequately deals with marijuana when that substance is put into the same schedule as other drugs such as cocaine, codeine and opium?

Mr. Forseth: I understand the point. There is a demarcation on schedule VI concerning the three kilo mark, over three kilos or under.

I know the pressure of the court system in the province of British Columbia and elsewhere. If the charge is simple possession of marijuana or a small amount for trafficking, and if there is an option to proceed summarily they are going to chose that option. Raising the amount to three kilos is, I think, sending the wrong signal. The criminal law must act and be functional and stand up in the courtroom, but it also is an educated and symbolic role. I think the bill sends the wrong signal to the community.