

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

Stephanie Butler Homicide

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the city of Edmonton was once again in shock and disbelief at another horrific act of violence, the city's ninth homicide of the year. One young woman is dead, a distraught husband is in mourning, and an elderly cab driver is severely beaten. The culprit, a repeat violent offender addicted to crystal meth with outstanding warrants, went from being in police custody 48 hours prior to committing murder and aggravated assault.

To the Solicitor General: given that the accused in this situation was in police custody only two days prior to committing violent crimes, will the minister utilize the provisions of section 46.1 of the Police Act to conduct an investigation into this incident to determine what went wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me say that this is a very tragic event, and our thoughts and prayers are certainly going out to the families involved. The question as to whether this is going to become a 46.1 or not is presently being investigated by the Edmonton city police. This case will soon be before the courts, and I will not make any further comments at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The accused in this tragic case had a very long history of addiction to drugs and mental instability as well as outstanding warrants. That should have been enough to hold him in custody. What is obvious in this situation is that producing \$300 in bail and a court order to stay away from his brother's house were not even close to being the measures necessary to protect Stephanie Butler and the cab driver. The actions taken were not adequate. There was clear risk.

To the Minister of Justice: will the minister commit to a public fatality inquiry into the circumstances that led the justice of the peace to release the accused on only \$300 bail and the said court order when these conditions were so obviously not enough to prevent this from happening?

1:50

Mr. Stevens: Well, as the Solicitor General rightly pointed out, Mr. Speaker, this matter is before the court. It's totally inappropriate for me as Minister of Justice and Attorney General to respond to that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a glaring problem in this province, and that is the lack of resources available to the police to enforce the conditions of court orders. Time and again the Official Opposition has raised the problem of inadequate police funding, particularly for Alberta's major cities. The government has failed to respond to these concerns, and they continue to fail to recognize that the funding formula needs to be re-evaluated due to population increases and a dramatic increase and escalation in violent crimes. Everyone knows that the police need more resources, everyone but this Tory government.

To the Solicitor General: when will the minister commit to reviewing the funding formula for cities with populations over 100,000 and request raising it from the meagre \$16 per capita that it's currently at?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to funding for police agencies, I do want to point out that over the last two years funding has increased by 20 per cent and has resulted in over 200 new RCMP officers out on the street. In regard to cities and those funding formulas, we are currently reviewing that. If we see a need to change, we will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.