

**Speaking Notes  
Terry Matchett, QC  
Lasting Solutions to Safer Communities Forum  
Thursday Evening Banquet**

**Thursday, March 13, 2008  
6 p.m.  
Coast Terrace Inn Edmonton South  
4440 Gateway Blvd.  
Edmonton, Alberta**

(check against delivery)

## **Introduction**

- Good evening Honourable members of the judiciary, ladies and gentlemen.
- It's truly a pleasure to be here tonight and contribute to this forum by sharing with you some of the work the government is doing to foster safer communities.
- Let me start by saying that your attendance at this conference is a clear and important statement of your commitment to find lasting solutions to the issues around crime in Alberta.
- The province of Alberta is at an important point in our crime reduction initiative and this forum is a very timely boost as we move forward.
- I've spent most of my professional career working as a prosecutor in our court system. I considered that work important but I often asked myself whether I was really

making a difference in terms of making the community safer by reducing crime.

- You remind yourself that locking people up for a while does that by hopefully deterring others from that behaviour and by taking the person off the street for a period of time. And while that is largely true, I eventually came to the view that the criminal justice system is to safe communities what a hospital emergency ward is to healthy communities. In both cases you're trying to fix the damage after it's already been done. If you want healthy people you need a cradle to grave focus on healthy lifestyle policies that support that outcome. The same applies if you want safer communities. From the earliest stages of life you need to understand the risk factors that drive a person to commit crimes and put in place policies and programs which lessen or eliminate those factors.
- In saying that, please don't get the impression I've gone soft on crime – for those who choose a life of serious crime or show no interest in rehabilitation we must continue to remove them from society.
- As you've heard at this conference, to be effective in fighting crime and the causes of crime it is essential that there be joint responsibility among communities, community agencies, business, police, government and all Albertans.

- And as a department, Alberta Justice knows that working together with all our partners in a balanced way is necessary to effectively reduce crime and the factors that most impact community safety.
- And we also understand that we need to continue to build more collaborative mechanisms that will facilitate that joint work.

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- Over the past few years, governments across the country have been working to increase the involvement of our external stakeholders and members of the public in government policy development.
- Today, governments face increasingly complex issues that extend across multiple sectors and jurisdictions. At the same time, public demands for more open policy processes have greatly increased.
- This means that governments need to increase their level of collaboration both internally and externally to achieve the societal outcomes expected by its citizens.
- Refer to cross-ministry initiatives in government

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- One of Alberta Justice's first attempts at this was in January 1999, when 151 delegates attended the Alberta Summit on Justice.

- The mandate at that time was to come up with recommendations on ways to improve public confidence and community participation in the justice system.
- One of the recommendations we committed to implementing was to establish a process of ongoing communication and information sharing that promoted stakeholder collaboration in the development of justice policies and initiatives.
- This desire for greater stakeholder and community input soon led to the formation of the Justice Policy Advisory Committee or JPAC.
- JPAC is made up of our major partners and stakeholders and was designed to be a forum for collaboration on policy affecting the justice system.
- Currently, JPAC has five working groups – Leaders, Media, Volunteers, Law Related Education and Research.
- Not only is JPAC an important vehicle to develop policy; it is a place to build relationships and share ideas for new policy directions.
- The creation of JPAC placed Alberta on the leading edge of policy development in Canada. Our Ministry continues to be recognized by other jurisdictions for the collaborative approach we take with our stakeholders and partners.

- JPAC is participating in a number of important policy projects.
- For example, the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice brought the Legal Services Mapping Project to JPAC for input.
- This project will map the legal services currently available in the province for Albertans to identify gaps and accessibility problems.
- We have been advised by the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice that this project would not be possible without the collaborative environment JPAC provides. Indeed, they chose to do the project here in Alberta for that reason.

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- Sometimes the collaborative work at JPAC results in seemingly small changes that can have very positive impacts.
- For example, on the Criminal Justice side, during this last year, JPAC was used as a vehicle to find a solution to rural victim services not having access to court information.
- By working on the problem collaboratively, JPAC was able to help rural victim services get access to court dates and scheduled appearances, something which had been an obstacle for them for over 10 years.

- While JPAC is a very useful mechanism to facilitate reform at the highest levels, as the government moves forward with our Crime Prevention Initiative, we will need to create many new formal and informal mechanisms to foster collaboration in reducing crime.

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- It will be absolutely essential for example that some of those mechanisms engage the community at the local level. It is true in so many different ways that crime is a local issue and it must be addressed at the local level by people truly engaged in finding solutions. That's one of the reasons why this conference is such a great support to our ambitious endeavour to reduce crime in this province.

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- As we increase our knowledge and awareness of what causes crime and share ideas and best practices, we can develop targeted strategies and put them into practice in our communities to make them safer.
- Your focus at this conference on social development approaches to crime prevention is vitally important because it is key to knowing how to safeguard vulnerable segments of the population from becoming engaged in crime or victimized by criminal activity.

- I want to thank the John Howard Society and the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association for putting on this forum.
- This conference will serve to reinforce what most of us in the justice system know to be true – that we'll never reduce crime by simply reacting to it.
- Rather, we must look at proven and effective responses to crime in our communities that balance prevention with treatment and enforcement.

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- As all of you know, the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force was the vehicle chosen by the government to craft a plan to reduce crime in Alberta.
- I want to take a few minutes to share with you some of the findings of the task force and some of the initiatives the Alberta government has underway as a result of their recommendations.

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- The task force was formed in the spring of 2007 under a direct mandate from Premier Ed Stelmach to the then Minister of Justice, Ron Stevens.
- The Minister appointed MLA and former Solicitor General Heather Forsyth as the Chair. He also appointed 8 other members representing urban and rural

communities, the Aboriginal community, Crown prosecutors, youth, victims, police and academics.

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- The task force travelled to 14 communities and heard from more than 1700 Albertans about how to reduce crime, enhance community safety and improve public confidence in the criminal justice system.
- They also held a two day symposium last June that brought together community leaders and experts in crime prevention to talk about focusing the recommendations that needed to be made to government.

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### **Key Issues Affecting Safety in Communities**

- From the consultation participants, the task force heard some common themes about crime in Alberta.
- By far, the most common were issues around drugs and alcohol – their use and more importantly their abuse...and the impact this has on crime.
- They also heard that individuals and families are under increasing stress in today's economy.
- And people are concerned with delays in the criminal justice system and how the system deals with offenders or more often, fails to do so.

- The task force also heard about the mounting pressure on police services and the challenge of meeting those pressures with limited resources.

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### **Highlights of the Task Force Report**

- In its final report, the Task Force identified five key theme areas similar to those that arose during the consultations.

#### **Drug and alcohol abuse**

- The first theme was drug and alcohol abuse and addictions.
- The evidence is conclusive that people often commit crime under the influence of drugs or alcohol. As a former prosecutor, I can certainly attest to that.
- Drugs and alcohol are major contributing factors to fights, thefts, vandalism and family violence.
- And it seems that Alberta's "work hard – play hard" culture is making drug and alcohol abuse more socially acceptable.

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- The task force heard that better treatment and longer term treatment are needed to counter these addictions. And that treatment for mental illness needs to be more closely linked to addictions treatment because in many cases, offenders are dealing with mental health issues as well as addictions.

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- The task force recommended a number of things that could be done to address drug and alcohol abuse in the province.
- For instance, regulations around liquor licensing and serving alcohol provide restrictions on excessive drinking. Yet binge drinking still goes on and in many cases is encouraged by drink sales or promotions.
- Enforcing these regulations in areas where there appears to be a problem would help reduce a lot of the fights and other crime that occurs once the bars close.

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- In addition to treatment and enforcement, the task force also sees a place for the prevention of substance abuse.
- Social marketing campaigns can be effective in changing behaviour by influencing what is socially acceptable and what is not. In essence, we need to wage a very public war against substance abuse.

- A number of recommendations were made to address addictions and mental health issues. The most significant was to increase the number of treatment beds available.
- We are looking at funding an additional 100 mental health beds in the province.
- We recognize that we need the people to staff these new beds and the challenges we face around recruiting, but we've got the ball rolling. The bottom line is we need the beds and a commitment has been made to provide them.

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### **Laws and the courts**

- The second theme that emerged was a need to see changes in laws and the court system.
- The task force heard about ideas that are working for communities at the municipal level to address crime in different but effective ways.
- These included reinforcing existing laws and regulations, introducing new legislation and in certain cases, allowing municipalities to use by-laws to deter criminal activity.
- The report finds that these avenues need to be pursued wherever possible.

- If by-laws work to shut down a drug house, for example, we have succeeded in making the community safer.

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- During the fall session of the Legislature, the government passed Bill 212, the *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*.
- The Act supports community efforts to target and shutdown derelict properties used as drug houses or for other criminal activities that endanger our children and families.
- The Act will be implemented later this year and a new program will be established to expand the number of sheriffs in the province in order to ensure the legislation is fully enforced.

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- One of the biggest concerns the task force found with the criminal justice system is sentencing – both in terms of what the sentence is and when it is imposed.
- Albertans want to know that the punishment fits the crime. They also want to make sure it is an effective and timely deterrent to crime.
- The delays in court proceedings are seen as a real hindrance to imposing immediate consequences on

offenders for their actions. This is particularly troublesome for young offenders.

- As a result, we need to become better at eliminating inefficiencies and delays in criminal justice system proceedings whenever possible.
- We believe that one way this can be addressed is by implementing file ownership in all Crown offices. The Criminal Justice and Court Services Divisions of Alberta Justice and the Provincial Court of Alberta will be working in partnership on an initiative to look at different ways to schedule trials.
- In addition, we have brought in a prosecutor from Manitoba who helped to develop and implement this new process helped them reform their system.
- One of the essential principles of Crown file ownership is that control and responsibility of a file are given to one Crown prosecutor from the beginning of the court process to the end.
- File ownership will make more efficient and effective use of limited Court Services, Crown and Provincial Court resources, fully utilize court time and ultimately increase the public's confidence in the justice system and improve access to justice.
- Another way we are working to streamline the system is by involving Crown prosecutors in bail hearings.

- We anticipate a number of new Crowns and support staff will be hired to allow for this change.
- This will ensure the best possible case is put forward and accused persons, who should not be released, will more likely remain in custody.
- Conversely, those who should be released, will be released with appropriate conditions.
- Alberta is also addressing delays through our specialized family violence and drug treatment courts.
- The task force recommended a similar court in Alberta for offenders suffering with mental illness.
- And I'm pleased to say we have already begun working with the judiciary on developing a mental health court pilot project in Edmonton.
- In addition, ministries are looking at expanding funding for family violence treatment, particularly in Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie and Airdrie.

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- We support specialized courts because they get results.
- And the reason they are so effective is because they offer immediate treatment to offenders.

- By addressing the problem behaviour soon after the offence has occurred, we are making an immediate impact on how the offender thinks about their behaviour.
- We are forcing them to recognize it was wrong and we are getting them into the treatment they need to change their behaviour.
- We are also working on new tools to support victims.

[PAUSE]

- The *Victim's Compensation and Restitution Act* will be proclaimed and implemented to obtain voluntary compensation and restitution from offenders for victims.
- If legal action is required, assets will be seized and the proceeds from their disposal will be paid to victims.

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### **Families, children and youth**

- The third theme area relates to families, children and youth.
- Research shows that many of the risk factors that contribute to criminal behaviour start with families.
- The effects of poor parenting are real. And as a result, one of the best ways of preventing crime is to ensure that children grow up in supportive, positive and caring families.

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- The problem we face here is that it is extremely difficult to legislate proper parenting.
- What the government can do is ensure that resources and information are available for parents when they need them.
- One way we're looking at doing this is through pilot programs targeted at families and parents of children at-risk for later anti-social behaviour.
- This is one of the reasons why Alberta's work on family violence and bullying and on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder are so important.
- Preventing family violence and FASD are two initiatives that go a long way to reducing the irreversible and harmful effects of these choices on children.
- And the fact that they are preventable in many cases demands our continued attention.

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- The task force recommended that further work be done to eliminate harmful influences on children.
- Efforts to keep our kids out of gangs, drugs, violence and other crime need to go further.

- Targeted programs, such as mentoring, that support at-risk youth and their families can be helpful in preventing criminal behaviour before it starts.
- Formal mentoring focuses on helping youth with social problems through friendship and guidance.
- Having a mentor can open a door to life experiences that some children may not otherwise have a chance to enjoy.
- And the impact is significant. The Alberta government and a number of community agencies currently offer mentoring programs for youth and are looking at expanding them.
- Through the Safe Communities Initiative more training and administrative support will be made available for rural mentoring programs in the coming fiscal year.

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- Many of you would have heard Dr. Irvin Waller during the morning keynote presentations speaking on building a safer Canada.
- In his book, *Less Law More Order*, Dr. Waller makes the case for prevention over punishment to deal with crime, and investing in families and education over incarceration.
- One thing he says is that the impact of family violence on a child is so significant that we can reduce crime

simply by making a targeted effort to stop family violence.

- In Alberta we have done a great deal to address family violence through our cross-ministry initiative on family violence and bullying.
- The initiative has been instrumental in establishing specialized domestic violence courts, domestic violence treatment programs, and the Alberta Relationship Threat Assessment Management Initiative, or ARTAMI.
- These initiatives are effective, but they deal with family violence after the crime has occurred.
- We need to do more on the prevention side of family violence.
- If we can ensure safe, happy homes for kids to grow up in, we can really have an impact on what Alberta will look like five years from now, and an even greater impact a generation from now.

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## **Policing**

- The fourth key theme area the task force mentioned in their final report is policing.
- We all know that the presence of police and their involvement and commitment to communities are vital to stopping crime.

- Of the communities the task force visited, all of them praised their police. The only complaint was that there aren't enough of them.
- We need to hire more police officers to target serious crime, to support community policing, and to allow police to engage in crime reduction and prevention initiatives.

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- Not only do we need more police to deal with the increasing population of the province, but we also need to support their efforts by doing what we can to make their jobs easier.
- This can be as simple as obeying traffic laws, or as serious as reporting crime.
- Approximately two-thirds of crime goes unreported in Canada and this needs to be addressed.
- We also need to look at how we deal with repeat offenders.
- Police are frustrated when they have to pick up and charge the same offender over and over because they are out on the street again.
- The Edmonton Police Service completed some research and found evidence that 137 offenders in the city use up approximately 30 per cent of police time.

- Ensuring these people are dealt with effectively – and only once – will go a long way to alleviating pressure on the current system. And that might be by treating their addictions or mental illness, or by incarcerating them.
- Alberta Justice and Alberta Solicitor General, along with police, have already begun developing a strategy to deal with repeat offenders.

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- Work has also begun on a crime mapping project to address high crime areas and what needs to be done in those communities to lower crime rates.
- This type of targeted policing effort is effective because it concentrates limited resources where they can have the biggest impact.

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### **Community action**

- The final theme area in the task force report is community action.
- Research shows that the most effective crime prevention initiatives take place at the community level.
- The best solutions come when communities and community agencies work together to tackle the factors that lead to crime in their neighbourhoods.

- And who better than those on the frontlines, at the local level, to decide what will make the greatest impact in their community.

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- A number of Alberta communities already have initiatives underway to address crime and safety.
- This commitment and especially their results are commendable.
- We hope to see this resourcefulness replicated in other communities as they implement their own safe community strategies.

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- Make no mistake, the social issues communities are facing are complex and cross over a number of sectors.
- Collaboration between governments and communities is essential because criminal behaviour is a complex social problem. And there are no quick or easy answers.
- We must respond to these complexities with a coordinated and sustained, long-term strategy. One that looks at enforcement and prevention, while addressing addiction and mental health issues.
- While Albertans confirmed much of what the government has already been doing, the consultations

provided a strong signal that there needs to be a change in focus.

- Crime reduction work must move “upstream” and focus more on prevention.

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- For those offenders who commit serious and violent crimes, clear action must also be taken.
- There must be meaningful consequences for crime. This includes closer monitoring of offenders, effective alternatives to custody and stricter compliance with conditions of release.

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- And finally, this must go hand-in-hand with treatment for those suffering from mental illness and addictions.
- Addressing crime on these three fronts – prevention, enforcement and treatment – is precisely the strategy recommended by the task force in their final report.
- And is also the foundation we need to continue to work closely with communities and community agencies to continue to develop safer communities in Alberta.

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## **Steps to implementation**

- The final report of the task force was released on November 6 last year along with the government's response.
- The report was well received and the government accepted 29 of the 31 recommendations.

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- The highest priority recommended by the task force was to establish a responsibility centre to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.
- The government has agreed to form the Safe Communities Secretariat for this purpose.
- Alberta Justice recently hired an executive leader for the secretariat. His name is Bill Wister and he is a former Crown prosecutor and head of specialized prosecutions in New Brunswick.
- In addition to his years as a prosecutor, he spent 14 years working in the health care system and has a Masters of Social Work. Bill has an ideal background for this unique position.
- We are pleased Bill started with us this week and is attending this conference as one of his first duties. I explained to Bill that in Alberta we don't offer swimming lessons, we just toss you into the pool.

[ask Bill to stand]

- The secretariat will be up and running by April 1 and we are quickly moving forward with the rest of the staffing.
- Staff will be seconded to the secretariat from the five key partnering ministries to oversee the implementation process.
- These include Justice, Solicitor General and Public Security, Health and Wellness, Children and Youth Services and Education.
- These individuals will work cooperatively with partners, communities and other stakeholders looking at the best ways to implement the recommendations.
- They will also act as liaisons with their home ministries; communicating information and formulating strategies based on the expertise of their home ministry.

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- Before I conclude, I want to personally thank Brad Odsen for the commitment he has shown to the task force consultation process and to reducing crime in Alberta.
- Brad has been faithfully involved with JPAC and has taken part in many of the subcommittees and working groups.

- He also made sure there were representatives from the John Howard Society at many of the task force consultation meetings and he personally attended the Edmonton consultation and the symposium in Calgary.
- In addition, when we were looking at potential governance structures for the secretariat, Brad took the time to write an article in John Howard's quarterly newsletter and propose a potential governance structure.
- His suggestions were good ones, and he doesn't know this, but Justice staff put forward his proposal as one of a number of possible governance structures brought to the DM Partnering Committee for consideration.

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- Well done Brad. Your enthusiasm and commitment to addressing crime and to Alberta are inspiring to us all.
- And your continued commitment to working together for safer communities is greatly appreciated.

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## **Conclusion**

- As you all know, Martin Luther King started out his most quoted speech with the words "I have a dream." To be successful all of us must share a dream, a vision for a safer society for our families.

- While crime is a complex problem, we can reduce it by working together.
- And to achieve that dream and uncommon results we are looking for, we must work together across ministries, disciplines, sectors and communities.

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- We must address crime at its roots. We must have serious consequences for those who ignore our offers to help them turn their lives around.
- The topics covered in today's sessions help to move us forward on our long journey together.
- And the Thematic Workshops tomorrow are specifically designed to enable each of you to start the important work of helping your community to understand and address what needs to be done to make our communities safer.
- Your active participation in these sessions, asking tough questions and finding out from each other what works and what doesn't will generate new ideas.
- And those new ideas have the potential to make a difference in our communities.
- In many ways this forum is a wonderful springboard from the work of the Task Force in finding tangible and practical solutions to address crime.

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- I urge all of you to take something of what you learn here and put it into practice in your community.
- Winston Churchill said, “It is no use saying ‘we are doing our best.’ You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary.”
- Reducing crime and having safer communities are goals we all share.
- They *are* achievable goals.
- By working together to find lasting solutions we are taking the necessary steps to succeed.
- Indeed we must succeed. And as people who share a common vision and a common cause, we will succeed!
- Thank you and enjoy the evening.

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