

TABLED DOCUMENT NO. 108 - 12 (3) TABLED ON MAR 22 1993

The Honourable Jeannie-Marie Jewell  
Member - Legislative Assembly  
Representing Thebacha



March 19, 1993

Re: River Ridge Secure Facility for Young Offenders

At this time of extreme fiscal restraint we, the native organizations in Fort Smith, representing the majority of people in the Town of Fort Smith, are both shocked and appalled at the proposed blatant misuse of taxpayers monies by the Department of Justice.

On one hand we are told that funding for many programs has been eliminated or cutback. On the other hand, we have a Department of the Territorial Government proposing to needlessly waste taxpayer's dollars to change one new facility in Fort Smith from a secure to an open facility and change another facility in Hay River from semi-secure to secure. We say needless because it is indeed needless. This does not make economic sense.

In Fort Smith there is a brand new secure facility for Young Offenders which is functioning well. It's staff are well trained on a continuing basis. This established and well run facility cost millions of dollars to erect and requires no improvement to maintain it as a secure facility.

We are told that because the facility in Hay River requires some upgrading and since there is no need for two secure facilities in the South Slave Region, the Department proposes to spend thousands of dollars by taking out all the secure facilities at River Ridge in Fort Smith and converting it into an open facility. It would then spend much more taxpayer's dollars and convert the semi-secure facility in Hay River into a secure facility.

Now, we are not party to the inner workings of the Government, and sometimes the poor uninformed public doesn't quite understand the real reason for these big decisions. However, it should be as obvious to the Government and particularly to the Department of Justice, as it is to the taxpayer, that what is proposed is both unnecessary and a ludicrous waste of taxpayer's money.

If the department is intent upon spending some money, might we suggest that some monies be spent on improving the facility in Hay River and converting it to an open facility, something that it is much more suited for. The staff are already trained so such a move would cause no disruption there.

Meanwhile, in Fort Smith, the department already has a brand new secure Young Offenders facility with trained staff. Continue to maintain River Ridge as the secure Young Offenders facility in the South Slave. This would spend a lot less of the taxpayer's money, would not disrupt any of the employee's lives and would satisfy both the department's and the taxpayer's requirements.

Further, if the department requires only one Young Offender's secure facility, does it not make sense to use the new secure facility that the department has spent millions for that exact purpose? To us that makes economic sense. It should be obvious to the decision makers that the taxpayer pays the shot and must be heeded.

Departments need not only be consciontious at election time.

As our MLA, we respectfully ask that you remind the government that bureaucrats are hired to spend the taxpayer's money wisely at all times, not in an apparent indiscriminate and carte blanche manner regardless of a department's budget.

Our primary concern, of course, is the taxpayer's money. Coupled with that, of course, our secondary but equal concern is for the employee's of those two facilities. What will happen to them if such a bad decision was pushed through? We believe it to be appropriate to give some consideration to these people as well. The department has spent untold thousands of dollars hiring and training these employees in Fort Smith to operate their new secure facility.

Will the staff in Fort Smith now be let go and thousands more spent to train the staff at Hay River? Or will the already trained staff at River Ridge be uprooted to the new facility at Hay River while some staff there is let go? We recognize that this is speculation and that these are hard economic times. Perhaps it is time that departments recognize this also. Cutbacks have to be made which sometimes cost jobs, but surely we make cutbacks to save money and not to spend more money. There is neither an evident short term nor a long term benefit to the Department of Justice proposal even if it might include other correctional facilities in the long term.

This would cost thousands more of the taxpayers dollars and needlessly disrupt the lives of many families. Again, this does not make good economic let alone compassionate sense. One would think that somewhere surely common sense will prevail.

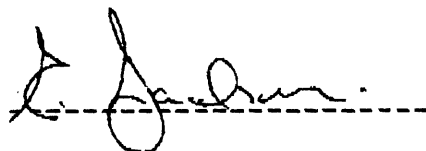
The one thing that could cloud the issue of course is the matter of politics. If the Department of Justice is proposing to spend all this money for political reasons then I guess there's not much that the taxpayers can do beyond voicing their collective concerns. It will be a fait accomplis without much discussion or notice.

We trust that this is not the case and that the Minister responsible for the Department of Justice will bow to the obvious.

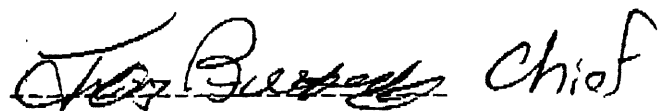
We respectfully request that you as our member in the Legislative Assembly will do all that can be done to carry our concerns to the government and further, to do all that can be done to save the taxpayers from this needless expense. Maintain the Secure Facility for Young Offender's (River Ridge) in Fort Smith.

Thank you,

Earl Jacobson



President  
Fort Smith Metis Nation  
Local 50

 Chief

Representing  
Fort Smith Native Band  
Fort Smith