

# Replace the Remand Centre?



Edmonton Remand Centre is a provincial facility located in the Federal riding of Edmonton East many residents and staff are constituents. When there is a call for replacing a major public facility we must be careful with taxpayers' funds and do what is necessary for the health and safety of all, but, use good judgment.

On April 14, after reading some very disturbing articles concerning the Edmonton Remand Centre in my riding of Edmonton East, I decided to investigate and to tour the facility, to determine first-hand whether the allegations of horrendous conditions were true. B.C. law professor Michael Jackson had referred to the facilities as "degrading", but he does not have a history of commenting positively on the Canadian prison system, and rather has a history of mostly taxpayer-funded legal intervention on behalf of prisoners' complaints. I have over thirty years of experience as a manufacturer and/or distributor, supplying systems and inspection services, to many prisons located primarily in Alberta, and I have also visited

prisons in Saskatchewan and Ontario. I believe that I am able to make some credible health and safety commentary regarding prisons.

I believe the Remand Centre to be well secured, in contrast to the security at certain other facilities that I have visited and commented on in the past. This is extremely important given the expectations of the public to have a safe facility in their midst. Current deficiencies in security at the Remand Centre are notably hinged doors rather than safer sliding doors for high security area cells and are being addressed.



The Edmonton Remand Centre constructed in the 1970's has been updated regularly for safety and security for inmates and staff

Living conditions, while not to "Club Fed" standards of golf courses, horse barns and cottages with picnic tables and BBQs, are nonetheless clean, safe and well managed by staff members who demonstrate concern for the inmates and pride in their work. There was one common complaint of the inmates: they wanted cable and colour TV, not the black and white television that fea-



tures only three local channels. This is a place of incarceration, funded by taxpayers, and should not provide a level of luxury that many of the prisoners' victims cannot afford. Limiting access to cable services to keep pornographic images out of the prison is a lesson that Club Feds could heed but unfortunately they are presently distracted with the planning of the proposed "Club Fed." chain of tattoo parlours.

Meals are pre-prepared and delivered to the cells. The kitchen is first-rate, with meals being nutritional and of brand name food quality. Meal menus are prepared well ahead, are varied, and are open to scrutiny by anyone interested. Air Canada take note: hot soups, hot beef stew, pork chops, oven fried chicken and baked ham, an air traveller's dream, are provided. Inmates are entitled to express meal preferences, such as "no fish". Even the Director of the Edmonton Remand Centre dines daily on prison food.

When I visited, some twelve inmates were playing basketball in a full size gymnasium. The gym stage platform was a workout room containing tens of thousands of dollars worth of exercise equipment including twelve weightlifting machines, two bikes, two elliptical machines, two treadmills and one

stair set. Less than half of this top quality gear was being used at 2:00 in the afternoon along with unused exercise equipment in two other cellblocks as well as equipment for outdoor exercise yards for use in appropriate weather.

Complaints about poor air quality were only evident in cells in which the prisoners were smoking. However the cell return air grills were partially or completely covered with paper by the prisoners themselves. Unplugging vents and an anticipated smoking ban will cure the poor air quality problem caused by smoking.



**Women's emergency shelter where women sleep 2 to 7 people per room while many others sit up at night waiting for their turn at the beds.**

Complaints of lice-infested mattresses could not be confirmed. However the foam rubber mattresses covered in heavy plastic that they use will not support lice. In addition, all linens are changed once per week and may be washed in available laundry rooms, in the cell blocks, as often as the inmate wants. Coveralls are also changed weekly. Civilian clothes are not allowed, also because experience has taught the prison administration that competition, jealousy, theft, intimidation and possible infestations occur when inmates wear their personal clothes in an institution. Perhaps complainants should reassess their own sanitary circumstances





at the time of entry and submit voluntarily to a de-lousing. It's very easy to miss lice on entry inspection, but lice grow on humans; they do not transfer from one person to another unless there is close contact, nor do they live long on plastic mattresses.

An issue was made of the tear-resistant security clothing in the form of heavy gowns issued to persons, male and female, for modesty. Persons who are thought to be at risk of self-injury could endanger themselves through the tearing of normal clothing, which then can be made into nooses or ropes. If the professor regards such clothing as oppressive in nature, I wonder what alternatives he proposes in the interest of protecting inmates against self-injury while saving them from the indignity of nakedness.

The professor, seems to be particularly shocked by the fact that inmates must share sleeping quarters. As a boy I slept in a room no larger than any currently occupied by an inmate of the Edmonton Remand Centre, on a bunk bed, with the other bunk occupied by my brother. Every worker going north to oil camps, lumber camps or pipeline camps has no more space and shares a room with more than one person. It is simply insensitive to the many who have no other choices, for anyone to suggest that sharing a 100 square foot room, through the use of bunk beds,

may somehow be categorized as inhumane treatment.

In fact, the women's emergency shelter in Edmonton (W.E.A.C.) has women sleeping two to seven per room in smaller rooms and on mats in the hall while dozens sit up all night at a table waiting for their sleeping shift on a mat or a bed. Is it inhumane for a prisoner while it is OK for impoverished women and OK for many struggling taxpaying families? For an Edmonton newspaper

editorial writer to call for the Remand Centre to be replaced simply based on the professor's inconsiderate claims and prisoners' understandable but groundless grumblings is irresponsible. The state of conditions at the Centre, at the time of my visit, were good, secure, clean and well-managed. The remaining discussion, that of bunk beds versus



The Grierson Centre Prison and the Stan Daniels Centre are a converted RCMP barracks located in a rapidly developing residential area.

single beds, is hardly a reason to build a new prison.

The prison administrator has assured me that prisoners can be moved to other provincial prisons if over-crowding is ever deemed to be a concern. While the facility was built with one bed per cell, the management decision to increase occupancy to two beds per cell does not by itself mean that a new Remand Centre is required. Management has determined the occupancy rate they can cope with efficiently while providing

the appropriate space and room for prisoners' health and safety and the safety of staff. With the possible exception of extra space that would help to cope with a higher number of medical interventions by medical staffing, I believe that the Remand Centre is very functional and staff are performing in an exemplary and efficient manner.

In Calgary, a recently-opened \$20 million emergency shelter for the homeless has 100 square foot rooms that house four people in two bunk beds. They are the lucky ones. Others get a floor mat or a 100 man, bed ward to share. Perhaps everyone, prisoner, poor, or even university professors themselves should have the inalienable right

to sleep in a private room. But long before prisoners gain this right through public-funded expensive class action legal firms, money is better spent on helping those truly in need. We need to improve the conditions of the homeless men and women, the working poor languishing in shelters and high cost, low quality housing, the remote camp workers and the struggling families homes first. Canadians fund far too many Club Feds -- we don't need to add to it by building, at great cost, a new "Club Ed".

**Update:** While the inmates of the remand centre have not been convicted of their accusations we must keep in mind that the judiciary has decided that these particular inmates awaiting trial are a threat to the community of varying degrees and are to be incarcerated for the duration.

9111 - 118th Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5B 0T9  
(780) 495-3261  
Fax: 495-5142

Web Site:  
www.petergoldring.ca  
E-mail:  
goldrp1@parl.gc.ca

411 Justice Bldg.  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6  
(613) 992-3821  
Fax: 992-6898

*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment and fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*

**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Question #1**—Do you think that 2 people sleeping in a 100 sq. ft room in separate bunks constitutes inhumanity?

Yes       No

**Question #2**— Do you think that prisoners should have private rooms, color TV, cable, and order in food delivery?

Yes       No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_



**Peter Goldring**  
Member of Parliament  
Edmonton Centre-East  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6