

Electronic Tagging

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1059

10. **Mr. Allen** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the experiment in tagging in Nottingham. §

Mr. John Patten The trial of electronic monitoring in Nottingham has run its full course and ended, as planned, on time. The results will be fully evaluated together with results from the other two trial areas, where the experiments continue. §

Mr. Allen Will the Minister bear in mind the experience of Mr. Richard Hart, who lives in Nottingham and who was the first person in Britain to be tagged? His tag apparently indicated that he was absconding. The police went to his home, broke in and found him in bed with his wife, who was particularly upset. He was at home all the time. Before he went back to prison, his tag malfunctioned 15 times. Because he was unable to leave the house, the Departments of Social Security and of Employment said that he was not available for work, so he got no benefit. Does the Minister agree with the National Association of Probation Officers that the tagging scheme has been a fiasco and should not be extended elsewhere? 1060 §

Mr. Patten Characteristically, the hon. Gentleman is talking through his hat. He does not know what has been going on in his own back yard in Nottingham. We have seen in Nottingham a successful experiment which has run its full course and which shows how precise electronic monitoring is in revealing when there has been even the smallest breach of conditions. The hon. Gentleman talked about the National Association of Probation Officers. Does he get up and criticise the association every time a probation officer fails to control or get back to a bail hostel someone who should have been back on time? Of course he does not. The tagging scheme is in operation in 21 states in the United States of America where it is widely welcome and is a great success. §

Mr. Lawrence As the Nottingham scheme is one of three in operation, is not it true that electronic tagging has shown that it effectively picks up violations as soon as they occur, which the ordinary system does not do? Has my hon. Friend yet been able to form a view about the even newer development of tracking tagging? §

Mr. Patten My hon. and learned Friend is right in the first part of his question. Indeed, tracking tagging is full of possibilities for future use. Any right hon. or hon. Member who doubts the efficacy of electronic monitoring should talk to the people who have been subject successfully to electronic monitoring rather than being on remand in prison. Electronic tagging has led in some cases to people getting lesser, non-custodial sentences than they might otherwise have received. §

Mr. Hattersley If tagging in Nottingham has been such a great success, why did the clerk to the Nottingham justices say on behalf of the magistrates that it had been a complete failure? Now that the Minister of State has had his moment of publicity, should not he drop the whole daft idea? §

Mr. Patten First, the right hon. Gentleman is reporting alleged remarks by the clerk from §

the Nottingham justices which the clerk certainly did not make. Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman characteristically has not applied his mind to how to deal with offenders on remand or being punished in the community in ways other than the traditional way. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman has thought seriously about criminal justice issues for a decade. He is politically and intellectually out to lunch on such issues.

Mr. Maclennan If the Minister is prepared to announce today his complete conviction in the efficacy of the scheme, why has he bothered with experimentation? §

Mr. Patten We have not drawn our conclusions to a satisfactory end because we have three experiments. The hon. Gentleman is highly intelligent. He knows that when experiments are conducted it is necessary to wait until they are over before they are evaluated. §

Mr. Alexander Does the Minister agree that any failures are failures of the defendants rather than the system? Is not the advantage of the system that the authorities know immediately the bail condition is broken? Is not it significantly cheaper to have tagging than to keep defendants expensively in prison? 1061 §

Mr. Patten My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He knows, as I know, that unfortunately when people who are remanded on bail go into the community, they often breach their conditions, but we hear nothing about that from the Opposition. §

Mr. Allen In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's reply I give notice that I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment of the House. §

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