

Law and order

House crime bill OK, prison break hit on same day

BY REBECCA WALDMAN
STAFF WRITER

Within an hour of the House passing what one Michigan congressman called a "fat-free crime bill," 10 violent criminals escaped from a Detroit prison in the second local breakout in a week.

"I want to investigate that whole picture," Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Hills, said Monday, the day after escapees Monte Matthews and Pierre Porter were apprehended in Southfield.

One escapee of the early Sun-

day morning prison break was found dead Sunday night, and five remain at large. In the other escape, in which two prisoners being transferred commandeered a police helicopter, one remains at large.

"There may have been a staffing fall down, but I don't know that for sure," said Knollenberg, whose district includes Southfield and Livonia. "But there's no connection between (the break) last night and the crime bill per se."

Rep. Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, said the breakout is a state issue, not a federal one. That's because the site of the escape, Ryan Correctional Facility, is a state prison, said the congressman, whose district includes southeastern Southfield and Troy.

However, he said, "It's clear we need more prison space, and the \$10 billion (allocated) in the House bill" should provide some relief."

The House passed the \$30 billion bipartisan bill, called the Brewster-Hunter alternative, after a marathon of tinkering and

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Rep. Joe Knollenberg

negotiations. It's expected to have a tough fight for approval in the U.S. Senate.

Not every representative was completely happy with the result. Knollenberg voted against Sunday night's \$30 billion version, which he said had a lot less fat than previous attempts he opposed. The House's April 1994 version cost \$27 billion, and a later compromise version called for spending \$33 billion on both punishment and prevention programs.

"There is still far, far too much (money) for social programs," Knollenberg said. "There is even some duplication, like with job training programs."

Other congressmen, who lean toward such social programs — or "prevention" efforts, as they see them — voted for the bill, despite losing some funding in those areas.

"It's basically a strong bill," Levin said. "It has some very important provisions for law en-

forcement. Three-quarters of the money is in law enforcement, and one-quarter for prevention programs."

Out of the \$30 billion, Levin said, the House allocated about \$13.5 billion to law enforcement, including \$9 billion to increase the number of police officers. Prisons get about \$10 billion, and just under \$7 billion goes to prevention programs such as "midnight basketball" and similar organized activities.

"There was some reconfiguration and improvement of the prevention programs," Levin said. Smaller earmarked funds, he added, went into a block grant of about \$400,000, out of which states can allocate as they choose.

The bill contains a measure Levin authored, allowing new police officers to be used for regional task forces that fight crime in suburban communities.

"I met with police chiefs this winter who said they wanted a

crime bill, and they wanted flexibility for the money to be used locally, as they see fit," he said. "Regional or multi-community provisions allow for task forces like CAD, or Curtail Auto Theft, and NET, the Narcotics Enforcement Team in Oakland County, and are very important for small and mid-sized suburban communities. Crime problems cut across city lines."

Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Flint, said the bill would increase Michigan's police force by 3,000 officers by the year 2000, and would increase police forces by 20 percent across the country.

"That will be the most visible thing for the public," said Kildee, whose district includes Rochester and Rochester Hills. "There will be greater police presence, and that will be a deterrent to crime."

Kildee, who voted for the bill, praised it for allocating federal dollars toward what he called "The Three P's: Protection, Punishment and Prevention."

The next step, he said, is getting the bill through the Senate, which he felt would pass it despite other reports that it could have difficulty there.

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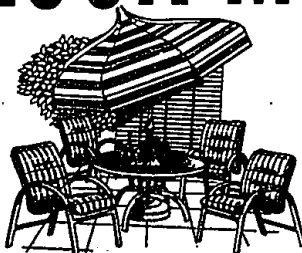
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