

Government Orders

To me that is a very positive thing. I believe we will be able to solve crimes when we are able to offer proper legislated witness protection to people across Canada.

• (1255)

Goodness knows, there are enough crimes that need solving. Hopefully we will get people to come forward and offer their evidence in exchange for being protected from those very vile people in society who do not care about snuffing out people's lives.

The hon. member for Dartmouth used a descriptive term for these people. He called them demons. In order for us to exorcise our demons from society, our criminal demons, this will be one of the excellent tools we can use in that regard.

The bill is deceptively short considering what it is going to do. It only has 24 relatively short paragraphs. Perhaps we lose sight of the fact that sometimes shorter is better. It is deceptively short yet not lacking in anything.

When I drafted Bill C-206 I spent a lot of time thinking about all the different angles. I thought I had them all covered. I was very gratified when the House unanimously approved it at second reading. However, as is probably most often the case, the bureaucrats examined the bill and found certain things that were not in it and put them into a recommendation to the solicitor general. He, to his credit, accepted those recommendations. Bill C-78 is an improvement on my Bill C-206 and covers ground that is not covered in my bill.

One other thing I want to mention is the use to which the witness protection program has been put. For example, in 1986 approximately \$500,000 a year was being spent by the RCMP on witness protection in all of Canada. In 1993 that amount has ballooned to \$3,800,000. This is money well spent because it is money used for solving crimes perpetrated in Canada, crimes that might otherwise go unsolved. That demonstrates to me the efficacy of a national witness protection program and the need for Bill C-78.

One thing that was lacking before was openness, light shining on the witness protection program, publicity about the witness protection program. The program has been ongoing for quite some time. I am very pleased to note in clause 16 of Bill C-78 something that was not contained in my private member's bill but is very important, an annual report.

The commissioner of the RCMP, who will be in charge of the legislated national witness program, will file a report with the minister. That in itself is very important, as the minister will be apprised of what is going on with witness protection, how much it is costing, how many witnesses there are and its success rate in solving crimes.

The minister has gone further because not only will he receive the report but the clause provides that the minister shall—not may, not think about, but shall—cause a copy of the report to be laid before the House of Commons. We in the House of Commons and the people of Canada whom we represent will have an opportunity on a yearly basis to hear about the witness protection program and thereby publicize it, to examine how much is being spent on it, to know how many people are being protected by it and to understand how many crimes are being solved by the use of the witness protection program as a tool of law enforcement.

To me this is important because it will publicize the program. It will give people an opportunity to come forward and say they saw something, know something or heard something and say they will come forward if they have protection in the circumstances. It will be for the commissioner to decide whether or not in the circumstances of the particular case witness protection should be afforded. That is as it should be because it is a tool for law enforcement to use for the protection of witnesses who will help to solve crimes.

• (1300)

All in all, Bill C-78 is an excellent bill. I am delighted to support it. I am delighted that it apparently has all-party support. That indicates to me that it will receive quick passage through the House of Commons so we can get on with the legislated witness protection program, get on with publicizing it, get on with solving crimes and get on with trying to find the perpetrators of the 1,455 unsolved murders between 1980 and 1992.

There are a couple of areas in the bill on which I would like some clarification. Hopefully these will be clarified by the officials in their appearance before the committee when the bill is studied at committee.

I draw specific attention to a lack of a provision to authorize emergency steps. For example, if the commissioner believes that there is some urgent need to protect someone to get them out of harm's way before the technicalities of the bill kick in, it would seem that there should be some sort of mechanism specifically provided in the bill for that purpose.

The bill will help Canadians. It will protect Canadians. It will help solve crimes. That is fairly obvious because of the all-party support the bill is receiving. Members on all sides of the House of all different political persuasions and of all types of views on justice issues recognize that witnesses and informants need to be protected if we are to help solve and fight crime.

It is refreshing to see that there is such unanimity on such an issue in the House. Canadians can feel reassured that the House of Commons cares about them, cares about their personal safety, cares about the fact that crime exists and must be controlled and eradicated, and cares about the fact that witnesses and people who come forward to help in the enforcement of the law will be