

Government Orders

of citizens, women and men, who assist police in their efforts to crack down on criminals. We all know this is a needed program and a needed access to information.

The program will help them to re-establish in a new location and will support them until they become self-sufficient if they fulfil the criteria I outlined earlier in my remarks.

All citizens who contribute to eradicating crime and violence from our society deserve our gratitude and support. We know that crime is on the decrease. Notwithstanding we will always have some individuals in society who will engage in abhorrent behaviour. We will always have those who will act outside the law in their selfish, personal interests. However initiatives such as this one will help to ensure society can be a caring, safe and just.

In some cases contributions that witnesses will bring to the court on very dangerous criminals call for extraordinary courage. We want those citizens who have demonstrated their concern for safety and security in the home, in the marketplace and on our streets to receive the best possible protection. No other program has been so comprehensive or so considerate of the needs of our citizenry. That is why I support the solicitor general's initiative.

I hope that all my colleagues in the House, particularly those who have been expressing their concerns on individual cases, will look at this collective undertaking, support it wholeheartedly and join in ensuring a speedy passage of Bill C-78.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today on Bill C-78 which is really about public safety. This must be very rewarding for my colleague from Scarborough West considering his diligence in bringing this vital matter to the government's attention. His efforts in this regard are certainly commendable.

The debate on private member's bill last spring and the previous fall showed great evidence of support on both sides of the House for the bill and for what he was trying to do. The debate on Bill C-206 demonstrated there is really a clear need for a legislated protection program for witnesses and sources in criminal cases.

It seems that demonstrated there was a clear desire by members of Parliament for such a program. One of the reasons for the desire and the need for the legislative program is that there have been some problems in the past. For example, at times there have been misunderstandings between the police and a witness or a source about what the agreement was between them, or what the roles of each was and what their responsibilities were. It is important that the bill clarify some of the rights, responsibilities and obligations on both sides in these matters.

In my view the solicitor general is to be commended for responding to an obvious need to bring about changes to the decade old program. Many people may not realize there is a witness protection program within the RCMP that has been active and operating for quite a few years. Also many programs are operated by municipal and provincial police forces across the country.

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The solicitor general is to be commended for responding to the obvious need to bring about changes to this decade old program. We see his response today in Bill C-78, which is now before us. The bill is really another plank in the government's efforts to deal with crime.

I will give some examples of how we have dealt with crime in various ways over the past couple of years. There have been amendments to the Young Offenders Act. I am looking forward to attending a forum in my area in Dartmouth next Thursday, where we will be discussing youth issues and issues related to the Young Offenders Act. It is being put on by CBC radio and I am looking forward to attending to discuss some of the issues arising out of past amendments and concerns of the public about the Young Offenders Act.

We have also had Bill C-45, which provided for reform of the corrections process and issues of conditional release. We all recognize that we had very speedy passage of the bill to provide for the use of DNA evidence in criminal proceedings.

All these things are planks in the efforts of the government to deal with crime. We are working steadily to fulfil our goal of ensuring that Canadians live in safe homes and safe streets.

Upon passage of Bill C-78 Canadians will have a witness protection program that will serve them well, because it will provide a legislated program that will operate more efficiently, more effectively, but will not cost taxpayers more money. I am sure that in my riding of Halifax West the taxpayers will be in favour of that part of the bill.

The whole area of witness protection is particularly important in places like Nova Scotia, as it is across the country. However in Nova Scotia the area where it will be most often used will be in drug enforcement. Our province is a key offloading area for drugs coming from South America, the Caribbean, and the eastern coast of the United States because of the fact that Nova Scotia is a peninsula with so much coastline and many little coves. This makes it picturesque and beautiful to visit, and I recommend that all members and Canadians who are interested should visit us and see our beautiful province. However it also provides an opportunity for drug smugglers to offload their product because it is difficult to detect them and difficult for the RCMP or other police forces to cover all those inlets and bays.