

*Government Orders*

A complaints procedure will be in place and the commissioner of the RCMP will submit to the solicitor general an annual report on the operation of the program.

During 1994 and 1995 we have provided protective services to 70 new witnesses, 30 of whom were referred by other agencies. The \$3.4 million we are spending annually on the program will not increase as a result of the change in administration but the money will be spent more effectively. It will be spent more clearly on guaranteeing the safety of the witnesses.

It is important for the public to understand and appreciate that the witness protection program operates across the country, but it does not operate in a vacuum. In devising the statute and in setting out the scheme in the act we have consulted all the provinces and territories.

When someone applies for the program or when a decision is made to admit an applicant to the program, the following factors will be taken into consideration: the potential contribution the witness or source can make toward a police investigation; the nature of the offence under investigation; the nature of the risk to the individual; what alternate methods of protection are available; the danger to the community if the individual is admitted to the program; the potential effects on any family arrangements; the likelihood of the individual's being able to adjust; their maturity, their ability to make judgments and other personal characteristics; the cost of maintaining the individual in the program; and other factors the commissioner of the RCMP finds relevant.

It is important that there be a clear, defined decision making process to admit an individual into the program. In serious cases such as those requiring a change of identity or an admission of a foreign applicant, the decision to admit an individual will be made only by the assistant commissioner in charge of the program. A decision to terminate protection must also be made by the assistant commissioner.

This is only part of the Liberal safe streets, safe neighbourhoods program. Obviously we need statutes like this. No matter how much serious crime there is, we know there always will be crime and there always will be a need to protect people.

When we are protecting people we need to be able to say to Canadians we are protecting people worthy of protection, that we are protecting people when there is a serious risk and that we have a clearly defined methodology for doing it. As the economy becomes healthier, as we work toward the creation of jobs and the creation of prosperous communities, we will find there will be less and less violent crime on our streets.

• (1145)

Those who would seek to encourage Canadians to believe that violent crime is increasing at the present time are being disingenuous because we know statistically and from crime reports that is not the case.

The bill is not a response to the fearmongering that exists in certain quarters of society. It is a practical, concrete response to a need to clearly define and assist the criminal justice system in witness protection. It is a practical, pragmatic response to a situation we have been able to identify. It is part of the ongoing Liberal government plan for safe streets and safe communities in Canada.

**Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I extend my gratitude to the Solicitor General of Canada for establishing a legislative base for the RCMP's source and witness protection program. I also assure him of my total support.

It is another useful and effective tool for our law enforcement officials. It will reduce crime and make Canada a safer place for everyone.

Our various colleagues in the House have defined the extent and content of the bill. I found the interventions of my colleagues very interesting. I particularly refer to the previous intervention by my colleague from Windsor.

As my hon. colleague and the solicitor general have said, in the past criminals have successfully used fear and intimidation of potential witnesses to avoid prosecution and punishment for their crimes. Enforcement agencies need the support and assistance of the public to further their investigations to successfully bring criminals to justice.

[*Translation*]

The bill under examination today is aimed at improving the RCMP's witness and informant protection program, making it more effective and more open. Its intent is to protect those who assist our police forces in criminal investigations, particularly when organized crime is involved.

It is an acknowledged fact that the contribution of informants and witnesses is often essential in resolving certain criminal investigations. The Quebec Minister of Public Security, for instance, stated only a few days ago that the most effective means of curtailing the war between motorcycle gangs in Quebec is to recruit informants and witnesses. Those who co-operate with law enforcement agencies occasionally place themselves in dangerous positions as far as their personal safety is concerned, and we owe it to them to provide the best possible protection.

In the past, some participants in the old sources and witnesses program have complained that they did not get the benefits they