

Government Orders

The bill will help us better manage what we are doing in the safe streets policy. It will result in better prosecutions. The crown attorneys will know what the infrastructure will be for their witnesses if there has to be a witness protection program extension. It will result in better criminal procedure, a better understanding both on the part of witnesses and the people who manage the witness protection program of what they have to deliver.

• (1225)

It is a three-way street. We have the public that wants to see the benefits of a better managed system. We have the witnesses who need to know what they can expect, who will know what they have the right to ask for and require in terms of protection. It will assist the police better in knowing what the deliverables should be and what the deliverables are, both to the crown which is gathering the evidence and to the witness.

I congratulate both the solicitor general and the hon. member for Scarborough West for their contributions in this regard.

The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the hon. member for Scarborough West who has so much history with this issue, would the hon. member find it acceptable, as another member came out of a meeting to speak, to have the hon. member for Dartmouth speak first?

Mr. Wappel: Mr. Speaker, it would be my delight to hear what the hon. member for Dartmouth has to say.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

This is an important bill, particularly for the hon. member from Scarborough who so kindly gave up his spot for me to speak. I congratulate him on the work he has done in laying the groundwork for this type of legislation.

Many times in the past the legislative procedure and process of the House of Commons have given reason for the public and members of this place to be cynical and sceptical about what it is the backbench can do, what it is independent members can do with respect to setting the legislative agenda. I acknowledge up front the work the hon. member for Scarborough West has done in ensuring this important piece of legislation was put before the House.

It is quite rare for a private member's bill to be debated and actually get beyond the pro forma number of required hours once it is drawn and actually get passed. The fact that the hon. member for Scarborough West got the bill to second reading and caused it to come forward is not only a testament to the way Parliament can work. It is also a personal testament to how the member sticks to it. All members owe him a debt of gratitude.

There are very few times when a piece of government legislation comes forward which is supported by all sides of the House. It appears the legislation is supported by all sides of the House.

Perhaps the government and the House leadership on our side will take a close look and find, when legislation comes from the backbenches of either side of this place, that it is better legislation. They might want to free us up a bit more to do that type of job.

In the last number of years I have found that my opinions on justice, law and order have gone from what would have been considered to be a liberal left position to a more realistic, responsive position when it deals with some aspects of the criminal justice system. That has happened over the seven years I have been a member of Parliament because of my interaction with the criminal justice system on behalf of my constituents. I have viewed it from afar and have watched cases unfold. I have dealt with people who have been victims of crime. I have dealt with the law enforcement agencies and people in the judiciary.

• (1230)

As we start to understand that, when we deal with the criminal justice system, just as we have to be flexible in other areas of public policy such as social policy and fiscal matters, we have to be extremely flexible and reasonable when we deal with the criminal justice system.

The system must be responsive to the needs of the community. Clearly the area of witness protection is one of those areas where there was a responsibility, a requirement by government, to come forward and recognize we had to statutize programs that currently existed at the federal level with the RCMP.

I am concerned that sometimes we direct the limited resources we have for law enforcement into areas that simply are not able to deal with the problem in as effective a manner as is required. The area of witness protection has concerned me for a number of years. I will deal with the reasons for that.

In my area, which is not that dissimilar from most urban areas across Canada, there is a lot of urban crime. There are a lot of crimes specifically against children. The hon. member for Scarborough West has been on his feet in the House more times than any other member dealing with some of these issues.

In my riding we have had to suffer through a disproportionate number of our young children from 13 years old to 16 years old being drawn into prostitution. I claim no moral high ground in dealing with these issues, but I am a parent and I represent an area where there are many kids who have been plucked from their turbulent years in puberty and thrown into a world that can only be described as a world of terror. They are plucked out of their schools; they are taken from the downtowns, from the shopping malls, by people who can only be described as the worst criminals in Canadian society. They are pimps that befriend primarily young girls, draw them into a life of crime, of drug addiction and literally sexual slavery. At 14, 15 or 16 years old these children have lost their youth and have been violated in the worst possible ways.