

*Government Orders*

Interestingly the annual cost will not go up as a result of the program and if it goes down that is fine. It is an important program and will vary each year depending on how many people are being protected. The annual cost is \$3.4 million. There are no additional costs expected as a result of introducing the legislation. The average cost per case is \$30,000 but approximately 60 per cent of cases cost less than \$20,000. If that can bring people who are involved in organized crime or other serious crimes to justice then it is well worth the money. I am confident that all Canadians, and certainly those in my riding of Halifax West, would support that and would certainly support the intent of the bill.

The changes proposed in the witness protection program act will give the RCMP's source witness protection program a solid legislative and regulatory basis. This is lacking in the existing program. It is important that we provide it and therefore I urge members to support this important bill.

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have a few moments to speak to Bill C-78, the source witness protection program bill.

There are two or three perspectives I will touch on. My colleagues have touched on most of the technical aspects of the bill and all parties in the House are apparently supporting it. Therefore there is nobody really nibbling at the corners. I am certainly not going to do that. It is a good bill, as has been recognized by colleagues.

There are two or three perspectives that should be brought out in discussion. I want first to pay some tribute to police officers across the country who over the past many years have informally provided protection for witnesses. They have done it in many ways, often not at taxpayers' expense.

This is something that has not been recognized very much in the history of law enforcement in Canada and North America. It was very real over the past decades when no public moneys were formally available to protect witnesses that police officers had to use their cars, their garages, their basements, freebies from the motel outside town, and all kinds of different devices to make sure the witness who was scared to death got a chance to get into the courtroom, give the evidence, get out and survive in the face of great risks. I pay tribute to all those policemen, many of whom were Mounties. This was not confined just to the federal police force but also to provincial and municipal forces across the country.

• (1220)

That history is not written; it is all unwritten. It is anecdotal now to the extent that these policemen and former policemen get a chance to talk about it. It is an unwritten part of our Canadian

criminal justice history. I wanted to note it here and pay tribute to the many who made the system work.

Starting in 1984 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police began a witness protection program that provided some kind of framework for witness protection albeit not recognized in statute. That was in the face of the growing threat from organized crime which developed post-war. Also as was mentioned earlier, there were threats from individuals who while they might not have been part of an organized crime group apparently were not prepared to stop at anything in trying to preclude their conviction.

There have been many bad stories in relation to that as part of our criminal justice history but there have also been many good stories. With the growth and public knowledge of the availability of a witness protection program in many parts of the world, there began to be some confusion about what a witness might be entitled to have: a free bus ride, a free taxi ride, a free room or some accommodation, money, protection and a new identity.

Over time the field became more and more confused. It was not so much on the part of the police, as they were simply doing their very best to deliver evidence to the courtroom door for the prosecutors. It was more so for the witnesses who from time to time and place to place became confused about exactly what the protection was composed of.

Some witnesses were more accommodating than others; some wanted more than others. It became more difficult for the police to manage. There might often be cases where when the process was over, the evidence had been given hopefully ending in a successful prosecution, witnesses felt they did not have the protection they thought they were to have. Maybe they made it difficult for the police involved. Maybe they went to the local newspaper, the local media. It became confusing and embarrassing for some. Something had to be done.

The first positive signs I saw in the House was the research and the bill produced by our colleague, the member for Scarborough West. That was quite a credible exercise. A private member's bill was passed in the House at second reading and referred to the justice committee. At about that time the Ministry of the Solicitor General indicated it would want to have a bill similar in nature. Our colleague essentially acquiesced and the solicitor general has presented the bill which apparently has support from all sides of the House.

The last perspective I want to address very briefly is that the bill will help us better manage the safe streets policy the Liberal Party has adopted. It will better manage the costs. The program will be codified. It will probably show up as a cost item in the estimates and the parliamentary authorizations as a specific category rather than being buried as it was in part previously.