

has exclusive police jurisdiction in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

It is also important to note that the symbolic importance of the red serge, or the "significant" uniform, is recognized in the current RCMP regulations of 1988. Pursuant to the regulations, the Commissioner of the RCMP can approve changes to all uniforms except to the significant uniform. Any changes to the red serge require ministerial approval.

Today's uniform depicts neutrality, impartiality, tradition, history and heritage. This uniform is a symbol of Canada and should only be changed to benefit the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a whole and only to reflect safety and comfort.

• (1430)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak to this motion. I do not want to derogate from the motion itself because I find myself very favourably disposed to it.

I want to refer to the phrase "officers of Sikh origin". I do not think origin is really at issue here. What we are talking about is a faith and not origin. The reference to origin is perhaps a little unfortunate and slightly distracting. That aside, I also want to refer to the portion of the motion that refers to multiculturalism. It is my view that here multiculturalism is not just a reflection but it is a true manifestation of the community itself. It is a reality for us all that many of our fellow Canadians fervently and proudly subscribe to a faith wherein because of their devotion to God, the creator, they do not cut their hair or kes as it is called, and for reasons of tradition and good grooming, it is bound in a turban. I have, and perhaps we all have, friends and neighbours who are Sikh and they are an integral, real part of our Canadian culture.

My father was a Mountie. All of my growing up years were spent with a man who proudly wore the uniform of that day. I remember trying on his boots more than once, those big high boots and the big stetson hat, which did not fit me at all. I recall one day my father came home with a tuxedo and a small hand gun, a concealed weapon. That became the RCMP uniform for a day or a week in

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terms of undercover work. The uniform has changed. It has changed to accommodate women most recently.

In Halifax, where I was born after the last war, I saw many uniforms from the services, as well as the RCMP. Even though I was not alive during the last two wars, I know that men of the Sikh faith have served with distinction and valour in service to our Crown. They did that with or without battle dress, with or without helmet, even though the absence of a helmet might have put them at greater risk to their lives.

In my riding of Scarborough, in metropolitan Toronto, the Metropolitan Toronto Police will shortly have men of the Sikh faith proudly serving in the force. They will do that without cutting their hair, without removing the turban.

The Charter provisions in our Constitution speak for themselves. I do not want to spend a lot of time on that, but I feel it is likely that if the issue is pressed in the courts, if we are truly going to rely on our Charter, then the courts will find almost certainly that men of Sikh faith should not be barred from serving in the RCMP simply because of a uniform requirement.

I have children in my riding playing football, ball hockey, and they have their hair, their kes, properly done up as they play these sports. I am confident, and I think the whole country is—I like to think it is—that these children can grow up and be able to serve as Mounties just as proudly as my father did.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise to speak in support of this private member's bill introduced by the member for Burnaby—Kingsway.

Passage of this bill is vital to Canada's commitment to multiculturalism. It is also vital to Canada's commitment to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms which is lauded for its promotion of equality and of human dignity, and which recognizes our multicultural heritage.

Multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canada. We must embrace and act on the concept of equality and diversity. I ask the question: What is more important, the uniform an officer is wearing or the qualities that officer has on the inside? Does the RCMP tradition consist merely of red serge and brown stetson, or does it consist of the integrity and dedication that