

Government Orders

In the meantime there are individuals running around the country who are armed better than most military units. I see nothing being done about the real problems, but I constantly see all kinds of legislation coming forward that is not doing what it could for victims and law-abiding people. Instead the government concentrates on making certain that things are done right according to the charter so that the criminals are forever looked after. Canadians are getting tired of it.

I will conclude and turn it over to my colleague for Fraser Valley West by saying that Bill C-78 is the kind of bill we are most happy to support. I thank the government for bringing it forward. Once again, I thank my colleague for Scarborough West, the initiator of the whole idea. I hope we will see more legislation that says victims come first and not the criminals.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on Bill C-78 today. As my colleague for Wild Rose said, it is one of the few pieces of legislation we have seen in the criminal justice system today from the Liberal government which actually directly and successfully address a concern we have in our society, the protection of witnesses.

The protection of witnesses is actually quite an informal program today managed by the RCMP. Certainly there is no overriding national program that looks after the interests of the victim.

Regardless of what the government says, it is necessary to take the country back from the criminal element. Time and time again I hear that crime is not on the increase. I would denounce that theory of the government. We only have to stand in a circle of friends anywhere in the country and ask who has been the victim of a crime. I am not just talking about serious sexual crimes or the high profile crimes we see in Vancouver, Toronto and so on. I am talking about major everyday crime: break and enters, stolen vehicles and so on.

• (1105)

We have to somehow get to the nub of the issue. We have to get back to punishment for disobeying laws. That includes actually getting the criminal incarcerated.

A victims protection act gives confidence to those out there who are intimidated by the process. It gives them some confidence of protection. I can think of several instances in my community which I have been involved with where intimidation was a very large part of an exercise of the criminal.

I can think of a lady named Joan who was sexually assaulted by a pretty hardened individual who had spent more time on the inside than on the outside. He has been in and out of parole board hearings. Every time he gets out he commits another crime and goes back in.

This time good old Karel sexually assaulted Joan with a weapon. The weapon was a needle with cocaine in it. Joan was

63 years old. All through the process, through the court hearings and so on when I was there with Joan, the individual was intimidating her by way of looks and other things that were done. The intimidation was there.

Not only did it happen in the courtroom but subsequent to his incarceration when he was in Vancouver remand waiting for his little trip to the regional psychiatric centre, good old Karel started to send threatening letters to Joan. It just brought home to me very clearly why witnesses need protection. Joan had no one to look after her.

We finally got the letters stopped. Imagine, he was in Vancouver remand for such a horrendous crime and used stamps paid for by the taxpayer to threaten the very person he attacked. That is the kind of thing going on.

Hopefully Bill C-78 will do something about those sorts of things. There are other people who need protection. Joan was not only a witness but was a victim at the same time. There are people who see things today and are just plain afraid to take that step forward because of the intimidation.

Along with my colleague from Wild Rose, I spent some time yesterday with the mayor of Cornwall who has some serious problems in that community. There are serious criminal activities. He is a pretty sure and very responsible individual. I am certain that with the intimidation he has been under, the threats and so on, there are times that people like him who want to stand up for their community and provide public service but are being threatened by gangs and organized crime need formal protection.

The mayor of Cornwall and other brave individuals who are willing to stand up and be counted and people who witness the crimes that are going on down there right off the reserves need the protection. They need the confidence they will get the protection.

The witness protection program will strengthen the existing RCMP source witness protection program. Hopefully the process will be formalized so that both the witness and the RCMP know and understand it. It is a loose program today. People do not understand their rights.

• (1110)

Victims rights do not discontinue with such things as witness protection programs. There are all kinds of other things which also need attention as far as victims rights go. There will be a victims rights bill in the House of Commons this year. Within that bill there are things that have to be addressed.

For instance, victims should have the right to give oral and written statements at parole board hearings. Today they are at times allowed a written statement but in many cases the statements are vetted. I have seen victims' statements in sentencing hearings of murder cases. I am not a lawyer but I attend these cases when my riding is involved. I was at one where the victim's statement was actually vetted which is wrong. The