



House of Commons Debates

**THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SECOND READING SPEECH ON BILL C-4
THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 2010**

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to engage in this debate, especially since I have heard a couple of my colleagues from the government side expound with what they would call a particular eloquence on the method as well as the principle of what makes this society work. I have noticed that they focused on the words “protection” and “prevention”.

If it is true that what we must have is protection of society, and without pandering to everybody's greatest fears and paranoia, I think we would need to look at what other professionals and stakeholders in the field say about these proposed legislative items and, in fact, about this one in particular.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on to their references, I know that you are an esteemed scholar of the law as well. I hope you will not feel offended if I make reference to people other than yourself as experts for reference here.

It pains me to hear some of my colleagues from the government side who normally speak in a fashion that might be reasonable, and I refer in particular to my colleague from Abbotsford who is a valued colleague on a committee where he is sorely missed, but when he engages in the kind of partisan tripe to colour the weaknesses of this bill so that it can be more acceptable, I think only about what some of the stakeholders in the private sector would say with respect to his observations.

I think for a moment about Rick Linden, a criminology professor at the University of Manitoba, whose observation is that this bill is designed more for political effect than actually to have much of an effect on crime. I guess he probably drew that conclusion after having studied the bill and after anticipating what my hon. colleague would have said earlier on.

In fact, that is replicated and repeated by Professor Nicholas Bala, a family law and youth justice expert at Queen's University, who says that this bill is a classic example of pandering to public misperceptions about youth crime.

Can members imagine that the hon. member opposite would say that what Canadian society is in greatest need of is protection against the actions of youth criminals?

We may be in need of protection but the way in which that member and his government have decided to focus on one particular element of our society and to vilify it and to put it in a position where it is now the greatest danger to the safety of Canadian society is nothing short of shameless.

Frank Addario, of the Criminal Lawyers' Association, reminds everyone that there is no evidence that more severe punishment does anything to reduce recidivism among youth.

That does not mean that we should not have punishment. However, if the government is going to propose amendments to an act that was introduced by prior governments, then it has an obligation to demonstrate that things are not working. Instead, the government has given us perceptions and anecdotes of what the public, from its perspective, thinks is required under this legislation.

However, I do think there are some issues that need improvement and I am sure the committee will address many of these issues. Not all things are bad in the legislation. As I read through it, I thought we might be able to support a few items, especially with respect to the fact that we will improve the way the system is administered.

However, here are the weaknesses that I thought the government would have addressed. I was absolutely shocked that the member who just spoke, my colleague from Abbotsford, said that the way to protect Canadians was to put an addition \$25 million into the protection of Canadians.

Do members know what that translates into? Just so that everybody is not confused about what it means, it means, at the very most, we would be able to hire another 250 front line officers in order to do what must be done, which is to enforce the legislation, no matter which it is, whether it is weak or strong.

This legislation would have no value unless an enforcement officer, through his or her vigilance and his or her work, could ensure that the outcome desired by legislators is actually effected on the street. In the last election, the government promised 1,000 front-line officers but instead we have 250. The government is so boldfaced as to suggest today that the \$25 million is somehow going to protect Canadians better than under any other administration.

For four years the Conservatives have been standing in this place, holding public announcements and photo ops, saying they are the party of justice, they are tough on crime. But they say not to hold them to that. The Conservatives are not going to provide the officers we need to ensure the legislation that is in place is observed. They are not going to provide us with the resources we need in this society to make sure there is a harmonious interaction among people in different age groups and different socio-economic environments and those who fall prey to individuals and groups that have no interest in public welfare.

The government has not put any resources into that, but it claims it is going to protect, perhaps with legislation, which is actually a piece of paper that everybody is going to throw away. If we do not have the officers to support it, the enforcement capacity, and if we do not invest in the justice system so that we can have prosecutors and judges deal with these issues when they come before them, then justice is delayed, justice is denied, there is no justice at all.

If we are really truly going to accept the government's view that the main ethic that drives the Government of Canada, that government is supposed to define us all to ourselves and to the rest of the world, then I ask it to please live up to its commitment to provide us with the protection that is required, the observance that is demanded of the legislation that defines us. That is not happening. That is not going to happen at all.

The Conservatives stand in this place and say this is all the fault of the Liberals who preceded them. How many years ago? It was four years ago. For four years the Conservatives have done absolutely nothing except fall down on the promises they make.

If we are going to have as a society a group of individuals, a collective, who are functioning in a productive fashion, who are respectful and accepting of each other's differences and each other's ambitions and future aspirations, then we need to establish a public ethic to which everybody has buy-in.

The other item is that, when we talk about protection and prevention, we have to talk not only about investing in enforcement officers, not only about investing in the justice system and its apparatus. We need to make an investment in society where it counts.

How much has the government put forward to ensure we have the kinds of programs in place that young people, primarily young boys, need? It appears that what we are doing with this legislation is taking, as a first order of business, the vilification of every male child in this country. I say "child" because when we refer to "young men" we are talking about those who are over the age of 18 and therefore subject to the same observations, penalties and programs that are available to all adults. But we are thinking about children, primarily those under 14 if I read the legislation correctly.

My hon. colleague from Abbotsford thinks there is a menace out there. It is called a child. He thinks those who are entering their teens pose a great threat. They are called young men.

One of the ways we prevent difficulties in society is by making an investment before the problem takes place. We give those young men primarily, but young women as well, an opportunity to have a productive intervention in society, to find their place. That does not necessarily mean we have to tell them that if they do not follow a straight line then all hell will rain upon them.

They do not have to worry about that because we have no active volcanoes here and we have no policemen out there to get them. If by chance we do catch them, they will never get to court because we are not going to have any funding for judges. If we have funding for judges, we are not going to have enough money for prosecutors and others, so they will not have to worry about it.

Think about legislation that delivers that kind of message. The government wants to go out there and trumpet the fact that it is tough on crime, not tough on the individuals, not prepared to take a look at those men and women who are going to be part and parcel of the creation of a society that we are going to call our own. Where in the legislation will we find material evidence that the Conservative Government of Canada is actually concerned about the environment in which a

young boy or a young girl is being raised, that it is concerned about the values that define the community in which those young people grow?

Where will we find the evidence in this legislation that purports to focus on prevention? Will we find the evidence that the Government of Canada is actually interested in building the infrastructure that allows those young people to grow as productive and involved citizens of our country?

We had the good fortune today, Mr. Speaker, thanks to your good graces, to host a group of young men and women who, through their own self-sacrifice and the investment of their parents, their community and some cases government, dedicated themselves to an achievement of participation, first of all, and then successful performance in the last Olympics. We had them here. We should have gloried not just in the medals they won but in the fact that they succeeded. They allowed each and every one of us, legislators from all around the country as my colleagues from the Bloc say, to be able to point to all of the infrastructure for social building, for community building, for nation building that worked and is seen as an example through the achievements they shared with us.

Where do we see that in this legislation? It is ironic that, after we see some successful young men and women whom we honoured today and who showed us the privilege of honouring our successes through their efforts, instead we say young people are a menace in the making and we are going to put in place so much structure, so much rhetoric, that they will be frightened into doing what is acceptable. But nowhere do we define “acceptable”. Nowhere do we give an indication of what those public ethics, those public values, those familial-linked community achievements, are that are desirable from a national perspective.

Taking a look through the bill, we ask: What will be required of this government to make some of this stick? If the objective of the government is incarceration and extended incarceration for each and every one of these individuals it is going to incarcerate, notwithstanding the fact that the trend line is in the reverse direction in terms of what young people are doing in our society, we are going to hear from the Conservatives that we are going to make it easier to incarcerate and extend and we are going to put the money forward for that. We are going to build more jails.

Just think about this. In a society where people are looking for houses, we are going to build more jails. In a time when people are looking for affordable housing, we are going to spend at least \$100,000 per cell in order to incarcerate and to extend the incarceration of people we want to vilify because we have not put enough money in prevention, in education or in building an infrastructure where we can take our young men and women, our children, and turn them into functioning adults who will make this country proud.

No. We would rather, through this legislation and the government opposite, think in terms of ourselves as holding a great big baseball bat in our hand and saying to people that if they step out of line, this thing is going to come crashing down.

We should think about this. The government is going to spend \$100,000 per cell. It wants to increase the incarceration rate by at least 30%. That means we are going to be looking at

members of Parliament coming before the House to approve or disapprove of the government building more cells over the next few years, which will be in excess of \$3 billion.

Members opposite are chuckling. They are surprised that people have actually done their homework. It is not something they are accustomed to. They are reading talking points from the PMO all the time. They really have not taken a look at what is going to happen as a consequence of the bill.

I welcome the fact that they are paying attention. We were talking about education, so listen closely.

As well, we build a cell and we have to have someone invigilate that cell. In other words, we have to have jail guards. That is an additional \$100,000 per year for every one of those.

When we take a look at the numbers we are going to need in terms of building these cells and building a structure for maintaining them, think how much cheaper it is for the Government of Canada to build an infrastructure of prevention. That is not something anyone is talking about.

The Conservatives are much more comfortable with the idea that says if one wants to feel angry about the way things are happening today, vote Conservative. If one wants to focus on retribution, vote for the Conservatives.

However if people want to think in terms of having a positive vision of the world, trying to rehabilitate, trying to ensure we bring productive individuals before us, they can vote for someone else; Liberal, I think, if they are smart.

Think about the message the government is sending out there to everyone. It prefers to send an extremely negative message and, to make it worse, it is so perverse that there are no funds to realize the very lowly ambitions of the bill. There is no money.

If one wants to protect society, how much money? Recently the Conservatives talked about having to protect society in the aviation industry. They have to protect them at airports. They have to do this; they have to do that. Bang, there is another \$1.5 billion tax for them to do that. They spent \$11 million buying 44 body scanners about which an expert in the committee this morning said, "What a waste of money. Cancel the contract". That \$11 million for those 44 body scanners to protect air travellers was not enough. They had to slap on another \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I know that on occasion you enjoy a good meal and the French have a saying that says, *l'appétit vient en mangeant*, the appetite comes with the eating.

It seems that the Conservative government, whenever it has an opportunity to waste some money on something that is of little value, can turn around and develop an appetite for raising more taxes to do something that is of equally less value.

That is what the bill represents. It represents an opportunity that is wasted. Instead of talking about how we can reach out to those young people who will replace us, and we will all be replaced by those young people, instead of vilifying them, it should reach out and provide the

kinds of programs they need. The Conservative government talked about prevention programs. It cancelled almost all of them.

In my own province of Ontario, where we had some \$8 million, in the GTA \$11 million, to provide programs for assistance to students and young people at risk, the government cancelled that. On an annual basis, it said, "We do not need that; if they are bad they will suffer". Immediately the government has focused on punishment, identifying bad guys but not going out there to catch them. If it does catch them, it says, "Throw them in jail". "But we don't have jails". "That's the fault of another government; we're going to build them". "Where are we going to get the money?" "We don't know".

That is the problem with the government. It does not know what it is doing. The youth are suffering as a result and this bill will put responsibility for failure on the shoulders of others. We deserve better.