



# DEBATES OF THE SENATE

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## **EMERGENCIES ACT**

MOTION TO CONFIRM THE DECLARATION  
OF A PUBLIC ORDER EMERGENCY—DEBATE

Speech by:  
The Honourable Bev Busson

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

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### EMERGENCIES ACT

#### MOTION TO CONFIRM THE DECLARATION OF A PUBLIC ORDER EMERGENCY—DEBATE

**Hon. Bev Busson:** Honourable senators, I rise today to speak in favour of the Emergencies Act. Our capital, and the entire country by association, had been taken hostage and continues to be at risk.

Early last week, it had unfortunately become clear that the usual procedures of the municipal police force had been overwhelmed, as their chief had put it. The blame game is for another day, but we must now step up to the plate.

Last Friday, the full force of the state enabled by the Emergencies Act began the process to end this occupation of our capital, and we are now debating essentially whether we should sanction it. We as the chamber of sober second thought are called upon to act, not for our own political beliefs or philosophies, but for the greater good.

Like the pandemic itself, this is one of those times when we must act decisively, not in a partisan way, in order to support our democracy and those who put themselves in harms way to defend it for us.

This is not over, as some of us have suggested. I implore you to consider the message we would send if at this moment in history we take advantage of the freedom won back for us this weekend, and yet vote no for this matter disagreeing with the act coming into force in the first place. Again, this is not over.

Those who coached the occupation of our nation's capital and the intended roadblocks across Canada will be emboldened if we, dear colleagues, do not support our national institutions, its police officers and the rule of law. I will repeat, this is not over.

I'm so proud of the police officers from across the country. In the past days, they employed textbook professional policing techniques using their powers in a measured way — no tear gas, no rioting, no looting and no loss of life. The Emergencies Act continues to enable the police to react with strength and to ensure our democracy is re-established. If we vote no, the wrong message will be sent. Contrary to suggestions made today — that we can just invoke it again if we get this wrong — are untenable. We never want to invoke this again.

Truckers and their supporters gathered in Ottawa on or about January 29 to rally against mask mandates, lockdowns, restrictions on gatherings and other COVID-19 preventive measures. These peaceful protesters, comprised of Canadian citizens exercising the right to demonstrate, soon found their cause co-opted by a much darker element in our society. Call them what you will, but know that they stand for the overthrow of our government and the dissolution of our democracy.

Canada prides itself on embracing and supporting human rights enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our Charter describes our rights and what we can expect and demand in our civil society. But it also suggests that with this, a corresponding contract exists to respect the rights of others as well. Freedom is a two-way street balanced to ensure that the rights of one do not infringe on the rights of another. We depend on this balance to live our life together with respect.

One of these rights is the right to speak against the government and to oppose any law we disagree with. However, and disturbingly, there has been a wave of ultra-right groups who have taken the trucker-inspired protest against mask mandates and morphed it into a movement that is not only disruptive to the rights of the citizens of Ottawa, but also has brazenly ignored the rule of law and created an environment of hatred for those who live and work in our nation's capital.

Spinoff protests have occurred and are still occurring around the country as well as at border crossings and airports. Hardcore members of these groups thwarted requests and negotiations to have them leave and they locked down, thumbing their noses not just at the police, but at the rights of each and every one of us to feel safe and secure.

Those in Ottawa were the hardest hit, but the entire country has felt the sting of this lawlessness and disrespect as we watched the nation's capital be turned into an amusement park for anarchists. Make no mistake, their mission remains the dismantling of our government and replacing it with one of their own. Sorry senators, we're not going to be running the country with the Governor General any time soon. These people, by definition, are anarchists. They are professionally led, well funded and skillfully planning the downfall of our democracy. They use children as human shields to obstruct enforcement.

These occupiers are by definition anarchists. They are professionally led, well-funded and skillfully planning the downfall of our democracy. They use children as human shields to obstruct enforcement. We need the full power of the state to make sure these people do not again overwhelm those who are trying to protect us. Although this protest was political and a failure on many fronts, it becomes a police matter to clean up the streets and deter those who would want to move the game somewhere else. This is not over, and I believe those who think it is are engaging in wishful thinking.

There will be armchair quarterbacks who would have complained of heavy-handedness if the protests were proactively dismantled on day two of the occupation and there will be those who will now complain that they went too far. I learned in my prior life that policing a protest is a no-win situation. The police are not there to take sides. They are there to keep the peace. In my opinion, it's a miracle that, given the chemistry of the occupiers and the numbers of counter-protesters feeling forced to vigilantism, no one was killed or that violence and looting had not been triggered.

This brings us to today. What are we prepared to do to protect our democracy? That is essentially the question we have to ask ourselves. Some have argued that invoking the Emergencies Act is an overreach. I submit that this is exactly the situation that this act was designed and created to address. It was passed by the Mulroney government and has never been used before. The situation cries out for an effective and decisive response. People were entrenched in our capital, swearing at people wearing masks, making racist and homophobic remarks, attempting to commit arson at buildings where people were asleep and generally taking over the streets. They were imposing their will on those who have the right to live their lives, go to work, stroll down the streets and have nights of peace in their own residences without the wail of hoodlums and the cacophony of semi-truck horns. If these circumstances do not cry out for this act, I don't understand what would.

We can debate what went wrong, who is at fault and how we can avoid these situations in the future — and in fact the legislation demands that we do so — but for now we need to support those who have taken back the streets. The local police without these powers were outnumbered, under-equipped and unsupported by the system. I would argue that the policing system in the capital is not nimble, not integrated and is inherently reactive rather than proactive. And I'm hopeful that the official review will remedy this failure.

In the meantime, this act gives the police the proactive authority to deal effectively with this issue. Having won the city back, they now have to deal with the instigators so that it is made abundantly clear that taking Canada hostage again is not an option. We need to support the police with the powers to do what they need to do to give us our freedom back. We are asking — no, demanding that the police place themselves in harm's way for us, our capital and our country. We owe them the opportunity to do this safely and with all the tools available.

Protests are incredibly difficult and complex situations to manage at the best of times and are both dangerous and volatile for police who have to step up and deal with systemic mistakes of the past. Political failures have created this situation. If we want our police to enforce our rights and keep our democracy safe in these exceptional times, we need to do what we can to make sure

they succeed. Failure is not an option in these difficult circumstances. It is, in reality, our country, our way of life that is at stake.

They knew going in that they must succeed and they did it the Canadian way, with only as much force as necessary, with no loss of life, with a clear message that the copycat occupations of this nature will not be tolerated. This could not have happened without the Emergencies Act.

Canada is a diverse country — the best country in the world — and should be coming together rather than allowing this to become a partisan issue dividing us. We should stand together for a strong Canada rather than use this as a political football to gain favour and votes. We should stand for law and order. The vast majority of Canadians want this crisis to end and, of course, we all want it to end peacefully. This is not a local problem; it is a national crisis. And I am at a loss to understand how we can play politics with our democracy and with the lives of not just the police but with the people of Canada, including the protesters themselves.

Again, this is not over. It's difficult for us to accept that there are organized groups in this great country who subscribe to a White supremacist, anti-government philosophy with the goal of taking down the government, but sadly, this is the reality we must come to grips with. These people used our love of freedom and diversity against us and weaponized the valid concerns of ordinary people — in this case, truckers — who were simply trying to voice their displeasure with the government policies around COVID-19 and vaccine mandates. These groups are strategic, they are smart and they are masters of manipulation and disinformation.

I hope this chamber can find a way to differentiate between valid protests, which are a hallmark of the Canadian way, and the international movement to destabilize our country and others with deception and hatred. We must support the police and other authorities to use this act to do what we have asked them to do, stop this affront to law and order and our way of life before it spreads to other parts of our country. It is on all of us to have the courage to speak out against anarchy by endorsing the Emergencies Act. This must never happen again. Thank you, *meegwetch*.

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