



Blake Richards, M.P.
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News Release

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BILL C-309 WILL DETER RIOTS, PROTECT PUBLIC SAFETY BY UNMASKING CRIMINALS: M.P. BLAKE RICHARDS

With debate now begun on his Private Member's Bill C-309, Member of Parliament Blake Richards says he's working to build broad support in the House of Commons for a new law to unmask rioters and better protect public safety.

"This bill is a measured response to a problem that law enforcement officials have grappled with for years ... No one should be able to commit violent and destructive crimes against persons and property with impunity, under a cloak of anonymity," Richards, the M.P. for Wild Rose, Alberta, said to open debate today on the *Preventing Persons from Concealing Their Identities during Riots and Unlawful Assemblies Act*.

Bill C-309 amends sections 65 and 66 of the Criminal Code which outline the penalties for participating in a riot or unlawful assembly respectively, by making it a new offence to wear "a mask or other disguise to conceal their identity without lawful excuse". Richards crafted the bill in response to recent disturbances in which masked rioters assaulted civilians, destroyed public and private property and looted businesses.

"Police have long advised us that their inability to preemptively deal with individuals who are concealing their identities in the middle of such explosive situations is hindering their ability to maintain control and to protect the public during such events," Richards said.

Bill C-309 has been well received by police chiefs in a number of Canada's major cities, including Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria.

"I welcome any legislation that reduces the potential for violence at public gatherings. This bill is a meaningful step towards preventing those with violent intent from hiding behind disguises, masks and facial coverings," said Victoria Police Department Chief Constable Jamie Graham, who put forward a motion at the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police conference in August 2011 that called upon Parliamentarians to strengthen criminal legislation dealing with persons wearing disguises at assemblies.

Chief Constable Jim Chu of the Vancouver Police Department said: "The Vancouver Police Department is pleased to support this bill. When we see protesters in a crowd donning masks and hoods we know there is a very good chance that violence will soon follow."

Richards urged Parliamentarians across party lines to support his bill, saying it will improve public safety through better deterrence of riots and result in swifter prosecutions of individuals who do participate in riots or unlawful assemblies.

"This bill has the potential to deter and de-escalate just such unfortunate events in the future, and to protect persons and property, and I sincerely hope that all members will join me in moving it forward," Richards said.

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