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M.P. BLAKE RICHARDS INTRODUCES PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL TO MAKE "MASKING UP" DURING RIOTS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE

Disguising or concealing one's face during a riot would become a Criminal Code offence if a Private Member's Bill introduced today by Member of Parliament Blake Richards passes into law.

Bill C-309, the *Preventing Persons from Concealing Their Identity during Riots and Unlawful Assemblies Act* amends the Criminal Code to make it an offence to wear a mask or to otherwise disguise or conceal one's identity in such circumstances.

"When trouble starts, people intent on criminal activity depend on being able to "mask up" to conceal their faces with bandanas, balaclavas or other means to avoid being identified and being held accountable for their actions," said Richards, the M.P. for Wild Rose, Alberta. "Wearing a mask in these circumstances is an aggravating factor for their behaviour that should be reflected in the law.

"My bill would make it an offence to disguise one's self in these events and will give police options to deal with those who fail to comply," he added. "It is a new tool to assist police in controlling unruly mobs and to help investigators identify offenders in the aftermath."

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 an offence to wear "a mask or other disguise to conceal their identity without lawful excuse".

A motion by Victoria Police Department (VicPD) Chief Constable Jamie Graham at the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) conference in August 2011 called upon Parliamentarians to strengthen criminal legislation dealing with persons wearing disguises at assemblies.

"I welcome any legislation that reduces the potential for violence at public gatherings," said Chief Constable Graham of the VicPD. "This bill is a meaningful step towards preventing those with violent intent from hiding behind disguises, masks and facial coverings."

Under Richards' bill, offenders are liable to imprisonment for a term not to exceed five years and are guilty of an indictable offence or an offence punishable on summary conviction in the event of an unlawful assembly.

The bill exempts persons with "lawful excuse" for having their face covered.

"The simple fact is, people are required to clear the area immediately when riotous behaviour occurs," Richards said. "Those not attempting to leave the area, and who in addition conceal their identity within the vicinity are likely not there for peaceful purposes.

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“This bill strikes a balance between allowing lawful peaceful protests and suppressing unlawful activities in a disturbance,” the M.P. added. “I would suggest it serves to strengthen legitimate peaceful assembly by giving police new means to act against those who are intent on using peaceful assemblies as a cover for their criminal behaviour.”

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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