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CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

**BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE ADJOURNED**

Speech by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Thursday, November 17, 2016

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Hon. Larry W. Campbell moved second reading of Bill C-224, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (assistance — drug overdose).

He said: Honourable senators, I would like to start out by commending Ron McKinnon, the Member of Parliament for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, for bringing forward this bill in the other place. Quite simply, there is an opioid crisis in Canada. I don't think that I have to go into any great detail. We read it every day in the newspapers. We see it in our communities and we talk to our friends.

I have intimate knowledge of this area because I was a coroner for 20 years. For 20 years I investigated the deaths of people who were suffering from addiction. On a number of occasions I knew that this did not take place in isolation, that somebody was present when this overdose took place. Because of our law, usually the person who was injecting with the deceased would either have a criminal record, would be carrying their own personal drugs or would have shot up with them and been subject to arrest by the police.

This amendment will take care of that by changing the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to provide an exemption from prosecution for those who report a drug overdose.

I should stress that this does not give immunity to anyone for serious offences covered under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, such as possession for the purpose or production, just to name a couple.

According to a recent study by the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council, people experiencing or witnessing an overdose are often afraid to call 911 for fear of prosecution.

I was once in a place where people were injecting. I was actually giving a talk when somebody overdosed. They opened the back door, called 911, and put them outside in the alley and waited for the ambulance to arrive. This does not happen in isolation. This happens every single day where there are injections going on.

This is the biggest reason why people don't call, and it is the biggest reason why people die alone in every single city in this country.

This type of legislation is not a new concept. A number of other jurisdictions have versions of Good Samaritan laws — 37 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

Last Monday, there were 28 overdoses at Insite in Vancouver. There were no deaths because medical help was immediate. But on that same day, there were 11 other overdoses in the Downtown Eastside that luckily were also saved.

Over 600 people have died in British Columbia this year and thousands across Canada. In the 1990s we called it an epidemic when 250 people died in British Columbia. This is way beyond an epidemic. It is staggering. In the other place, this bill received unanimous consent, and I'm hopeful it will have the same effect here.

Strides have been made in Canada in the area of addictions: removing naloxone from the list of prescription drugs. Naloxone, for those not familiar with it, is a drug that you inject into somebody who has overdosed, and it basically surrounds the opioid molecules. I have seen people I thought were dead come back to life. But it lasts about a half an hour, and you have to get them to hospital. Thanks to Senator White, six essential ingredients of fentanyl are now controlled substances. Tomorrow for the first time, to my knowledge, here in Ottawa there will be an opioid summit that will discuss all of these issues.

Obviously, these are all steps in the right direction, but this bill stands to garner immediate, positive results. It will save lives. I am hopeful we can send this bill to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee swiftly for rigorous and thorough study.

It is necessary to point out that, unlike every other bill that is before us, people's lives actually depend on this in the immediate and near future. Each day people are dying, and we can help stop that.

Thank you.
