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**Bill to Amend—Second Reading of Bill C-343—
Debate Continued**

Speech by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Wednesday, April 2, 2008

THE SENATE

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BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING—
DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Tkachuk, seconded by the Honourable Senator Johnson, for the second reading of Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (motor vehicle theft).
—(Honourable Senator Tardif)

Hon. Larry W. Campbell: Honourable senators, I am pleased to speak to you today as the critic on Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to motor vehicle theft.

This bill will add a section to the Criminal Code differentiating between motor vehicle theft and other forms of property crime. The main purpose of this bill will be to waive the provision requiring that the stolen item exceed \$5,000 and make it easier for prosecutors to track previous vehicle theft offences.

Honourable senators, I agree with the fundamental and underlying rationale behind this legislation which recognizes the importance that automobiles play in the daily lives of Canadians, whether they are going to work, picking up groceries or their children.

When Canadians become victims of car theft there is a sense of frustration and vulnerability. This, coupled with the substantial inconvenience and potential replacement costs or increased insurance rates, creates a burden that all Canadians must bear.

Honourable senators, auto theft is a serious problem in Canada. As the Honourable Senator Tkachuk pointed out yesterday, motor vehicle theft is estimated to cost Canadians over \$1 billion a year in insurance, health care, policing and out-of-pocket expenses such as deductibles.

In addition, I do not have to remind honourable senators that in my former role as the Chief Coroner for British Columbia I was well aware of the dangers associated with auto theft and poor driving skills and the resulting deaths of innocent people. Motor vehicle theft puts all of us at risk.

Bill C-343 is an attempt to reduce the problem of automobile theft. Unfortunately, honourable senators, in its current form I have serious reservations about the impact this proposed legislation will have on reducing theft of this nature in Canada.

This bill reminds me of another piece of legislation that we dealt with recently, Bill C-2. Professor Anthony Doob of the University of Toronto rightfully said:

... in the long run, whatever you do on this bill, do not fool yourself into thinking that you have done anything at all that will make any of us any safer. Whatever decisions you make will be for reasons that should not include public safety.

Professor Doob continued later:

... in the end, this will not address the issues. This will make people feel as if Parliament has done something, and that feeling will be wrong.

I see many similarities between Bill C-2 and Bill C-343. Rather than dealing with the root causes or providing the necessary resources, this bill is a newspaper headline, "get tough on auto theft," rather than a viable solution.

Auto theft in Canada is already on the decline and that is not due to legislative changes. The decline is the direct result of the hard work and dedication of police forces across Canada. This, combined with the introduction of new technologies in the auto theft field, which by the way has made car theft more difficult and risky for thieves, is the driving force behind the decline we see today.

This proposed legislation falls short because it fails to adequately address either of the two groups that are involved in this form of criminal activity. Members of the first group, the joyriders, are often young, opportunistic and not concerned about the penalties because they not believe that they will be apprehended and are rarely aware of the consequences. These are the drivers that scare us the most when it comes to auto theft. They are inexperienced. Their youthfulness leads to dangerous and often deadly situations.

The second group includes members of organized crime who are taking advantage of the Conservative government's weak response to Canadian port security and are either shipping stolen vehicles overseas or alternatively sending the vehicles to be disassembled and sold for parts.

If this government was really concerned with car theft it would be investing in programs and technology that would increase risk and remove the level of profit.

• (1440)

By increasing funding for police programs and providing greater resources for the Canada Border Services Agency for port security, we would take steps forward in addressing the factors that encourage organized crime to participate in motor vehicle theft.

Any legislative changes need to be intertwined and implemented with a coherent strategy that combines available resources. Unfortunately, since the Conservative government refused to bring this initiative forward as a government bill, I have questions about this government's dedication and willingness to fund solutions for the problem of motor vehicle theft.

I look forward to studying Bill C-343. I know honourable senators in the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs will conduct a thorough review of this legislation. Hopefully, together we can provide concrete solutions and recommendations that will serve Canadians.