



DEBATES OF THE SENATE

1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT • VOLUME 150 • NUMBER 122

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES BILL

**BILL TO AMEND—MESSAGE FROM COMMONS—
AMENDMENT FROM COMMONS CONCURRED IN**

Speech by:

The Honourable Larry W. Campbell

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

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Hon. Larry W. Campbell: Honourable senators, I rise to speak to Bill C-37 as amended by the other place. Quite frankly, in all of them, the only amendment that concerns me is the change of the word “shall” to “may” with regard to opioid prescriptions at supervised consumption sites.

I share the concerns of my colleagues with regard to supervised consumption sites going into neighbourhoods, but I can assure you two things: the Downtown Eastside did not become a haven for drugs because of a supervised injection site. If you don't have drugs in your neighbourhood or a significant mass of drug users in your neighbourhood, there won't be a consumption site put there, because it makes no sense. It's like taking money and throwing it out the window. But I certainly share the concerns of citizens who are afraid of this. It's something we have to address from a communications point of view to point out exactly what's going on.

I want to be clear that I think that Bill C-37 is a quantum leap forward with regard to drug treatment, even with the changes and even with not getting all the amendments. Moving to less red tape, closing loopholes that allow drugs to enter Canada and banning pill presses are all part of the solution to this drug crisis.

I especially want to make it clear that this is not a criminal issue. Successive governments for probably close to the last century have made this a criminal issue and waged war on what is essentially a disease — a medical condition. As a result, we see the market for opioids increasing as the supply increases. Right now it's fentanyl. Make no mistake; in time, another poison will take its place in the market. I've seen it throughout the years with heroin, crack, cocaine and all kinds of chemicals that are put together in a bathtub.

My single biggest complaint, and why I supported the “shall offer” amendment, is the lack of response from provincial governments. Health care is their responsibility. This federal Minister of Health has time and time again changed regulations to allow for opioids as treatment. She has held press conferences, appeared at events and clearly demonstrated her resolve to deal

with this issue. The word “shall” would put the onus on provincial authorities to use opioids as one form of harm reduction and treatment and as a substitute for the poison that's being sold on the street.

Interestingly enough, some of my friends in the drug policy area, who I've worked with closely for probably 50 years, see the use of the word “shall” as a barrier to treatment. This is, in my opinion, nonsense. If I'm an addict and I come into a clinic and somebody says to me, “We would like to supply you with an opioid” after talking to them about their medical condition, which may be mental illness, abuse, any number of things, and then say to them, “I'd like you to use this opioid, and don't use that,” I'm trying to think of the addicts who would say, “No, I'm not going to do that.” It's no barrier. It's an opportunity to move forward, perhaps get into treatment, not have to work in the sex trade, and not have to break into cars or terrorize other addicts.

We all worry about us. They're not going to bother us. They bother other people who are in the same condition, who are suffering from mental illness, who have no place to live. Being offered clean opioid treatment when needed is hardly a barrier but rather an enlightened way to keep people alive and to help them with long-term treatment.

While people are dying, the provincial governments are locked in dynamic inaction. With the word “shall” in the amendment, for the first time ever, the Canadian Police Association supported supervised injection sites. This is huge. This is, quite frankly, something I never expected. I don't know what the reaction is going to be from them now that we've changed it to “may” and allow provincial governments to again slither away from their responsibilities.

I don't want to go into the number of people who have died, but it's up 50 per cent from last year; and last year was over 900, and that's in British Columbia. Two people a day are dying in Ontario. Four people a day are dying in British Columbia. We have no idea what's happening in some jurisdictions because they don't have the capability of collecting the statistics, so it's only a guess.

A famous poet once said, “You can't always get what you want.” At least I think it was a poet.

Senator Campbell: While I'm extremely disappointed with one aspect of the bill, I'm hopeful that with time this too shall change. I'm hoping for a time when addicts will be treated with the same dignity that other health care users expect. For this reason, I will be voting to accept this bill as sent to us by the other place.