

Richmond MP addresses Parliament on crime

BY EVE EDMONDS,
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Kerry-Lynne Findlay

Photograph by: submitted, for Richmond News

Richmond MP Kerry-Lynne Findlay will be speaking in the House of Commons today (Wednesday) detailing the Tories' new comprehensive crime bill.

"I certainly feel like I'm in the thick of it," said Findlay, talking to the News just hours after the bill was tabled Tuesday.

Findlay, who was practicing law before being elected to represent Delta-Richmond East last May, currently holds the position of parliamentary secretary for Justice Minister Robert Nicholson.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act is actually comprised of nine bills that had been introduced earlier, but failed to make it through the last parliament.

The package includes:

- tougher penalties for drug traffickers and those who sexually exploit children.

- stiffer penalties and more accountability for violent and repeat young offenders, which includes releasing their names to the public;
- an end to house arrest or conditional sentences for serious crimes by serious and violent offenders;
- the elimination of automatic pardons for certain crimes.

“Basically we are committed to victims of crime,” said Findlay.

It also gives more power to immigration authorities, allowing them to deny work permits to individuals if it's determined that individual is at risk of being used and abused for degrading and humiliating work.

Finally, it would enable victims of terrorism to sue individuals or a foreign state for damages.

Liberal Leader Bob Rae told the press that the extensive bill will “significantly increase the prison population at the rate of \$108,000 per inmate per year.”

“The Conservatives are taking us in an ideological direction that has nothing to do with increasing public safety and everything to do with this obsession that they have with the symbolism of denunciation of crime,” he said.

“We’re all opposed to crime. I haven’t met anybody who’s advocating it, no one in my constituency is soft on crime. We all want to deal with it but this is not the way to do it.”

Under the Tories’ justice agenda, judges will lose some discretion when it comes to handing down sentences, and the country’s prisons will be filled with more inmates who will spend more time there.

This comes at a time when Statistics Canada reports homicides, attempted murders, serious assaults and robberies are on the decline across Canada.

In 2009, there were 801 attempted murders in Canada, but 2010 saw only 693, making last year’s rate the lowest for this offence in more than 30 years. As in the past, most crimes (79 per cent) were non-violent. That includes theft under \$5,000, mischief and break-ins.

The omnibus bill has been condemned by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the John Howard Society of Canada as costly, irresponsible and misdirected.

The act will go through second reading, then head to the Justice and Human Rights committee, an intergovernmental committee, which will assess the bill.

This is just the beginning of the process, said Findlay, adding that the bill was an important part of the Tory's election platform.

— with files from Postmedia News

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