

Building better anti-terrorism laws

Dear editor:

In the wake of the deadly attacks on military officers in Quebec and on Parliament Hill last October, we must consider how to best protect Canadians from modern terrorist threats while safeguarding our values. Although the government's new anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-51, takes some proper steps in that direction, it will need fixing.

Having been the government during 9/11 and other terrorist events, the Liberal Party is well aware of the tough issues and sensitivities involved. We will support C-51 because of measures that will help keep Canadians safe: making better use of no-fly lists, building on the powers of preventative arrest, and allowing for more coordinated information sharing within government. However, there are also concerns and we hear them, and will offer non-partisan amendments to address the gaps. We hope the government will be constructive and work with us to make a better law; if not, we will present our amendments to Canadians in this year's election.

First and foremost, when a government asks its citizens to give up even a small portion of their liberty, it is that government's highest responsibility to guarantee that its new powers will not be abused. Every single one of our allies (the U.S., the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia) with whom we share intelligence has a parliamentary or congressional oversight mechanism for their national security agencies, yet Canada does not. If we are going to give our security agencies new powers, they must be subject to much stricter supervision and review.

Liberals will also work to narrow and clarify the overly broad scope of new powers that have been proposed, and put a time limit on how long the provisions last before they must be reviewed—as has been the case with past Canadian anti-terrorist legislation.

Beyond laws, there are real worries that this government is not providing enough resources to the task. Our existing review body for the Canadian spy agency, CSIS, has raised doubts about its own capacity after the government left vacancies on its board open for years. We must also ensure that our security services have what they need to do their jobs, without depriving them of resources in other areas—especially in light of recent budget cuts.

It is not enough for government to simply say “trust us”. That trust must be earned, it must be checked and it must be renewed.

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