

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? More concerns to consider about Bill C-37

Last month, I wrote about the current Liberal government's announcement to repeal the Respect for Communities Act and replace it with a drug strategy supported by legislative changes in Bill C-37, An Act to Amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

I also shared several concerns I had with this proposed legislation.

Since that time, the bill has already gone through Second Reading in the House of Commons; was referred to the Standing Committee on Health for review; and as of Feb. 9, the Committee had concluded its review and has sent it back to the House of Commons for Third Reading. The Bill is being expedited through the House of Commons, as the current government has intended; however, there are still many concerns it fails to address.

My Conservative caucus colleague and Health Critic, Dr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa), rose in the House of Commons Jan. 31 to share his many concerns about Bill C-37. The concerns Carrie raised in his speech are valid and I believe we should all be aware of them before this proposed legislation goes through its Third (and final) reading in the House of Commons before going to the Senate. A large concern Carrie raised was the contradictory message the current government is sending with Bill C-37. We know injection sites provide access to illicit and dangerous drugs; however, the government wants more of them to be established. It simply doesn't make sense.

In my previous Ottawa Journal on this subject, I referenced that under our previous Conservative government, the federal minister was required to take into account the wishes of the community before granting a permit to open a drug injection site. However, under Bill C-37, that will no longer be a requirement. So even if a municipality has made clear its wishes to have nothing to do with drug injection sites, the federal government will be able to impose one whether residents want it or not. In his address to the House of Commons, Carrie also raised similar concerns and referenced witnesses that appeared before the Health Committee who testified that an injection site cannot be successful without the support of the entire community.

Another concern raised by Carrie is that the current government is using harm-reduction strategies as temporary, band-aid solutions instead of supporting treatment programs and prevention. The injection sites fail to facilitate good physical and mental health and are actually doing the very opposite by providing a safe place for addicts to receive their fix and should they overdose, someone will be on-hand to revive them. As Carrie stated, "Injection sites do not save lives; they revive people who, from what I have heard from meeting with many recovered addicts over the years, do not want to be alive if drugs, crime and overdosing is all they have to look forward to."

Carrie also raised that Bill C-37 creates a co-dependent relationship with drug addicts, as one party (the current government) becomes an enabler and supports the other party's (the addict) addiction to illicit drugs. The government shouldn't act as an enabler; it should act as a preventer and take steps toward prevention strategies.

An important point raised by Carrie is that once the Minister of Health approves a supervised injection site, the local police of that community have the responsibility of maintaining safety. The government has stated that crime rates drop; however, that's not the case. Those afflicted with addiction continue to illegally possess the drugs whether it is through break-ins, robberies, prostitution, etc. This raises serious concerns for those residents and families in the community where a proposed injection site is to be established. Furthermore, it is unfair for the government to disregard the concerns that may be raised by local law enforcement with respect to the location of a supervised injection site in their community when they are charged with the responsibility of keeping that very community safe.

If Bill C-37 proceeds ahead through Parliament in its current form, the government will greatly impair the ability of families, local residents, law enforcement, public health officials, community groups, municipal leaders and others from having a voice in whether a supervised injection site may be opened in their community. Bill C-37 isn't a step in the right direction for either communities or those suffering from severe drug addiction, as it places both at risk. I agree with the many concerns raised by my colleague Carrie, and like him; this is why I cannot support Bill C-37

