

Mandates and Convoy

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Thank you for your e-mail.

Let me begin by saying that I understand your frustration about the mandates that were put in place during the past 2 years. All Canadians have had to give up many of the privileges we took for granted in order to try to stem the spread of COVID.

I believe that the various mandates and restrictions enacted by provincial and federal health officers have been essential to saving thousands of lives across Canada, and I maintain my belief that the decisions around imposing and lifting those restrictions should lie with public health officers, not politicians. We have seen the results of political decisions to lift mandates prematurely in provinces like Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where death rates are about twice that in British Columbia.

I am also aware that the omicron variant has changed the calculus around vaccination and travel mandates and their effectiveness. That said, while hospitalization and death rates are still high (though decreasing at the moment) I would again defer to public health experts as to when these mandates should be altered or lifted.

It has become apparent that there are plans in place to begin the easing of mandates in the coming weeks. While not every mandate will be eliminated at once, these are positive moves towards our reintegration back into our social lives and activities.

My concerns around the convoy that occupied Ottawa for the first three weeks of February are on various fronts. First of all, their supporters felt that the mandates had taken away freedoms guaranteed in the Charter of Rights. This is simply not true—the first paragraph of the Charter says explicitly that any of these freedoms are limited by reasonable restrictions. We have the right to free speech, but not to use that speech to spread hatred. We have the right of assembly, but not to take a city hostage for three weeks.

Secondly, the leadership of the convoy stated that their main goal was to remove the government of Canada, a government that was democratically elected only a few months ago in an election where vaccine mandates were one of the main issues.

Once the convoy became entrenched in Ottawa it was apparent that enforcement would need special powers to remove it. On February 14th, the Liberal government invoked the Emergencies

Act, which gave local police forces the ability to quickly bring in officers from across the country to help in the operation. It gave them the ability to compel tow truck operators to provide the equipment necessary to move the trucks. And it allowed authorities to temporarily freeze the bank accounts of convoy organizers and participants to investigate concerns about where significant funding for the convoy was originating. I have to add here that allegations that donors to the convoy were having their bank accounts frozen have proven to be completely false.

I also have to state clearly that the Emergencies Act is not the War Measures Act, or anything close to it. There is no declaration of martial law. All rights under the Charter are preserved. There is no use of the armed forces. It has powerful oversight mechanisms built into it, including a special parliamentary committee that is underway now.

The NDP reluctantly supported the government in invoking the Emergencies Act because we felt the impasse in Ottawa had to come to an end, as did the various border blockades that were having serious impacts on our trade with the United States. But we said from the start that we would be watching closely and immediately pull that support if it was clear the Act was no longer needed. After the convoy was removed from Ottawa and border blockades were cleared, it was apparent that there was little further need for those powers. All parties signalled that to the government and the Act was revoked on February 23rd after 10 days of use.

Thank you again for voicing your concerns about mandates and the Emergency Act and please accept my apology for my delay in responding. My offices have been flooded with more than 13,000 emails and phone calls on all sides of the issue.

It is my hope that no matter what side of the issue you stand on, that we come together as a country to work towards a better future.

Thank you again for taking the time to voice your concerns.

Sincerely,

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