

Anti-terrorism talks bring Prime Minister to YRP's Aurora headquarters



By Brock Weir

Prime Minister Stephen Harper was in Aurora on Thursday afternoon to hold meetings with local police and other lawmakers ahead of proposed sweeping changes to national security that were announced Friday.

Joined by Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown, Mr. Harper held talks with York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe in the operations centre of the YRP's headquarters on Don Hillock Drive. Rounding out the group were Julian Fantino, Associate Minister of Defence, Roxanne James, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Glenn De Caire, Chief of the Hamilton Police Service, Jennifer Evans, Chief of Peel Regional Police, and Chief Paul Martin of the Durham Region Police Service.

"We are delighted to have such a distinguished and expert group here to discuss some of these issues on terrorism and crime," said the Prime Minister at the roundtable discussion, noting its location in the command centre of the YRP.

He noted that the recently opened operations centre was a fitting place to be the backdrop for the following day's announcement as it is, in many cases, the first place where threats to community safety are addressed and emergency responses are organized.

"We are not under any illusions on the ever-evolving, ever-changing multiple threats that we face," said Mr. Harper at the YRP headquarters. "It is difficult to predict them all, impossible to prevent them all, but we must continually evolve and improve our tools in order to do everything we can to deal with what are obviously, potentially, very dangerous situations for the Canadian public, situations that we are seeing more and more frequently, unfortunately, all over the world in countries with whom we are very close.

"I am looking forward to hearing from chiefs on their thoughts on where we go from here. We are not going to restrict this discussion by any means to terrorism, but also our ongoing interests as a government and your ongoing interests dealing with crime and public security threats more generally."

Rolling out what he described as the "formal suite of measures" the following day in Richmond Hill, what Mr. Harper presented were significant changes in legislation and proposals for the Combating Terrorism Act and Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act.

Wrapped up in these proposed pieces of legislation include the criminalization of the advocacy or promotion of terrorist acts, countering terrorist recruitment by allowing courts the power to remove propaganda online, a boost to CSIS to address threats with oversight from the courts, preventing threats to transportation, and making it easier for law enforcement agencies to detain suspected terrorists before they can cause harm.

While the measures also include using classified information to deny entry and status to non-citizens who pose a threat, as well as providing extra protection to witnesses and others participating in national security proceedings, outside the legislation the

government will move forward with plans to work at preventing radicalization ? as well as intervening with those showing signs of radicalization ? at the community level.

?Our government understands that extreme jihadists have declared war on us, on all free people, and on Canada specifically,? said Harper in a statement following Friday's announcement. ?Our government will continue to protect the rights and safety of all Canadians. We will not, however, privilege the so-called rights of terrorists and others who would harm Canadians over the rights of law-abiding citizens. The proposed legislation would provide our security and law enforcement agencies with the required tools and flexibility they need to effectively detect and disrupt national security threats before they happen, keeping Canadians safe.?