

Federal government invokes Emergencies Act

BY MICHAEL RILEY Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Canadian government invoked the Emergencies Act for the first time Feb. 14 since it was passed into law in 1988. This was done, according to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to deal with the anti-COVID-19 restrictions protests in Ottawa and the continuing blockades at border crossings in several provinces across the country. Trudeau made the announcement on Feb. 14 that the Emergencies Act was being put into place, saying that the federal government was ready to use more tools at its disposal to get the situation with the border blockades and the continuing protest in Ottawa, now entering its third week, fully under control. After discussions with cabinet and caucus, consultations with premiers from all provinces and territories and speaking with opposition leaders, the government has invoked the Emergencies Act to supplement provincial and territorial capacity to address the blockades and occupations. This is about keeping Canadians safe, protecting people's jobs and restoring confidence in our institutions, he says. Federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has already said he will support the minority Liberal government in getting Parliament to pass the invocation of the Emergencies Act. While so far it has Ontario and British Columbia's support, the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec do not support it, and opposition leaders have called the invocation of the Act a failure of leadership on Trudeau's part. Once passed by parliament, the Emergencies Act gives the federal government special powers for 30 days, including the power to prohibit the use of specific property, travel and public assembly. However, the government's actions are still subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Bill of Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Although the act allows the military to be used as police to supplement local and provincial law enforcement, Trudeau said that the military won't be used. The Emergencies Act was passed into law in 1988, replacing the War Measures Act. While this is the first time the Act has been used, its usage was contemplated to address the COVID-19 pandemic early on. The War Measures Act was used during the first and second World Wars and was used by Trudeau's father, Pierre Trudeau, during the October crisis in 1970, when he was Prime Minister. The invocation of the Emergencies Act comes with new financial ramifications, namely that any company with a truck involved in the protests will have their bank accounts seized and their vehicles insurance cancelled. Canada's antiterrorism finance laws are being expanded to include crowd funding sites like GoFundMe and GiveSendGo, who will need to register with the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada and report any large transfers. In addition, financial institutions will have the authority to freeze accounts they suspect of being involved in the protests without a court order. Trudeau said during the Feb. 14 press conference that the use of the Emergency Act will be time limited, geographically targeted and reasonable and proportionate to the threats they are meant to address. It will be used to support all levels of law enforcement across the country. Invoking the Emergencies Act is never the first thing a government should do, nor even the second. The Act is to be used sparingly and as a last resort, he says. Bancroft This Week will be following this story closely and will be reporting on any developments in next week's edition of The Bancroft Times and Bancroft This Week.