

(Trucker-Protest-The-Latest)

Jan 29 2022

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OTTAWA - The latest developments on Saturday's planned protest by truckers of COVID-19 restrictions and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government. All times Eastern.

11 p.m.

Conservative Michael Cooper is distancing himself from a Parliament Hill demonstrator who was flying a Canadian flag with a swastika drawn on it behind the Alberta MP during a television interview.

Cooper says he didn't know someone "with whom I'm not associated" was flying the Nazi symbol "some distance behind my back" as he spoke to the CBC.

He says he condemns Nazism, calling it "the purest form of evil."

Cooper also says whoever flew the flag with the symbol "should be eternally ashamed," adding that the person didn't represent those at the protest who acted responsibly, whom Cooper supports.

The statement comes after the mayors of the two towns overlapping his Alberta riding, Edmonton Mayor Amarjeet Sohi and St. Albert Mayor Cathy Heron, called on Cooper to apologize for "his behavior and lack of judgment."

Pictures and video of Nazi imagery being displayed at the truckers' protest spurred swift condemnations from across the political spectrum, including from some of Cooper's caucus colleagues.

Fellow Alberta Conservative Damien Kurek was also at the protest.

In a tweet, he too condemns "any signs of hate, antisemitism, or disrespect" and writes that many protestors he spoke with believed those signs "are disgraceful and don't represent those involved."

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8:30 p.m.

Politicians are condemning Nazi imagery displayed at a protest against vaccine mandates and COVID-19 measures in Ottawa.

Photos being circulated online show protesters waving the the Nazi flag and a Canadian flag with a swastika drawn on it.

Conservative member of Parliament Michelle Rempel Garner says that symbolism is a "banner for evil, murder, unjustness" and the genocide of millions of Jews.

She says the Nazi flag should never be flown in Canada.

Marty Morantz, another Conservative legislator, says the voices of people espousing such hate "must always be condemned -- never defended or explained away."

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6:40 p.m.

Cpl. Curtis Peters, an RCMP spokesman, says a truck convoy that gathered earlier Saturday near the U.S. border at Coutts, Alta. is now blocking traffic on Highway 4 that leads to the crossing.

Peters says U.S. officials are turning traffic around on the other side of the border.

He says police are monitoring the situation and no arrests have been made, but he says Coutts itself is now blocked off in case emergency vehicles need to get in.

Peters says police are “engaging in dialogue” with protest organizers, hoping to get them to allow some emergency access to the community.

Earlier in the day, Peters said that hundreds, and possibly as many as 1,000 vehicles were involved in the protest.

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6:30 p.m.

Officials are speaking out about a video that appears to show a rallier jumping on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

General Wayne Eyre -- chief of the defence staff -- says he's “sickened” to see people behave that way.

A video posted on Twitter by Steven Thornton, director general at the Department of National Defence, shows people pumping their arms and chanting “Freedom” at the National War Memorial, including one person apparently standing atop the tomb.

Defence Minister Anita Anand says the memorial is sacred, and the ralliers' behaviour is “beyond reprehensible.”

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5:50 p.m.

The crowd on Parliament Hill protesting vaccine mandates is thinning out as the sun has set on the national capital.

But the convoy of trucks that caused gridlock downtown and traffic snarls around much of Ottawa remains parked by the parliamentary buildings.

Truckers parked along Wellington Street in front of Parliament Hill say they're prepared to stay beyond today, with some saying they'll be there as long as it takes for vaccine mandates to be lifted.

Trucker Luke Winkels says he is well-stocked after people gave him food to eat, including a crate of oranges.

Others say they have been receiving donations and gift cards from those at the protest.

Many, including Winkels, say they'll be sleeping in their cabs overnight.

While the federal government oversees mandates at the Canada-U.S. border and for federally regulated workers, almost all COVID-19 restrictions fall to provincial jurisdiction. Those include mask mandates, business and school closures, and other public and private gathering limits.

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4 p.m.

The mayor of Terry Fox's hometown is speaking out against what he calls the “appropriation” of the Canadian athlete's legacy during the anti-vaccine mandate rally in Ottawa.

The Terry Fox Memorial Sculpture, a bronze statue of the cancer research activist near Parliament Hill, was used to hold a protest placard with the words “Mandate Freedom.”

A Canadian flag was also fastened like a cape around the statue's neck, while a pole with an upside down flag was placed near one of the hands, giving the appearance of Fox's statue waving the inverted flag.

Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West says Fox is a national inspiration and a unifying force, adding that, whatever the cause, no one should “appropriate his legacy” or touch his statue.

West says in a tweet that the poster and flags should be removed immediately, prompting Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson to reply that he has asked city staff to do just that.

The image from the protest is garnering a range of responses, including from the Terry Fox Foundation that tweeted how “Terry believed in science and gave his life to help others” and the foundation continues Fox's mission of funding cancer research.

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3:35 p.m.

One of the main organizers of the trucker convoy to Ottawa has addressed the crowd, suggesting that he believes their concerns can't be ignored.

Patrick King says despite meeting with several Conservative politicians during a previous convoy to the capital years ago, none ever acted on concerns.

King was part of the “yellow vest” protests in 2019, a global movement that claimed to represent the economic concerns of its members but also devolved into Islamophobic rhetoric and anti-immigrant views.

Speaking to demonstrators outside the Prime Minister's Office, he asked the crowd, “do you think they hear us now?” and garnered a round of applause.

He adds that watching people arrive in Ottawa to say no to vaccine mandates “is the most amazing thing I've seen yet.”

King has been called out in the past for espousing misinformation about COVID-19.

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3:25 p.m.

RCMP say several hundred vehicles, possibly up to 1,000, took part in a protest near the border crossing at Coutts, Alta.

Cpl. Curtis Peters, an RCMP spokesman who is at the border crossing, says the protest has been peaceful without any violence.

He says police are monitoring the protest and that, to his knowledge, no one involved has attempted to cross into the United States.

Peters says the protest has been allowing traffic to flow in the area, but at a reduced rate.

Coutts Mayor Jim Willett says it appears some regular traffic heading south to the border is backed up.

RCMP have issued several advisories against travel on Highway 4 that leads to Coutts, as well as for Highway 2 that leads to the crossing at Carway, Alta.

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2:45 p.m.

Ottawa police say the city's downtown core has no more room for vehicles, other than first responders.

Local residents are once again being warned to avoid the area as streets are closed due to the gridlock caused by the truckers' protest on Parliament Hill.

Police say in a statement that vehicles are being redirected away from the core even as more trucks are trying to make their way downtown.

The Ontario Provincial Police, who are responsible for Hwy. 417, the main east-west artery through Ottawa, are telling drivers to avoid the westbound lanes because of traffic backlogs linked to the demonstration.

The sheer size of the protest, which was expected to attract thousands to Ottawa, led local police to ask for backup from nearby forces.

Ottawa police say they have officers from forces in Ontario including Toronto, Durham Region and London, as well as officers from the OPP and RCMP.

Ottawa police also say that several vehicles parked at the National War Memorial this morning were immediately towed, adding that cars are not allowed to park and people will not be allowed to desecrate the memorial.

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2:10 p.m.

Edmonton police say trucking convoys in support of the national convoy to Ottawa may soon arrive at the provincial legislature.

Police advise the convoys may be coming from various parts of Alberta and are anticipated to affect Edmonton traffic anywhere between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. local time.

They say major arterials into the city core may also be affected.

Last Saturday, approximately 800 people marched through downtown Edmonton to protest COVID-19 public health measures.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney has said the ban by both Canada and the U.S. on entry by truckers not vaccinated against COVID-19 further aggravates supply-chain bottlenecks.

He said that leads to higher prices for consumers.

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1:25 p.m.

Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe is showing his support for truckers who want an end to vaccination requirements for those crossing the border with the United States.

In a statement posted to Twitter, Moe says the current federal border policy for truckers makes no sense and believes an unvaccinated trucker doesn't pose any greater risk of transmission than a vaccinated trucker.

Moe's statement goes on to say that he believes the policy poses a risk to the economy and Saskatchewan's supply chain that will increase the cost of living.

He says he supports an end to "the cross-border ban on unvaccinated truckers."

Moe is fully vaccinated, including receiving a booster which he believes kept him from becoming sick after recently testing positive for COVID-19.

He says the only symptom he had was cabin fever from being stuck in his house for several days.

Moe is encouraging anyone who isn't vaccinated to book their shots because he doesn't want anyone to become seriously ill due to COVID-19.

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1:10 p.m.

Sidewalks in front of Parliament Hill are jammed as protestors weave between the semis parked for blocks in Ottawa's downtown core.

The crowd on the lawn in front of the Centre Block has swelled in size since earlier this morning, with people mostly shoulder to shoulder as movement slows.

Some people are standing on the fence ringing Parliament Hill, which is awash in cold air and the unmistakable smell of marijuana.

The atmosphere is that of a party or festival.

Many have Canadian flags or those with an expletive aimed at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Several signs also say, "We are the fringe minority," playing on comments Trudeau made a few days ago that characterized some in the convoy crowd.

Others are also mockingly shouting the same words amid sporadic chants of “freedom.”

More trucks are still on their way as organizers try to keep everyone moving and note where traffic has stopped, or exits blocked.

Outside of the core, people have lined pedestrian overpasses, including one in the Ottawa suburb of Kanata over Highway 417 that has people cheering as big rigs pass underneath on their way downtown.

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12:40 p.m.

A Conservative MP from Saskatchewan says he recently tested positive for COVID-19 and is now isolating at home until he is symptom-free.

Gary Vidal made the comment on Twitter as part of a statement on this weekend's truckers' protest.

He says he would have met with those peacefully protesting in Ottawa this weekend, had Vidal been in town.

Instead, he says he is still experiencing mild symptoms.

Vidal's statement says he sympathizes with protestors' calls for an end to vaccine mandates, believing they have contributed to some of the anger in the country.

Vidal says he is thankful for being vaccinated, pointing to it as a reason for preventing serious illness, and is encouraging those who aren't to consider getting the jab.

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12:20 p.m.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance says it appears a number of protestors in Ottawa have no connection to the trucking industry, adding they have a separate agenda to push.

The group is telling Canadians that many of the people they may see or hear in media reports at the trucking protest on Parliament Hill do not speak for the industry or represent truckers as a whole.

About one-tenth of truckers that haul goods are estimated to be affected by requirements on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border for drivers to be vaccinated in order to cross freely.

The alliance says in a statement that the industry must adapt and comply with this mandate, noting the vast majority of drivers have done so.

For truckers protesting the vaccination mandate at the border, the trucking alliance is asking them to be peaceful and then leave the city.

The statement adds that truckers' actions at the demonstration will have an impact on the image of their colleagues nationally.

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11 a.m.

The sounds of honking horns are echoing around Ottawa's downtown core.

About 100 vehicles are idling around the National War Memorial in downtown Ottawa, with more trucks and personal vehicles packed on Wellington Street stretching west past Parliament Hill.

Hundreds of demonstrators are marching up and down Wellington Street, which runs right in front of Parliament Hill and the Prime Minister's Office.

The national flag is flying from some vehicles, or draped around the shoulders of some protestors, many of whom appear to be unmasked.

Some are carrying copies of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

David Santos says he came from Montreal for the protest because he believes the vaccine mandates are not health-related but what he calls a “control thing” by governments.

The event is peaceful and Ottawa police say there are no incidents to report.

In a tweet, the force also says that police resources are in place and will remain downtown until crowds disperse.

Officers are keeping emergency lanes open and plan to continue to tow vehicles obstructing those lanes and any other places police need to keep clear for public safety.

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10:30 a.m.

Organizers have cancelled a planned in-person vigil in Ottawa to mark the fifth anniversary of the Quebec City mosque shooting that left six men dead and five others seriously wounded.

A lone gunman shot and killed six worshippers shortly after the end of evening prayers on Jan. 29, 2017.

Canadians United Against Hate had organized an inter-faith candlelight vigil for tonight at a human rights monument by Ottawa City Hall, a few blocks south of Parliament Hill.

The group now says it will be holding a virtual vigil because of the truckers' protest in downtown Ottawa and threats of violence emanating from some attendees.

The Ottawa event is one of several organized by community groups.

The events coincide with the first National Day of Remembrance of the Quebec City Mosque Attack and Action Against Islamophobia, which was proclaimed last April.

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10 a.m.

A crowd of demonstrators is filtering on to Parliament Hill this morning ahead of a planned protest of COVID-19 restrictions and the Liberal government's pandemic policies.

Many are standing along the snow-covered lawn of Parliament Hill near the centennial flame despite the frigid air hanging over the national capital.

Ottawa police aren't reporting any issues related to the event as people slowly roll in to the downtown core and join trucks parked along Wellington Street in front of the parliamentary buildings.

Hundreds more vehicles from Western Canada, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces are expected to arrive in the next few hours to join those already in Ottawa.

The Parliamentary Protective Service expects as many as 10,000 protesters to be in attendance today.

Though the aim of the protest is ostensibly to oppose vaccine mandates for truck drivers crossing the Canada-U.S. border, attendees have said that is only a small part of their demands.

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