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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 26, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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CORRIGENDUM

April 24, 2007 issue of *Hansard*:

An intervention by Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8628 immediately before the intervention by Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ). The intervention is printed in Appendix A attached to today's issue of *Hansard*.

An intervention by Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8652 immediately before the intervention by Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.). The intervention is printed in Appendix A attached to today's issue of *Hansard*.

April 25, 2007 issue of *Hansard*:

An intervention by Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8695 immediately after the intervention by The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau). The intervention is printed in Appendix B attached to today's issue of *Hansard*.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 26, 2007

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the importance of April 28, which has been declared a National Day of Mourning. Each year, on that day, we remember the workers who have been killed or injured on the job or who suffer from occupational diseases.

Last year, I was among the families and co-workers honouring the people who had died as a result of workplace accidents. We gathered on that day of mourning to remember. One event particularly touched me and made me more aware of the importance of such a day. As I was giving my speech, I saw, in the crowd in front of me, a woman tenderly holding a photograph. When I finished speaking, I felt the need to go over and talk to her. After a short, emotional conversation, the woman handed me the photograph she was holding. It was a photograph of her son, a young man barely 20 years old, who had died in his workplace. I saw the enduring pain in the woman's eyes. It is impossible not to be affected by this sort of encounter. That woman gave me a better understanding of the impact an accidental death has on the victim's family and workplace.

A safe and healthy workplace is a productive workplace that benefits the workers, the employers and the economy. As Minister of Labour, I often talk about healthy workplaces that are free of racism, sexual harassment and psychological harassment. When a workplace is safe and healthy, society benefits: employees are happier and, consequently, more productive. The employer also benefits, and our economy and the workplace are better off.

I believe that the National Day of Mourning is a day for remembrance. It gives us an opportunity to express our condolences and sympathy for the victims, their families, their friends and their co-workers, and to remember that we still have a lot of work to do on workplace health and safety.

I have some statistics. In 2005, 1,097 Canadians died of work-related causes and another 337,930 work-related injuries and illnesses were reported. On January 25, I met with the ministers of labour from the provinces and territories in Fredericton to look at this issue, particularly how it relates to young people who have work accidents, and in some cases fatal ones. We noticed that more young people are having these types of accidents because they are receiving a little less training. There is perhaps also a little less awareness. The ministers of labour committed to promoting this issue and ensuring that it is talked about in schools, so that young people are aware of the importance of what they do, and so they realize that health and safety is important to them, to their colleagues, to their families, and to everyone.

I believe that the best way to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives is to work together to improve health and safety in all workplaces, thereby reducing injury, illness and death in Canada.

I would also like to take this one step further. Who is responsible for workplace safety? The minister brings in legislation, of course. We are doing everything we can to eliminate such incidents in the workplace. Of course, employers and union leaders are also responsible for workplace safety, but there is more to it than that. Every one of us is responsible for safety every day. At home or at work, when we see something dangerous, we must stop and take action. We must not pass it by and tell ourselves that it is not serious and that someone else will take care of it. No. Each one of us is responsible for informing the person in charge that something dangerous is happening.

In our society, both groups and individuals are responsible for taking action.

I would like to give one of my favourite examples about safety in the home. Almost everyone has climbed up on a chair to change a light bulb with no thought to the consequences of a fall. What would be the consequences for our wives, our children, and ourselves? What if we had to take time off work? We must be aware of the risks every day and take personal responsibility in our everyday lives.

On this day of reflection and commemoration, I would like to invite you to join me in working to promote safe and healthy workplaces.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Liberal Party and my leader, I want to join with the minister in commemorating the National Day of Mourning.

Today we pay tribute to and honour workers throughout Canada, particularly those workers who have suffered injury, illness or have died as a result of their workplace.

Every day, Canadians go to work in order to make a living for themselves and for their families. Sadly, though, on average, three workers each day die in Canada and many more are injured. Just this week we learned of two Chinese workers who came to Canada to make a better life for themselves and their families and, in the midst of their work, they died tragically as a result of a workplace accident.

Whether they be workers in the oil patch, the police, firefighters, highway workers or people fishing, farming, mining, and so many other ways to make a living, we are reminded today of the danger so many of our workers face in the workplace.

As we reflect, though, it is important that we act. We need to work together to ensure that all Canadians are able to go to work in conditions that are safe and healthy.

On behalf of my party, I wish to extend our deepest sympathies to all the families who have been affected by death or injury in the workplace. Their sacrifice and that of their families must serve as a lesson to us all.

• (1010)

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to emphasize the importance of the day of mourning to be observed this Saturday, April 28. This day has been set aside to remember all workers who have been killed or injured on the job, or are suffering from an occupational illness—just one day to remind us that we must increase our efforts in the area of workplace safety.

Despite the actions taken thus far, there are still too many accidents and deaths every year. In 2005, in Quebec alone, some 223 deaths and over 121,000 accidents in the workplace were reported to Quebec's occupational health and safety commission. Prevention continues to be the best tool to reverse those statistics, but that must not diminish the reality of the human tragedies that occur on a daily basis and that touch us all at some point in our lives.

More work needs to be done to improve workplace designs and conditions, in order to ensure that workers are less exposed to possible dangers. The slightest effort is sometimes all it takes to save a life.

This Saturday, we will remember all workers who have been killed or injured on the job, or are suffering from an occupational illness. Let us use this commemoration as an opportunity to reflect on the best way to do something about this and then let us take action.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today on behalf of New Democrats and our leader to honour our

sisters and brothers who have lost their lives or suffered injury and illness in the workplace. We stand in solidarity on National Day of Mourning recognized on April 28.

Every day, three working Canadians lose their lives on the job. The Canadian Labour Congress, provincial labour federations and labour councils across Canada have fought hard to bring attention to these issues and the thousands of workers who suffer because of lax safety standards and because efficiency is put above workers' safety and workers' lives.

The CLC first marked the event in 1984 and since then it has grown into a worldwide event observed in over 100 countries.

Approximately one million workplace injuries a year occur in Canada, every seven seconds each working day. Deaths from workplace injury average nearly 1,000 a year. In Canada, one worker is killed every two hours each working day. Deaths from workplace diseases go largely unrecorded and uncompensated. They likely exceed deaths from workplace injuries.

Despite this, many governments are weakening health and safety rules and their enforcement. Back to work legislation and the defeat of anti-replacement worker legislation are examples of how governments are chipping away at workers' rights.

Sadly, last week we learned that a railway worker was killed on the job. Just yesterday, two workers were killed and four others were injured on an oil sands construction site in northern Alberta, all of whom were foreign workers from China. We need to ask why the government is expanding the foreign worker program without real safeguards to prevent exploitation and ensure compliance with working standards.

We can and we must meet the goal of safer and healthier workplaces. Governments and businesses must start chipping away at labour rights. Laws protecting workers' rights must be stronger and they must be enforced.

Workers' rights are human rights and, in respect and honour of the lives lost and the families affected by death, injury and illness in the workplace, the NDP commits today to renew its fight for safe and healthy working conditions for all Canadians. We call on the government to commit to the same.

* * *

• (1015)

PETITIONS

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I would like to present a petition to the House from my constituents in Winnipeg South in relation to the Canadian Wheat Board.

[Translation]

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENTS PROGRAM

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here today, I would like to present three petitions concerning the cuts made to the summer career placements program.

The citizens of my riding have rallied to present 800 signatures. They are objecting to the changes made by the Conservative government. This is why I am presenting these petitions here today.

[English]

VISITOR VISAS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to table requesting that the visa requirements pertaining to people from Poland coming to Canada be lifted.

The petitioners point out that currently people from Poland are limited in their ability to visit Canada on a quick basis because of the requirements. They point out that there is a double standard, that in fact Poland does not require Canadians to have visas to get into Poland. They would like to see this requirement lifted.

They call upon Parliament to ensure that it does everything it can to increase family vacations, tourism and cultural exchanges, as well as trade missions between Canada and Poland.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 12 minutes.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MINISTERS' RESPONSES REGARDING AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning I gave the appropriate notice to the Speaker with regard to a matter of a question of a breach of privilege in relation to the whole matter of Afghanistan and more specifically with regard to Afghan detainees.

There can be no question about the confusion of the House in this matter. I believe there appears to be some indication that the misinformation to the House may have been deliberate and in fact has breached my privileges and those of other members of Parliament.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to Marleau and Montpetit at page 66, in which it refers to the issues of privilege and contempt. It states:

Privilege

Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House. There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions;....

I also had an opportunity to look at Erskine May, at page 144, which repeats much the same information and guide for members. It does say, though, that "the Members or its officers" must be free "from improper obstruction or...interference with the performance of their respective functions".

There can be no question about the issue of Afghanistan, the recent deaths of nine of our soldiers and the allegations with regard to the torture, coercive interrogation and in fact execution of Canadian prisoners turned over to Afghan authorities. Yesterday in question period there were 23 questions posed in the House with regard to this matter.

The Prime Minister answered 10 of those questions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs answered 11 of those questions, and the Minister of National Defence, who is the principal responsible for this matter, answered only two questions. In fact, I noted in *Hansard*—I will not quote it, but members and the Chair can certainly look at the responses given—it was basically deny, deny, deny from all those who provided answers to the questions of parliamentarians.

When Parliament is told that all is well, there is no cause for concern and there is no evidence of problems with detainees, members of Parliament must take that at its face. We operate here on the premise of the presumption of honesty. That involves not only what is said, but it also must, I argue, relate to what is not said.

Mr. Speaker, you will know that within an hour of the end of question period the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs had before it the Minister of National Defence. I was not there. I did observe on news reports, but it is also reported in a print publication, and I would like to read into the record what transpired. The article states:

The Minister of National Defence yesterday announced Canada had struck a new deal to monitor Afghan detainees, but the existence of the arrangement appeared to catch the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chief of the Defence staff [Mr. Hillier] by surprise.

It goes on to say:

[The defence minister] made what appeared to be an improvised announcement of the new detainee-monitoring deal after intense questioning at the Commons foreign affairs committee.

It states that he said at committee:

Within the last few days we have basically made an arrangement with the government in the Kandahar province so that we can have access to our detainees. So henceforth, our military, but it can be anybody, can have access to our detainees.

This is not information that was disclosed to Parliament during direct questioning in question period just an hour before.

● (1020)

In fact, the Prime Minister, in answering 10 questions, and the foreign affairs minister, in answering 11 questions, made no mention and gave no indication, but simply continued to deny that the allegations were true and that there was any problem.

Privilege

I believe that the House, I as a member of Parliament and all members of Parliament in fact have had their privileges breached. When questions are asked directly of the government on matters of national importance to all Canadians, Parliament is entitled to receive information directly.

What should happen?

Not only did the minister make some detailed disclosures within committee, but then after the committee meeting when he was chased down the halls and was cornered in an elevator, he gave another account of details with regard to this apparent deal.

There is a contradiction. There is an apparent cover-up. It may, in fact, as far as I can see, involve dishonesty. It may involve contempt. It may involve incompetence. It also may be all three.

It is my view that we need to have this matter fully aired and that Parliament should be advised of what was the truth. Parliament was not given the full information. It was deny, deny, deny, when in fact the Prime Minister must have known. The foreign affairs minister must have known. The Chief of the Defence Staff must have known.

But it seems, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of National Defence is alleging that he is the only one who knew of this deal. He said it was several days ago. I take him at his word. If it was several days ago, he has had the opportunity all week to make that representation to Parliament to allay the fears of Canadians and to represent the best interests of the Canadian military.

Mr. Speaker, if you find a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege, I am prepared to make the necessary motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The government may wish to respond now, or if it did not have notice of the motion it may wish to respond at another time. The Chair is prepared to reserve judgment. It is up to the government.

● (1025)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me in response to my hon. colleague. I would make a couple of points.

Number one, we will be making a response to the hon. member's contention of breach of privilege, but I would suggest it is unfortunate that the hon. member did not give adequate notice so we could have had the appropriate ministers on hand to respond today.

However, I also want to point out to the House and to anyone who may be watching that in response to the hon. member's allegations that the Prime Minister answered 10 questions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs answered 11 questions, and the Minister of National Defence answered only two out of the 23 questions posed by the official opposition, the report in question was a report issued to the Department of Foreign Affairs. So it is only appropriate that the minister responsible for foreign affairs take the majority of the questions.

The member is trying to imply by his line of questioning that the Minister of National Defence should have been the one standing up

and fielding these questions when in fact the very report he is alluding to was a report given to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

I would suggest that what we have here, quite frankly, is the hon. member playing petty politics with an issue far too important to the lives of our Canadian troops and to the lives of Canadians in general to play this type of partisan politics game in this House.

We will be responding in due course, but I would suggest to the member opposite that the next time he tries to promote his own partisan politics on an issue of such importance, he do so in a manner that is a little more respectful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in brief, I wish to join this debate to support the member for Mississauga South. The Bloc Québécois also has the impression that parliamentary privilege has been breached by the attitude of the Minister of National Defence, who could not have been in the dark about what was happening in Afghan prisons. A report prepared by senior officials at Foreign Affairs and International Trade has been available since 2006. Therefore, it is a question either of incompetence—and in my opinion, of breach of parliamentary privilege—or of hiding the truth. The latter seems more plausible to me.

This morning in *Le Devoir*, a journalist spoke of the collective duplicity of the government. For example, after the Bloc Québécois asked 40 questions on what happened to Afghan detainees, we were given the impossible answer that it was all rumours and allegations, even though this report actually does exist.

The proof that the government and the Minister of National Defence acknowledge that we were right to ask these questions is that we were told yesterday that a verbal agreement with the Afghan authorities on the treatment of Afghan detainees was made between 3 and 4 o'clock.

Therefore I am also joining the debate and saying that the Minister of National Defence breached parliamentary privilege and therefore I am asking the Speaker to call him to order.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP supports the position that the privileges of the House have indeed been challenged by the behaviour of the minister.

[*Translation*]

The situation with respect to the transfer of detainees has now turned into a circus. We must call on the government to deal with this situation.

[*English*]

When we have a situation where questions are asked on a specific topic in the House of Commons and only two or three hours later, down the hall in a committee room, we have a minister giving information that is clearly contrary to what happened in the House, every Canadian and every parliamentarian needs to be asking what is going on.

We support the challenge put before the government to respond. We believe that the privileges of not only the House, but of Canadians, are being violated here. We support the call for such a ruling.

The Deputy Speaker: The government has given notice of its intention to respond at a later date. In any event, the Chair would have taken the question of privilege under advisement and come back with a ruling later, so that is what we will do.

I thank hon. members for their interventions. We will proceed now to orders of the day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP) moved:

Whereas,

(1) all Members of this House, whatever their disagreements about the mission in Afghanistan, support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces;

(2) the government has admitted that the situation in Afghanistan can not be won militarily;

(3) the current counter-insurgency mission is not the right mission for Canada;

(4) the government has neither defined what 'victory' would be, nor developed an exit strategy from this counter-insurgency mission;

therefore this House condemns this government and calls for it to immediately notify NATO of our intention to begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now in a safe and secure manner from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan; and calls for Canada to focus its efforts to assist the people of Afghanistan on a diplomatic solution, and re-double its commitment to reconstruction and development.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

[*English*]

As I begin, I want to express once again our condolences for those soldiers and personnel who have lost their lives, Canadian and from other countries, and also for the countless citizens of Afghanistan who have lost their lives as well.

Today the NDP has presented a motion to the House calling for the immediate, safe and secure withdrawal of our troops from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan and to refocus our efforts to assist the people of Afghanistan on development and reconstruction and on creating a pathway to peace.

We are doing so because our current combat mission in Afghanistan is wrong, and two years more of participating in the wrong mission is two years too long. It means countless more lives lost.

Last week I rose in this House to oppose the Liberal motion which confirmed the Conservative extension of two more years. A year ago the Liberals opposed the extension of the mission to 2009, but today

Business of Supply

they have changed their minds. Their motion endorsed the Conservative plan. That is why the NDP opposed that motion.

I said at the time that when a party comes to the conclusion that a mission is wrong, then it cannot in good conscience tell our soldiers to continue in that mission for another two years.

[*Translation*]

In our opinion, two more years spent on the wrong mission in Afghanistan is two years too many. We strongly believe that our troops have to be able to trust their Parliament. They have to trust that Parliament will authorize their deployment at the right time for the right reasons.

[*English*]

Our soldiers have to trust that Parliament will reconsider its military strategy when it is not the right tool to get the job done. Our party takes that trust very seriously. We feel that the current mission is wrong and we have been consistent in calling for withdrawal. We have done so on several occasions and today we are formally doing so in the House.

Things wrong with the mission will continue to get worse. It is a seek and kill counter-insurgency. It is fundamentally imbalanced between military, humanitarian and development spending, and there is a deteriorating human rights situation and an escalation of the war.

Why continue to prolong this flawed mission when it is clear that more Afghan civilians will suffer and more insurgents will be recruited?

The NDP position on the combat mission in Afghanistan is clear. Bush-style counter-insurgency missions such as this can actually prevent Afghan citizens from reaching a lasting peace and alleviating the desperate poverty of the country.

It is unbalanced and overwhelmingly focused on an aggressive counter-insurgency mission, and of course the humanitarian situation, as we are all hearing back, is not improving with the situation of the growing numbers of refugees, just as one example.

Both the Liberals and the Conservatives have admitted that the conflict in Afghanistan will not be won militarily, yet they think our soldiers should continue to fight for two more years. They know the strategy is failing, yet they refuse to withdraw our troops now. That is not a responsible position and it does not show the respect that we owe to our men and women in uniform.

It is time to begin to work to settle this conflict diplomatically and redouble our commitment to reconstruction and development. That is going to require peace negotiations supported by the international community.

Business of Supply

•(1035)

[Translation]

The secure and resolute withdrawal of our troops, in consultation with our allies, is now necessary. At the same time, we must now make a concentrated effort to develop a new approach to Canada's role in Afghanistan. That begins by opening up a dialogue with the countries that are committed to helping the people of Afghanistan. We must work together to establish peace, development and justice. Our approach must respect and involve the organizations, groups and local governments in Afghanistan.

Canada must draw on its experience to provide the diplomacy, aid and reconstruction that Canadians and Quebeckers want to see in Afghanistan. This should begin with a ceasefire as soon as possible. Showing leadership in Afghanistan means working with our European allies in NATO and our allies from other countries to convince the Americans to end their poppy eradication campaign and stop supporting Pakistan's position on the Taliban.

[English]

Showing leadership in Afghanistan means taking concrete steps toward peace negotiations, something we cannot effectively do while we wage war.

Chris Alexander, Canada's former ambassador to Afghanistan and now a leading UN official in Afghanistan, said that the absence of a peace deal in Afghanistan is fueling the conflict. Gordon Smith, former senior Canadian diplomat and head of global studies at the University of Victoria, called on the international community to undertake serious efforts at inclusive and comprehensive peace negotiations. This is what is being called for by the NDP.

Parliamentarians have a responsibility to our soldiers and to the citizens of this country to do the right thing in Afghanistan. It is time to withdraw our troops from the counter-insurgency mission, focus our efforts on a diplomatic solution and regain Canada's strength and credibility rather than squandering it in a failing and futile mission.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to begin. I know many people want to ask this particular member a question. I will try to keep my remarks short.

The member says that the mission is failing. I wonder if he could enlighten the House on what expertise he might have in military matters and specifically how he is able to judge the success or failure of a military mission?

When I was in Afghanistan and had the privilege to interact with our front line troops at Christmastime, certainly they believed that they were achieving some great successes. Yet this particular member would say that the mission is failing. I wonder what he bases that upon?

I want to quote from the actual motion and if we are to immediately begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now from the "counter-insurgency mission" which is the motion before the House today, I would ask who is to take our place? What negotiations have gone on if we are going to immediately pull out and which of our allies is going to take our place? Who is going to hold the line, as it were?

A person does not have to be overly bright to understand that all of our allies, and especially the Afghan national army, are under tremendous pressure. The Afghan army has been taking countless more casualties than even we are.

Is the situation tragic? Yes, of course it is. I do not believe that the mission is failing and neither do our troops that are on the ground there. Our troops believe in the mission. They believe that they can accomplish the goals that have been set for them and that they set for themselves.

I would ask the hon. member, on what does he base his assessment that the mission is failing?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, clearly the hon. member and myself disagree. There are many authoritative reports that have been produced that speak to the failure of this mission. The reports speak to the fact that there is no end in sight. A mission with no end in sight cannot exactly be described as a success.

There has been an increase in the number of refugees reported having to seek shelter and food. Increasing numbers of children have been driven out of their communities and now are unable to receive medical attention when they are ill. There are growing numbers of casualties, both on the side of the soldiers involved, the military personnel, and much larger numbers of citizens being killed.

I think these are measures of a failing mission and there are many others. That is why we think it is time for Canada to take the lead in recognizing that there needs to be a new approach. I think it would send a very powerful signal if we were to do so. It would put Canada back on track as a country that has a role to play in the world, which is quite unique in terms of being able to bring sides together and work toward a ceasefire, peace negotiations. This is what Canadians do best. Frankly, we are losing that ability by prosecuting this mission in the way that we are doing so now.

•(1040)

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I often hear from the NDP members that they believe that this is the wrong mission for Canada. I was hoping that the leader of the NDP could explain to me why that is so. We have 60 countries that developed a five-year plan for Afghanistan. There are 37 countries on the ground in Afghanistan implementing this plan and 192 countries endorsed this plan at the UN General Assembly. Why is it that the entire international community believes that Afghanistan is the right mission? For some reason the NDP thinks it is not. That party is the only that does not think it is the right mission.

I had an opportunity to go to Afghanistan. I focused there on women and children. I went there and spoke with them, and asked them what it was like under the Taliban and what changes they have experienced.

I spoke with one particular person, a politician, who has just given birth to her first little boy. She has a \$500,000 bounty on her head simply because she is a woman and fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan. I wonder could this hon. member look her in the face when she says to him "Please don't go. Don't turn your back on us now because all will be lost". What would he say to her?

Business of Supply

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, the NDP brought a woman parliamentarian from Afghanistan to speak to our national convention while we were debating exactly what should be happening in Afghanistan. So, we do not actually need to take a lesson from the secretary of state, with all due respect, in this regard.

What is interesting is that the secretary of state did not mention that the vast majority of countries that are working in Afghanistan on trying to improve the situation, and we support those kinds of efforts, are not responding to a call, including from our government, to become involved in the aggressive counter-insurgency war in the south. It is very interesting to note that the secretary of state herself did not lay out the full story here.

The fact is most countries do believe that the approach being taken in the counter-insurgency effort is wrong and these other countries have chosen to take a different route. We believe that Canada should be engaging with them to find out how we can assist in that effort rather than follow the current direction, which was of course established by the Bush administration.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand here again today as a mother, as a grandmother and as someone who has visited Afghanistan with the defence committee of the House of Commons where I had the opportunity to speak with many of the Canadians who are serving in Kandahar province.

I was very impressed with the calibre, the determination and the commitment of the men and women we have sent to Kandahar to participate in this mission.

I remember one man in particular who was part of the supply route in Kandahar and was taking supplies out to the forward operating bases. He spoke to me of his time in the Canadian Forces and of his other missions. He had served in many missions for Canada. He told me that this was his second tour in Afghanistan. He said that he had seen and done things in Afghanistan this time that he never thought imaginable. He told me that he just wanted to go home. That had an incredible impact on me, as did the conversations I had with other men and women at the airfield in Kandahar.

I also stand here as a parliamentarian to echo the concerns and the opposition of millions of Canadians who see this war as a real blight on our country.

Tragically, 54 Canadian soldiers and a Canadian diplomat have been killed in this war and all Canadians share in the grief of their families and send them our condolences.

Violent incidents in January 2007 were more than double those of January 2006. Fifteen thousand families have been displaced in the south due to the military operations there. IDP camps are full. Not enough food and aid is getting through to these people. They live in miserable conditions in these IDP camps.

The criteria for success has never been defined by either the Liberal government that took us into this counter-insurgency mission nor the Conservative government. This mission should never be measured by the number of insurgents killed, nor should the number of foreign soldiers deployed there be seen as signs of progress.

Success would be tangible improvements in the quality of life for Afghan people, such as clean water, medical facilities, electricity and a safe and secure environment.

The war is getting worse. The government clearly does not want Canadians to see that but it is getting worse. With the strategy that counter-insurgency warfare against insurgents who will always know the terrain better than we will, whose recruitment strategies are strengthened by our war against them and who have a safe haven in a neighbouring country, it is not surprising that this mission is failing.

Afghans, Canadians, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers are dying in a senseless war. The men and women in this House must remember each casualty in war is someone's sister, someone's brother, someone's son, someone's daughter and someone's lover.

The government and the Minister of National Defence admit that the war in Afghanistan cannot be solved militarily but they continue along on this misguided mission, fighting it with air strikes and guns. As they stick to this futile path with what might only be described as ideological blindness, it is our soldiers and the Afghan people who suffer.

Why have the Conservatives refused to budge from this futile strategy? I asked that question nearly a year ago when we had the debate on the extension of the mission. Is it simply because they do not have the imagination or the wherewithal to devise a better approach?

What makes me most angry and what strikes me as being the most tragic part of this is that there are countless opportunities to do this differently and to play a constructive rather than a destructive role in Afghanistan.

● (1045)

Over a year ago I called upon the government to address the inadequacy of the prisoner transfer agreement with Afghanistan. It was my first question in the House the first day Parliament sat. I demanded an end to the flawed practice of handing prisoners over to authorities who we knew, in all likelihood, would torture and abuse them.

The allegations that are coming forward now, allegations that prisoners transferred by Canadian soldiers to Afghan authorities were tortured and abused, could have been avoided. This is a shame on our country, it is a shame on our government and it is a shame on the Minister of National Defence.

The government and the minister have misled the House about the transfer of Afghan detainees with a callous disregard for their responsibilities for human rights and human dignity. Many experts have told the government that it is a violation of international law. I have heard them tell the minister that in committee. It signals a break with the entire history of Canada's foreign policy.

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We are now in a state of more confusion after the minister's appearance at the foreign affairs committee last night. The Minister of National Defence now says that he has yet another new arrangement with Afghan authorities. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs knows nothing about it and the chief of defence staff said that it was news to him. He did not know anything about it either. Those are the very people who are responsible for implementing such arrangements. There is massive confusion and disorganization and the left hand of the government does not seem to know what the right hand is doing.

Canada has always been at the forefront of international human rights issues and, sadly, Canada's reputation has now been tarnished by the inaction of the government. It has known of the inadequacy of the prisoner transfer agreement for over a year and failed to take any action until it was front page news day after day in *The Globe and Mail*.

We have now purchased over 100 tanks but rather than ratcheting up our offensive by sending tanks and more fighters, we could be doing what we do best as a country. We could be finding creative solutions to bringing peace and security to Afghanistan. Political, not military, problems are at the heart of the Afghan conflict. All experts acknowledge this. There is, therefore, an urgent need for high level peace negotiations to end the violence in Afghanistan.

Canada could take leadership to ensure international support for peace negotiations. Canada invented peacekeeping and peacemaking and yet in Afghanistan we have invested virtually no effort toward exploring, supporting or fostering efforts toward peace.

I am opposed to this mission precisely because it is failing to protect the women and men of the Canadian Forces and the Afghans. I also oppose it because it is not and will not be good for anyone and air strikes from NATO will not bring peace to Afghanistan.

The Liberals put forward a motion to continue this misguided mission unchanged until 2009. If the mission is wrong, then we need to begin to end it now. The NDP motion affirms what seems to be clear only to New Democrats in the House of Commons. This war will not be resolved militarily and Canada must, therefore, change course and begin that change now.

● (1050)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the position the NDP is presenting, the immediate withdrawal of our troops in Afghanistan, seems to go directly against what the president of Afghanistan said. He had very complimentary things to say about our men and women when he came to Parliament less than a year ago. The United Nations and NATO are supporting the mission. The NDP's position suggests, in a very direct way, that we disregard our UN and NATO obligations.

I wonder what will happen to the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women and children who are clearly abused and have had their human rights violated profoundly. Without the protection of western forces, including the Canadian Forces, those abuses will continue. It seems morally abhorrent that the NDP would suggest a withdrawal of this nature without a plan. It is very disappointing that such a debate could even happen when our troops are fighting for Canadian values throughout the world, including Afghanistan.

I would like the member to respond.

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, I need to clarify something because I guess the member did not hear what I said in my remarks.

New Democrats in no way advocate abandoning the people of Afghanistan. We have never said that. Canada does have a role to play and we want to ensure that Canada plays an effective role in Afghanistan, one that really does lead to a peaceful solution for the people of Afghanistan.

The security environment in Afghanistan is far more complex than any of the government members seem to understand. There is the issue of the border with Pakistan where insurgents move back and forth at will and are able to flee into that country and come back and begin their attacks again. There is the whole issue of the narcotics trade and the criminal elements that are involved in that, which is a security threat. There is the whole issue of the warlords from the north and the independent militias that still operate in Afghanistan.

There is the issue of corruption, which is a security threat. We know that elements in the national police service and the intelligence service are corrupt. We know that people pay bribes to get their get out of jail card. There are many issues.

The last point the member made was that he thought it was disrespectful to our troops for us to be debating this issue. What could be more important in a democratic society than to debate sending our soldiers in harm's way? It is the most critical issue we should be debating in this House. We are talking about being in Afghanistan to help develop democratic institutions. To even suggest that it is wrong to have a democratic discussion in the House of Commons is offensive.

● (1055)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is shameful is this irresponsible motion put forth by the NDP. I do not even think the member listened to what she said. We cannot have peace without security.

I want to ask her a specific question. A recent report by the highly respected group, Human Rights Watch, a group with which I am sure the member opposite is familiar, noted that the Taliban tactics employed in the south of Afghanistan, specifically their blatant attacks against the civilian population, are clearly war crimes. For example, in the Helmand province, Taliban extremists resorted to the use of human shields, specifically local Afghan children, to escape fire. Last week there was a video of a young boy beheading a Pakistani man accused of betraying the Taliban.

The NDP motion calls for a diplomatic solution. I would like to know if this is the same extremist group that the member's party wishes to negotiate with. Can we actually contemplate withdrawing from Afghanistan right now? Is the NDP willing to let Afghanistan fall back into the hands of these murderous tyrants, those who hold public mass executions? Is that what the member wants?

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Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, of course any civilized person is horrified at the human rights abuses that take place within Afghanistan by insurgents and by others.

I have consistently said that Canada has a role to play. We want it to be an effective role to bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

In terms of peace negotiations and discussions, President Karzai himself said that was the way to bring peace to his country. There must be dialogue and discussion and it must include all of the affected parties.

Winston Churchill himself said, "Jaw-jaw is better than war-war".

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I am honoured to stand in the House to discuss our mission in Afghanistan and to speak against this irresponsible and immoral motion.

I am also very proud to stand here today to defend our troops, our aid workers and diplomats who are making a real difference on the ground for the Afghan people.

I wish to share with members some of the remarkable news about the advancement on women's rights in Afghanistan and how Canada is playing a leading role.

Before I talk of the successes, let us recap where women in Afghanistan were six years ago under the Taliban regime.

It was not uncommon for adult women to be beaten by the Taliban's religious police for simply showing a portion of their skin. Women were not allowed to work. Nor were women allowed to go outside unless they were accompanied by a man. Sadly, we know of instances where a woman's bones would break when she gave birth. She was not allowed to go outside and because of that she did not get the sunshine and the vitamin D she needed to support her bones.

Making matters worse, women were not allowed to be doctors and those who were doctors, the Taliban did not allow them to practise. Women had no access to health care. They could not vote. They could not run for public office. They could not express their opinion. They could not own land. They could not own a business. Sadly, young girls were not allowed to be educated under the Taliban regime. This went on for 30 years. An enormous part of Afghanistan's population cannot read and write. I was also disturbed to hear that under Taliban daughters were given as debt repayment.

Thanks to our Canadian troops, our diplomats and our aid workers and the strong resolve of the Afghan people, times are changing.

I returned from Afghanistan a couple of weeks ago. I found it unbelievable, having been there on the ground and spoken to so many women and children, to see what the military presence was doing in allowing them to grow and develop. I was shocked and could not believe the NDP could even possibly suggest that we leave Afghanistan.

Members of the NDP like to claim they support women's rights. That is completely contradictory. They also like to claim they support basic human rights. What do they think we are doing in

Afghanistan? The Afghan people cannot have development if they do not have the security. According to the NDP members, the military presence has not prevented any of the criminal behaviour or murders that have gone on, so we should leave as though it will not change. That is ridiculous.

In my opinion, the NDP is a party of hypocrites, a party of neophytes who do not realize that without security there can be no development. They say they support our troops, but not the mission. The Afghan people, our troops, our aid workers and our diplomats are the mission. It shows that the NDP, just like the Liberals, do not see the advances being made for Afghan women.

In February I met with Ms. Siddiqi, the Afghan woman and member of parliament, who I spoke of earlier. She just gave birth to her first baby boy, and I congratulate her on that. She has been a fierce advocate for women's rights in Afghanistan. I find it hard to understand how she can be so incredibly strong, and I admire that. She has a \$500,000 bounty on her head because she believes in what she is doing, she believes in what the international community is doing for Afghanistan and she is standing up for women's rights. This bounty exists for her for no other reason than the Taliban want her dead because she is a woman in politics.

How can NDP members, members of a party that brags about the number of women in its caucus, look her in the eye and say that they are not going to help her, that they want our troops home, that they are going to abandon her in her time of need?

That is not the Conservative way, and that is certainly not the Canadian way, to cut and run when the going gets tough.

When I hear the NDP and the Liberals question why we are in Afghanistan, I remain astounded at their fundamental lack of understanding or appreciation of the good that we are doing. When I think about why Canada is in Afghanistan, I think of just how clear our mission is and how it has been from the very beginning.

● (1100)

The purpose of our mission is to help a democracy take root and support its people, the very people who have lived under 30 years of conflict and oppression and have asked for our help. They have asked us to be in Afghanistan to help rebuild their nation.

When I was in Kabul only a few weeks ago, I met a widow from the rural provinces outside the city. She travelled over seven hours to see me, and not by car. She had eight children, four girls and four boys. Her husband, like many, was killed by the Taliban. The family became impoverished, since women were banned from working. She was so poor that she could not afford her children and had to give the four girls up to the orphanage so they would not starve.

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When the international community cleared the Kabul area of the Taliban and started micro-financing initiatives, she took out a micro-loan from an agency, in part funded by Canada. Canada is the leading donor for the micro-finance program in Afghanistan. She bought a cow. She used the cow for milk. She makes cream, yogourt and cheese and she sells this at the local market now. She has repaid the loan. She bought another cow and now she has enough money to support her family. She has told me that at the end of this month she will be able to get her girls back from the orphanage and then they will be able to go to school for the first time.

This is proof of progress. If we leave, as the NDP suggests and as the Liberals hint, then the Taliban will simply come in and end this progress. Under the Taliban, women could not own businesses nor could girls go to school. I wonder if anyone in the NDP sees this connection. Without security, these kinds of success stories cannot happen. Let us not forget that 5.4 million children now go to school and one-third of those are girls.

I had an opportunity to visit a school when I was in Afghanistan. No less than 20 girls, all around the age of 13, were for the first time going to school. What did they say to me? The only words they could say in English were “thank you”. What an incredible experience for me. Those girls will become a new generation of literate young women who will help lead their country. What does the NDP think will happen to those girls if the Taliban are permitted to once again take power?

It is time to stop the rhetoric of supporting our troops, but not supporting the mission. The troops are the mission. The international community believes in this mission. It is UN-sanctioned and NATO-led. Sixty countries developed the plan for Afghanistan. The Afghanistan government asked us to be there to implement it for them.

As I conclude, let me quote from a member of the House, who said:

It's not a question of should we be in Afghanistan. Yes, we should; we need to be...

Who said that? It was the former NDP leader, the current foreign affairs critic and member from Halifax. I agree with her. We need to be there. Perhaps her caucus should listen to her.

• (1105)

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member speak to the situation in Afghanistan.

I am continually in communication with the member for Halifax, who is our foreign affairs spokesperson. She said exactly what the member said she said, and I say exactly what the critic for foreign affairs said. We have never ever advocated abandoning the people of Afghanistan. I do not know how much more clearly we can say that.

We have always said that we were opposed to the counter-insurgency, search and destroy mission that Canada is involved in right now. We do not believe it can bring peace and security to the people of Afghanistan. We say that, recognizing that security is an element of what is needed in Afghanistan, but not through the barrel of guns, tanks and bombs from airplanes. There are better ways to do

it. Canada has demonstrated better ways of doing it in the past. We can do that again.

She talked about the women in Afghanistan. One of the women in my riding is from Kandahar province. In fact, she is an OB/GYN. She grew up in Kandahar, was educated there and left when the Soviets invaded. She has family in Kandahar province right now. She came to see me to talk about the escalating insecurity for her family in Kandahar now and how much less security and less peaceful they felt right now while the Canadians were there.

I ask the member to take off the rose-coloured glasses and address, in a real way, the situation of the women in Afghanistan.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I must be hitting the right buttons for her to accuse me of seeing through rose-coloured glasses.

Again, I will talk about some of the women who I spoke with in Afghanistan. One in particular, Rona Tareen, is a women's advocate within Kandahar city. Unfortunately, her predecessor was assassinated just a few months ago and now she has stepped into this leading role. Her predecessor was assassinated because she was a woman standing up for women's rights in Kandahar.

This is an incredibly brave woman. She told me what it was like in Kandahar under the Taliban before we arrived. She told me about how her little girl, who is 13 years of age, could not go to school. Now, for the first time, her daughter goes to school, and she is so proud of that. She told me how much she appreciated what we were doing.

Members should not kid themselves. Afghans know exactly what is going on. They know there is a certain element in the political parties and the NDP saying we should not be there. They do not understand and are actually a little nervous about it. They do not want us to leave. They do not want us to turn our back on them. That was the message I got from the women.

What does the hon. member say to a woman when she asks that we not turn our backs on them? Maybe the member could answer that question for me?

• (1110)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I point out for the secretary of state that the woman about whom she spoke, the advocate for women's rights from Kandahar, Afghanistan, was the same woman who asked for protection and did not receive it. This is a very clear example of where the mission is not working.

I listened to the member's comments. She has said that we are in Afghanistan to defend democracy, equality and women's rights. It seems very incongruous to me that on that basis the Canadian government is spending ten times the amount on the military mission than it is on aid and development and reconstruction. Canada has spent now over \$4 billion on the military effort.

The leader of the NDP pointed out earlier, as did the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, who has done a great job on this issue, that the government is now in confusion and chaos about its mission. We get different strategies and timetables about when Canada will be exiting. Why is the secretary of state not answer those questions?

There was a motion in the House—

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, we have to give the secretary of state some time to respond.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, other incredible progress is going on in Afghanistan, having had a chance to speak with no less than nine women who have been recipients of the micro-finance program. Again, Canada is the leading donor for micro-finance.

When we see micro-finance set up in other nations and developing countries, it usually takes 20 years for the program to be sustainable. The one in Afghanistan will be sustainable in five years. The Afghan people are at three years now and they tell us they will be on track for five years.

What does that say about the Afghan people, particularly Afghan women? Some 98% of the loans, on average about \$100 Canadian, are repaid. Of all those loans, 72% are for women. They can now feed their families and children. Some of those women walked seven to eight hours to say “thank you” to me. They asked me to take a message back to Canada, asking us not to leave. They also know what the NDP and the opposition are up to here. They do not understand from where the parties are coming.

I go back to Rona Tareen, who was very clear in her message to Canada. She thanks us and appreciates everything we are doing. She wonders why we are having this conversation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleagues, I stand here today to say—without hesitation—that I will not support this motion put forward by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth. This motion is based on an erroneous assumption. It assumes that development and diplomacy can be undertaken successfully in Kandahar without the crucial support provided by our Canadian Forces.

In the Afghan compact, which we signed along with the government of Afghanistan and members of the international community over a year ago, we recognized that success in this mission would require efforts along three lines: security, governance and development. The document said that progress in each of these three areas was crucial, and must happen concurrently.

In fact, the document called these three areas critical and interdependent. It says that security, governance and development are all pillars of this mission, implying that together they hold up the mission. And if you pull one of the pillars out, the mission will collapse.

Because we are pursuing efforts on all three fronts we are making progress in Afghanistan. Infrastructure is being rebuilt; the economy is growing; the government is establishing its authority and women and children are enjoying freedoms they were not allowed before. These signs of progress are a result of the security that our troops are helping to provide.

• (1115)

[*English*]

So when the member for Toronto—Danforth proposes that we put an end to the Canadian Forces contribution to this mission, he is

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essentially proposing that we undermine the pursuit of diplomacy and development in Afghanistan as well.

However, let us now listen to what other Canadians have to say on this matter. Appreciation for our Canadian Forces efforts in Afghanistan is being expressed across the country. From Bedford, Nova Scotia, a young boy wrote to our troops in Afghanistan. He said:

I am 10 years old, and in grade 5. What I want to say is, tonight I am at home, enjoying my book, my playstation, and my family. I am very comfortable. I know you are away from home, away from your things, and very uncomfortable. I want to say thank you, from me and from my family, for all that you do. Keep safe.

From Bradford, Ontario, it is just a simple message and straight to the point. It states:

Thank you so much. Afghanistan is now getting the help it needs to become a safer and better country. You guys and girls are amazing.

From Vancouver, B.C., the message states:

I have moments of deep frustration; I see the desolation and poverty on my streets, and I wonder why the government has chosen to put our brave soldiers in a war on foreign soil, when we have so many lost battles here. Then I realize that there are battles that only soldiers can fight and battles that only civilians can fight. Thank you for fighting the war that I cannot fight...My faith in the importance of protecting freedom is firm.

From Winnipeg, Manitoba, it states:

Watching our country's recent rededication of the Vimy Ridge Memorial, what moved me the most was near the end as the camera panned the crowd and there was a soldier—possibly retired—holding a picture of relatives in WWI military attire, possibly survivors of Vimy. Our country has a long history of helping others, even if sometimes it means laying down our lives. All of you in our Armed Services deserve our gratitude, our respect. Thank you.

From Yukon, it states:

You are all the ultimate “Team Canada”! There aren't words enough to describe my deep gratitude for your courage and personal sacrifice in the service of our country. All I can offer is a sincere and heartfelt thank you!

These are messages that have been sent to our troops in Afghanistan. These have all been written in just the last few months.

[*Translation*]

Canadians recognize that the security being established by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan is ultimately connected to the security we enjoy here in Canada. They recognize that the diplomatic and development efforts that are improving the lives of Afghans are possible precisely because the Canadian Forces are there. They recognize that some jobs in this world, unfortunately, require military force. They recognize that this mission continues a long Canadian tradition of helping others in need. And at the end of the day, Canadians just want to say thanks.

[*English*]

If members of the House still question the need for the security provided by the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan, they do not need to accept the words of those Canadians either. Appreciation for the vital contributions of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan is also voiced by experts, diplomatic experts, in fact. Nigel Fisher, the head of UNICEF Canada said just last week that “a strong international military presence is needed now” and he said it will be needed for years to come.

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Allow me to provide a substantive example of exactly how the work of our men and women in uniform is improving the daily lives of the Afghan people. For the last two weeks Canadian troops have been supporting an operation called “Op Achilles”, ISAF's largest operation with the Afghan national security forces to date. The intent of Op Achilles is to disrupt Taliban plans and establish security in the area of the Sangin Valley, a part of Helmand province that borders Kandahar province.

For the people of Afghanistan, the impact of security and, sadly, the impact of insecurity is very real. For instance, just north of the Sangin Valley is the Kajaki dam and powerhouse. The Kajaki dam is the largest dam in Afghanistan and it is the prime source of hydro electricity for the south. The hundreds of thousands of Afghans who live in Kandahar City, among others, depend on that dam for power and water.

In the fall and early spring, the dam's power output was wavering, but due to ISAF efforts, the supply of electricity to Kandahar City was sustained and now work can proceed on the dam's refurbishment project. This project aims to almost double the dam's electrical power output and triple irrigation capacity in the region. The Kajaki dam project is expected to benefit almost two million Afghans.

The economic and social impact of such a project will be enormous, but this project can proceed only if ISAF follows through on its commitment to provide the necessary security for the engineers and labourers to do their work. So when members talk about pulling the Canadian Forces out of Afghanistan today, they will jeopardize countless projects just like this.

Reconstruction and development cannot happen without security forces in place to help provide that necessary security. We do not want to leave the Afghans without light, heat and water, and we certainly do not want to leave them to live in a region that will be retaken by murderous insurgents. We do not want to leave them to suffer more bombs in the markets, more mines hidden cunningly on the side of the road, more gunmen terrorizing the streets, but that is exactly what we would be doing if we pulled our Canadian Forces out.

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

If we pull our military out now, the impact of the resulting insecurity would be heart-wrenching. For the sake of the Afghan people and for the sake of the Canadians who want to help them, I cannot support this motion.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member to comment on what his understanding is in terms of when this mission will end.

As he is probably aware, in May 2006 there was a vote in the House of Commons to extend this mission to February 2009. It was very narrowly approved by a vote of 149 to 145, so it was a very close vote. A number of Liberals, as we know, voted with the government. We have that on the record.

However, since then we have had very conflicting information from the Minister of National Defence and from military officials

who are planning to extend this mission beyond 2009. We have heard 2011, 2015 and even beyond that, so I think it is very important in this debate.

We are calling for withdrawal now, but we would like to hear from the government a very clear position regarding the exit strategy. Is it 2009? Is it beyond that? We hear of these other plans that are in the department that the Minister of National Defence is not able to clarify and provide adequate information to Canadians.

I would ask the hon. member to tell his constituents and all Canadians when this mission will end.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, the point I would like to underline is that the motion we are discussing today is a reckless motion regarding the safety and security of our Canadian Forces and their operations in Afghanistan.

Our government brought before the House a debate and the House voted on extending the mission until 2009. We will respect that vote that was taken right here in the House. In terms of what will happen in 2009, that is two years away. We are focused on the here and now.

I have already listed some of the accomplishment that we have realized in Afghanistan. My colleagues have spoken about the re-establishment of security, the rebuilding of facilities, the rebuilding of villages, and stabilizing the economy. These are all pluses that are occurring thanks to our participation in this mission and the participation of other countries. As we proceed, we will continue to evaluate.

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try and keep this very short and allow my colleague time to address my concerns.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam from the NDP was saying how in her assessment this mission was senseless and that it was misguided. Somehow the NDP seems to be living under this illusion that we can somehow deliver aid and assistance to the Afghanistan people without providing security.

She also said, and I wrote it down because I wanted to make sure I got it accurately, “There are better ways to achieve security”. That is what she said.

I know my colleague had a long and distinguished career in the Canadian Forces. I wonder whether, with his experience, he would be able to identify any ways that the Canadian Forces could actually achieve security through better ways than what they are attempting to do now because the NDP has failed to do that in the debate thus far?

● (1125)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague pointed out, I did serve in our Canadian Forces for 20 years in the army. In order to respond to his question I would like to say that there is no better way to establish security in Afghanistan than the way in which we are doing it now.

We are working with our Canadian Forces. We are working with the forces of other nations. We are working with the Afghanistan security forces to bring about physical security within Afghanistan.

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Within that umbrella of physical security, we are able to deliver important projects. We are able to deliver food aid, launch vaccination programs, rebuild bridges, schools and road networks. It is under this umbrella of security that we are able to accomplish what we are accomplishing today.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am somewhat puzzled by this motion on the part of the NDP. I started wondering why, after voting down a specific end to the combat role of our mission, it would bring forward a motion that it knows for all practical purposes is not going to be approved by the House. Obviously it is either a pursuit of some ideological purity, which baffles me, or some partisan calculations to do some damage control for having voted against the Liberal motion last Tuesday.

As we well know, in May 2006 Parliament voted to extend Canada's mission in southern Afghanistan until February 2009. The Conservative government rushed that motion through the House and gave parliamentarians little information and only six hours of debate. The Prime Minister's desire to play politics with this very important issue played a large part in the way that motion was handled by the Conservative Party.

This past Tuesday, as I said, Parliament voted on a Liberal motion that sought to ensure the departure date of 2009 was honoured. NDP members have made it clear how they feel about Canada's mission in Afghanistan. Clearly, they want the combat mission in southern Afghanistan to end.

In light of that, they had a choice to make last Tuesday. They could have voted for that Liberal motion and, with the Liberal opposition, sent a clear message calling for an end to our combat role in southern Afghanistan by the end of February 2009.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Richmond Hill.

Obviously if the Liberal motion had passed Canadians would have clarity on when the combat role was going to end. Our NATO allies would have clarity as to what arrangements they might need to make in case other troops from other jurisdictions might be needed. The government and people of Afghanistan would also know that our combat role would come to an end. This does not mean that our mission would come to an end in February 2009 but that our combat role would.

However, that did not happen, because the NDP voted to support the Conservative government in defeating that motion. The NDP knows realistically that the troops will remain in Afghanistan until 2009. As long as NDP members continue to vote with the Conservatives to oppose our efforts to put a deadline on the combat role, that combat role will continue until 2009. As well, the government is not at any time soon going to bring forward a motion to end the combat role any earlier than 2009.

As a result of what the NDP has done, what may in fact happen is that the government may bring forward a motion to extend this combat role for our troops beyond 2009. Of course, that means the government, as it wishes, would have an open-ended power to continue the combat role beyond 2009 if it so chooses.

Today the NDP has put forward a motion that calls for Canada to break its word to Afghanistan, as I have said, and to our NATO

partners. It knows that this motion has no chance of success. I must say with a great deal of regret that this is highly irresponsible and unrealistic.

Whatever one may think of the way in which the mission was extended to 2009 or the way the Conservative government has handled this mission, the fact remains that Canada made a commitment on the world stage to the people and government of Afghanistan, to our NATO allies and to the rest of the world. Such a commitment cannot be taken lightly. No responsible political party can ever or should ever lightly turn its back on any international commitment signed by Canada and approved by this Parliament.

• (1130)

What the Conservative government did in the way it rushed the extension was not to my liking. I voted against that extension, but the fact is that we have given our word to Afghanistan through a legitimate government of our country and we cannot go back on that word.

We need to provide some notice to our NATO allies. If this motion passes, arranging a replacement force in the wake of an immediate Canadian departure, as the motion demands, would be nearly impossible. NATO and our other allies require notice. We have to work with them to deal with this issue.

The behaviour of the NDP lays bare its willingness to give the Conservative government a pass, as demonstrated in the last federal election, even if the end result is to produce an outcome absolutely contrary to its policies and its stated values. In the last election, a right-wing Conservative government took over. In the way that NDP members defeated the Liberal motion by supporting the Conservative government, they have given a blank cheque to that government for an open-ended mission, possibly beyond 2009.

NDP members can criticize the mission and they can say that troops should be withdrawn immediately, but when they back the Conservative government and risk indefinite extension of the mission in the process, anything else they say rings hollow. The talk does not match the actions. That party does not live up to the responsibility a responsible political party should have.

The NDP is not standing up in an effective way for what Canadians want. Those members obviously do not have respect for Canada's word on the international stage. They had a chance to join with the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois to deliver a clear message on behalf of the Canadian people to the Conservative government, but they failed. They stumbled.

Now they are trying to undo the political damage that they may have done to themselves in their own constituencies. The NDP chose to risk the extension of the very mission it opposed beyond 2009. That is a possibility. Given the NDP's position on this mission, it is incomprehensible to me why those members did what they did with respect to the Liberal motion.

Business of Supply

A Liberal government would clearly commit to ending Canada's combat role in Kandahar in 2009 and would immediately inform NATO of this deadline to ensure it would be able to locate a suitable replacement for Canada. We feel that this is the most responsible approach under the circumstances and that it strikes a balance between the extreme approaches of the NDP on the one hand and the Conservatives on the other. Therefore, I will be opposing this motion.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hardly know where to begin to address the comments by the member for Vancouver South.

As for the Liberal motion that was before the House on Monday night and on which we voted, it would continue, unchanged, the search and destroy mission, the counter-insurgency mission, that the member has said he opposes, the exact mission that he voted against last year.

He was critical of the Conservatives for only offering a six hour warning of the debate on the mission in Afghanistan, yet his own government, the Liberal government that took us into this counter-insurgency mission in the first place, only gave the Canadian military a 45 minute warning that they were going into this counter-insurgency mission, in opposition to advice the Liberals had been given by the leadership of the Canadian military.

Let us make no mistake about it. This is a Liberal mission. Until a month or two months ago, it was operating under the mandate that the Liberal government gave to the Canadian Forces as a counter-insurgency search and destroy mission.

I want to ask the member for Vancouver South a couple of questions. First, surely he is embarrassed by his own caucus when the vote went down last year by only four votes and so many Liberals failed to show up in the House of Commons to vote on extending the mission. Second, how does he answer the questions about the detainee transfer agreement when, again, that agreement was signed under defence minister Bill Graham, who continues to defend it, even in—

• (1135)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows she cannot refer to people by their given names. The member she spoke of, the former minister of foreign affairs, is still in the House. In any event, the question has been asked.

The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Speaker, there have been many questions, not just one.

Let me go back to the facts of the extension of this mission. There is no doubt in my mind that the Prime Minister played politics with this issue at that time. We all understood that. Parliament, and in a free vote on the part of the Liberals, decided the mission would be extended. We accept that. We gave our word on the international stage.

However, the fact is that now we have NDP members who want to end the mission today, who know this motion will not pass, and who defeated the motion that would put a specific end in February 2009

to the combat role. I fail to understand how that serves their purposes.

Ultimately, our objective with the motion we brought forward was to put an end to the combat role in 2009, to respect our word, which we have given to the international community, to respect our commitment to the people of Afghanistan, and to ensure that our NATO allies are able to find a replacement if they need one.

However, now we have the extreme approach of the NDP. Those members want to end the mission today, yet they support the Conservative government, if the government chooses to extend this mission beyond 2009, in possibly—

The Deputy Speaker: We have one more question.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question as well. He seems to ignore that in fact it was the Liberals themselves who sent our troops into Afghanistan. We are part of a coalition of some 36 nations working to help this developing nation. Why is it that the Liberals now are so determined to undermine the good efforts of our Canadian Forces over there?

The military is giving their greatest effort ever, or at least in modern years, to establish this new country, working with developing Afghan security forces and our NATO partners. We are putting millions into relief efforts and our Canadian aid agencies working over there, with micro-finance programs helping women and women and girls getting education for the first time in a generation and perhaps in many generations. We are working to establish infrastructure in that country. We are giving hope to a nation that is just developing in the modern world.

Why are the Liberals in such a rush to undermine the good efforts that we are making and to send a message to the Taliban that if it puts our troops at risk and if it hammers our troops a little harder, maybe we will do just what the NDP wants and pull them out tomorrow rather than complete the mission and—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the mission the government undertook when I was part of that government would have ended in February 2007, this year.

It is that member's party, when it formed the government, that brought forward a motion, in haste, to extend the mission, when it could have waited some months so that we could have had more experience under our belts. Now the fact is that we have made a commitment to the world.

Our combat mission must end in 2009. That is our position. That does not mean we will abandon Afghanistan.

An hon. member: But why must it end in 2009?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: It is the combat role. There are many roles. Our troops may have many other roles as well in Afghanistan. We have the reconstruction and development work, which has been virtually neglected by the government ever since it has taken over.

Business of Supply

• (1140)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today. I have to say that it is interesting to hear the catcalls from the Conservatives and the NDP.

The NDP motion is unrealistic. Surely, if the NDP members had done any research they would have known it was unrealistic. To suggest that somehow we would have an immediate pullout from Afghanistan is not practical. It is not practical because we cannot take 2,500 troops out of Kandahar overnight. We cannot do that without informing our allies and indicating what this side of the House has been asking for from the beginning, which was in the Liberal motion, that we want to see a rotation at the end of February 2009.

During the rotation in 2003, when we were active in security in Kabul, from the beginning of that mission we sought with our allies a replacement at the end of one year. Turkey stepped up to the plate as the replacement.

If we were to take the NDP position, we simply would leave regardless of whether or not there was a replacement. The position of the Conservatives is they do not want to seek a replacement. In fact the NDP, by voting against the Liberal motion the other day, is playing into the Conservatives' hands.

I heard some of the catcalls earlier from some Conservative members which would suggest that we should be there beyond February 2009. If the Conservative government were honest, it would come clean and say that it intends to stay longer, and Canadians would know where it stands. We do not really know where the government stands because the NDP propped up the Conservatives the other night by saying the NDP was not going to necessarily support the February 2009 deadline.

I am a bit surprised by the NDP position. The NDP members say they support development. I would point out that since 2001, millions of Afghan children have gone back to school. Having visited Kandahar and Kabul in May 2006, I can testify to the fact that there were young girls, and in fact now there are over five million children, including young women, going to school, learning trades, being educated. Less than one million were going to school under the Taliban. That is a success.

If we were to take the NDP position, we would need to say that we support those things but we are not prepared to support them at the present time in terms of having our troops there. Troops are needed in order to continue with the development work that needs to be done. That is the position of this party, but it is not the position of this party to suggest that we continue beyond February 2009. We may take on a different role in Afghanistan.

If the NDP and indeed the Conservatives had heeded the Liberal position, we also said that this particular NATO mission is underfunded and undersupported. In Kosovo we provided twenty to one in terms of international troops to support the effort. In Bosnia and in Afghanistan, it was only two to one. We need to do more. In the meantime, instead of constructive ideas, the motion before the House is not realistic and it will not pass, given the position of the government and certainly our own position.

What could we do in the meantime? We have talked a lot on this side of the House about more emphasis on development issues, particularly in the long term. We are seeing success in the short term in the building of clinics and schools, but often three or four months later they are destroyed or burned. We need a long term strategy with our allies.

At the moment there are 26 countries involved in Afghanistan but only six fully participate. There are covenants with regard to countries like Germany. The other countries need to step up and do their full share. This is not solely a Canadian mission. It is a NATO mission. As a NATO mission all need to be fully engaged in the war that is going on there, and the rebuilding and redevelopment of Afghanistan.

I do not think anyone in this House does not support our troops, not one. What we need to do though is to say that it is not realistic to assume that what is already going to be the longest military mission for Canada will continue. That is what I fear is the position of the present government, that the Conservatives would extend it even longer.

• (1145)

The government and the NDP should be supporting the Liberal position, which is that there be more emphasis on diplomacy. We should work with our NATO allies and make sure that they do their full share. They are not doing their full share. The NDP members know that our allies are not doing their full share. The government knows that our allies are not doing their full share. Yet the NDP position is simply to leave. Obviously, the successes that have occurred particularly in the northern parts of Afghanistan would be subject to tremendous stress. Our leaving would present an opportunity for the Taliban.

Let us also keep in mind that particularly in Kandahar province we see great instability. We see a growth in instability in the Pashtun region where the Afghan Taliban are particularly successful. Because of the unfortunate porous border with Pakistan, even though there are 80,000 Pakistani troops on the border, it is a hot bed. It is not a hot bed for the north. It is not a hot bed in Kabul. It is not a hot bed in Herat and other places. We know that in this particular region and in neighbouring Helmand province where the British are there is instability.

I would only agree on this point, that we need to review our strategic approach. We need to review what is it that we are doing in carrying out the mission. Until February 2009 we clearly need to support our troops on the ground. We need to increase our diplomatic efforts with NATO, Pakistan and others. We need to have more accountability and a longer term focus on the issue of redevelopment. It is extremely important. We need to continue to see more.

There are seven million children still not going to school in Afghanistan. I think we could do better with our allies and with the Afghan government. That is something we need to continue to do. If we believe in schooling children, young women and the micro-credit programs that are currently in place and succeeding in Afghanistan, then we do not want to see that disappear. Again, this is not a solely Canadian mission.

Business of Supply

Better coordination with our allies on the ground militarily, diplomatically and in terms of development is important. That continues to be the position of the Liberal Party. We need to make sure that the government pushes on those two fronts. The government clearly is pushing on the military front. We need to redouble our efforts on redevelopment and on the diplomacy side. If we do so, then the very people we say we are there to support will have a better future. No one in the House that I know of wants to see the Taliban or al-Qaeda regain control in Afghanistan.

There are obviously different approaches. We have an approach. The government has an approach. Today we are listening to the NDP approach. I suggest that at the end of the day we have to not show division, but we need to show that we are united, not only in terms of our troops, but also in terms of ensuring that we put the necessary diplomatic pressure on our NATO allies. They have to do their fair share. We have to set up a rotation. The longer we delay on that, the more likely it is the government will come back to this House and say that there is no rotation in place so the mission will have to be extended.

That is why we set one up immediately in 2003, and in 2004 Turkey came in on the rotation. I do not think that is unrealistic. I did not hear that when I talked with the troops in Kandahar. They expected that at some point they would be leaving and there would be a rotation.

In conclusion, the Liberal Party will not support this motion. We will continue to support the efforts of our troops on the ground and other diplomatic efforts.

• (1150)

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope when people read these debates historically and they read the Liberal Party's participation in them, that they will be very careful to note the date on the newspaper or *Hansard*, because no other position has changed with the regularity that the Liberal position has changed.

The NDP has been absolutely consistent. It does not support counter-insurgency actions that have been taking place. The Liberals have ensured that those counter-insurgency activities will continue to 2009. They had an opportunity to get our troops away from that counter-insurgency and a whole bunch of Liberals got voter virus and were not here for the vote. If they had been here, which was the responsible thing to do, the motion to extend the mission to 2009 would not have passed.

I would like to know how the member would explain the fact that so many of his party's members were not here when they had an opportunity not to extend this activity to 2009. Now they are standing up and saying that they are the people who want to get the troops out. How does the member explain the change in position and the absence of his party's members when they could have made a difference in what is happening there?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, first of all the only voter virus has obviously infected the NDP members. They had the audacity to stand up in the House the other night and support the government and give it an out to extend the mission in February 2009. At the same time it is rather hypocritical, if I might say, to suggest that the Liberal position has changed. The Liberal position has not changed.

We had a six hour debate in May 2006. Given the politics of the government and given the situation—

Ms. Dawn Black: It was already extended by you guys.

Ms. Penny Priddy: You did it.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: If you want to hear the answer, I would suggest you listen. If you in fact know the answer, do not ask the question because obviously you are not interested.

Mr. Speaker, we were confronted with a six hour debate. We had a motion. Unlike the NDP, we had a free vote on this side of the House. We believe strongly in the support of our troops.

Some would interpret that those who did not support the motion did not support the troops. Others would say to get out. At least we have a clear position. The will of Parliament spoke. Parliament said February 2009. Unless the government changes its mind, we stick to the timetable.

Your position, which is totally inexcusable, is to say we will leave. How would you operationalize that leap?

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I listened to the hon. member for Richmond Hill say “you” and “your” and kept hoping that he would stop doing so, but he did not.

We are going to move to the next question. The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on 9/11 my wife and I sat and watched TV, as did probably the member and many others. We saw the mighty towers come down in New York City killing thousands of people, including many Canadians. It was then that most people recognized there was an evil that was existing, referred to as jihad, that wanted to kill and destroy. That became quite obvious. Many things have happened since 9/11 in other areas of the world which have indicated that this evil has been making an effort to prevail.

The only way to fight evil is with good. What we have in Afghanistan today is good men and women who are prepared to fight evil so that it never encroaches our land and our communities ever again. I commend them for that. I love every one of them for doing it. I will pray every day that they return safely from the mission.

How can any party in the House be party to an idea that we can schedule when a war will end. It is a war. It is a war against evil, and evil against the atrocities in that country which is spreading out to others. It has to be stopped.

I am proud that 36 nations are engaged in this process. I am really proud that this country has recognized the importance of that and has joined in this effort to fight evil.

To make a motion—

• (1155)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Wild Rose but we do need to give the hon. member some time to respond and time has almost expired.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Speaker, the only thing I would disagree with the member on is that this is a multinational force that is there. It is not a Canadian mission alone and, therefore, even in terms of operational ability to take a different role, does not preclude that the Canadian Forces may not take a different role in another part of the country. It may not preclude we set up another provincial reconstruction team. It may not preclude other avenues.

However, in terms of the military mission in Kandahar per se, we have said very clearly that on a rotation basis we need to inform our allies that we will be leaving the engagement there, where we have now been and will continue to be until February 2009. There is nothing shameful about that.

I would conclude by suggesting that it does foreshadow what I believe about the government, which is that it has no intention of honouring February 2009.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île

In this type of debate, I always start with some warnings. The current Conservative government has a strong tendency to say that if we do not share the same opinion, it is because we do not support the troops. This is completely false. I want to explain once again, as I did last week, the importance of this type of debate. The armed forces in democratic countries are under the authority of the government. Any decisions about the future of armed forces therefore rest with civil authorities and democratic parliaments. And in democratic parliaments, not all the members of a party are always on the same side.

I think that all components of each of these parliaments should be respected, and the Parliament of Canada is no exception. We must respect the fact that in this Parliament there are four political parties, whose members are elected democratically. No one in this House has special status. We were all elected by constituents who have a point of view, a philosophy, and who are asking us to represent that point of view and philosophy in Parliament, a most appropriate place. When beginning my remarks, I always say that we must not condemn individuals or parties for not supporting our troops, because we are the ones who determine the future of the Canadian Forces, in Afghanistan and in other international theatres of operation. I thought it was important to say that right off the bat.

That being said, I have a lot of friends in the New Democratic Party and in all of the parties. Even so, sometimes, we have to tell them nicely that we do not agree with them. That is what I will try to do today, even though I like some aspects of the motion. What I just mentioned is part of the motion. Despite our disagreements, all members of this House share the same goal: we are trying to run a country in a way that respects our international commitments, freedom of speech and democracy.

The Bloc Québécois cannot support the NDP motion. We must make a logical choice because we have adopted specific policy positions throughout this debate. Initially, we supported the mission, and soldiers were sent. Then, when the Conservative government came to power, it held a very limited and brief debate that resulted in extending the mission. We asked questions about issues such as the exit strategy, the kind of equipment our soldiers would have, and

how rotations would work. We asked a lot of questions that the current Minister of National Defence himself had asked when he was a member of the official opposition. We received no answers.

I would therefore like to remind those listening to us today that the Bloc Québécois did not support the extension of the mission. Subsequently, as events ensued, it became clear that the mission's mandate had to be changed. My Bloc colleagues and I all agree that the mission must be rebalanced. This can no longer be only a military mission. The development and reconstruction aspects are now, in our opinion, even more important than the military aspect. I am not saying that the military aspect does not have its place. However, based on current trends, we see increased militarization. This is why, last week, we supported the Liberal Party motion to terminate combat operations in February 2009. We believe that it remains important to keep our soldiers there. However, we would like to see the mission rebalanced as soon as possible.

At this time, the problem with the NDP motion is its rashness. In fact, the motion calls for the immediate withdrawal of the troops. Having twice gone to Afghanistan, I can assure this House that it is no small undertaking to get all the equipment and all the troops over there. It truly is not something that can be changed overnight. As a result, we cannot say that we are simply throwing in the towel and leaving. I am referring not just to transportation logistics, but also to how this would be perceived internationally.

For instance, after signing a contract to pay back a mortgage every month or to make monthly car payments, if an individual decided to stop paying, he or she would have to face the consequences. The same is true when it comes to international agreements. When a country makes a commitment to its allies to do something until a certain date, that country cannot later say that something came up and that it cannot continue. To do so would be to lose credibility.

• (1200)

This also gives people the perception of defeat and running away. If we leave without notice, before schedule, our Taliban adversaries, or other adversaries such as al-Qaeda, would claim victory. We would be giving up and that would be our defeat. We are not in favour of rushing this.

Now, as far as pulling out in February 2009 is concerned, I want to remind the House that NATO and the 10 other countries working with us there represent an alliance. People have to share the effort as much as possible.

The first time I went to Afghanistan I was very surprised to see that the Germans, in northern Afghanistan, had to return to camp at 8 p.m., when I know that is not the case for Canadians in the south, in Kandahar.

There is a price to pay depending on the geographic location in Afghanistan. Canada is currently paying a heavy price, and not just financially—that is the other problem.

Business of Supply

There are many discussions at NATO. I spend a lot of time there. I attend 3 or 4 meetings a year. There is a joint financing problem at NATO. In other words, people who go to Afghanistan under the auspices of NATO pay their share. They pay for exactly what they have to pay for, such as the movement of troops, equipment and materiel. This means that when they are in a combat zone, such as Kandahar, the bill is much higher than if they were in a zone where absolutely nothing is happening. I do not want to diminish the work of the others. However, I just want to say that the financial cost and human cost should not always be shouldered by the same people.

This is what I am trying to get across to my colleagues: by advising our NATO allies of our departure in the next two years, they will have enough time to determine who will replace the Canadians.

I am not saying that all the Canadians in Kandahar will pack their bags and leave. We do not know that yet. Development and reconstruction continue to be important to us. However, it should not be just Canadians who bear the financial price and the loss of life. It is not always up to Canadians to take on the entire task. This is a very important matter that we would like to debate on a regular basis.

After speaking about the rebalancing, I may also talk about the issue of detainees. The government has decided to remain in Afghanistan until February 2009. We support terminating combat operations as of that date. However, in the meantime, we will ask for a rebalancing of the mission in terms of development and reconstruction.

The figures speak for themselves: \$1.8 billion has been spent on military operations to date and \$300 million invested in reconstruction and development. That is clearly not enough. There is an imbalance in terms of the financial effort. Still, we are doing better than the average calculated for the area. Unless I am mistaken, for every \$1 spent on development and reconstruction \$9 is spent on military operations, but Canada's ratio is \$1 spent on development and reconstruction for every \$6 spent on the military.

We are not yet satisfied with these figures. We believe that a better balance is required. Everyone, including NATO generals, has said so. This battle cannot be won by military force alone. If we continue along these lines, we will end up losing the battle.

That is why the Bloc Québécois does not want an early departure. It wants to give the mission a chance during the next two years. In the meantime, we must work hard on an ongoing basis to rebalance this mission.

That is the Bloc Québécois position more or less. Obviously, I must say to my NDP friends that we cannot support their motion today.

• (1205)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that the opposition member's party has a lot of respect for the United Nations. Let us consider the UN's perspective on setting deadlines that are not well thought out.

Recently, the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Afghanistan, Christopher Alexander, appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence. He said that the UN finds it ill-advised and dangerous to set deadlines unless the

factors that promote instability are under control. Mr. Alexander also suggested that by rushing to get out, we offer hope to enemies of the transition.

Does my colleague agree with the opinion expressed by Mr. Alexander, the UN's representative?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I have met with Mr. Alexander a number of times. He is a very intelligent man, but we should clarify his position on this issue. We do not want to get out of Afghanistan, nor do we want to set a deadline. We are involved in a war, but this war is not like the second world war, which involved many nations against one. In Afghanistan, the major issues are different and the reality on the ground is different. Thirty-six countries are involved, including 26 NATO countries. One of the advantages of the Bloc's position is that our NATO allies would know we are getting ready to leave and would be able to prepare for it. We are ready to take on some other responsibilities, but it is not always up to the same people to take on this kind of responsibilities.

The Taliban can interpret this however they like, but our position is that other allies are capable of taking over from the Canadians. That is what we are saying. Two years from now, we will no longer be involved in combat operations. Our departure will be well organized and we will begin talks with our allies so they can replace us. We may be called to contribute elsewhere in Afghanistan, and we are not yet closing the door on that possibility. Should we be called to contribute elsewhere in the world, we will have the freedom to do so.

I think that the Bloc's position is very balanced.

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Bloc for his comments about the process in this place and the need for dialogue and debate. It is healthy to have differences of opinion and this is the appropriate place for that kind of discussion to take place.

We both sit on the defence committee and we had the opportunity to travel together to Kandahar to see a little of what is happening there and certainly to visit with the men and women who are serving there.

Mr. Alexander, who was referred to a bit earlier, was very clear when he came to our committee and said that one of the great failures of the process in which we are engaged and the process to which the international community agreed was that there was no comprehensive peace process as part of the Afghan Compact. He spoke very strongly to that.

I would like to hear my colleague's opinions on Mr. Alexander's statement to our committee about the need for peace negotiations and for a peace process.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to further clarify the Bloc's position. Ten minutes is sometimes not enough time to say everything.

Business of Supply

I would like to remind my colleague that the Bloc Québécois also agrees with an international conference. I think it is time to bring together several countries, and not just have opponents of Afghanistan and Afghanistan holding talks in isolation. Everyone knows that there are very close contacts with Pakistan and Iran. So we think there should be an international conference.

I might add that the Bloc Québécois also wants a senior UN official to coordinate things, since everything is now a little disorganized. We are involved in more combat than others, who are doing more development. If someone looked at the whole situation and advised the countries on an approach, things could improve.

I am grateful that the member gave me the chance to talk about an international conference, which is very important to us.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this issue of Afghanistan and Canada's involvement in Afghanistan is troubling. I do not like the war either. But from the beginning, I supported Canada's involvement, knowing that soldiers from Quebec would be going to Afghanistan.

It seemed to me that we had to support the American response to the events of September 11, a response justified by NATO and the United Nations. It is true that the war came out of those events. But it is also true that we saw the abuses committed by the Taliban regime, which had supported al-Qaeda.

I do not have much time, so I will go on and say that the Bloc Québécois was opposed to continuing the mission until 2009, because of the lack of information and the almost undemocratic way we were forced to vote on short notice on such an important issue.

In fact, I believe that the vast majority of Quebecers and Canadians agree with Canada's involvement in the operation in Afghanistan. Where people started having problems was when General Hillier himself asked that Canada take on the lion's share of the defence and reconstruction mission with the army in the Kandahar region.

I am very sorry that the NDP did not support the latest Liberal motion, which we did support. Now, with the various means at our disposal, we may be convincing our NATO partners that it is other countries' turn to take responsibility for the most dangerous regions. I would remind hon. members that this is a NATO mission, a UN mission.

We all know that the war will not be won militarily, but through reconstruction and development in a secure environment. We have no choice: we must ensure that security. But we must also strike a balance between our security efforts and the time, money and resources we spend on reconstruction, development and democracy. Many problems need to be addressed.

In committee, where we are looking at the question of Afghanistan, we have heard from a number of experts who have given a full account of all the problems. Frankly, the overall picture gives no indication that, in two years' time, the Afghan government will be able to assume full control of the country, ensure its defence, reconstruction and, above all, democracy, and drive out corruption and corrupt individuals. We have repeatedly been told that the biggest problems are the lack of viable institutions, justice, and

police officers, and the presence of rampant corruption, beginning with the government and even in the legal system, as some experts told us today. What the Afghan people need is hope.

• (1215)

It must be understood—and many polls have shown—that the Afghan people prefer foreigners. In fact, Canadians are not viewed as being different from any other foreigners. However, the Afghan people are not sure whether they are going to stay. I understand this argument and I think it is important. This is why I supported the Liberal motion. The allied forces must stay to ensure the reconstruction, development and safety of the country.

It is not up to Canada alone to take on NATO's job in the dangerous Kandahar region. The NATO partnership will crumble. The Canadians have been told that they cannot leave Kandahar to go to another region because that would raise doubts amongst the Taliban and the Afghan people, and NATO would then have to increase its efforts even further or face serious problems.

Strategy is extremely important, and the Taliban, supported by the powerful Pakistani secret service—this is what has been repeated over and over again—certainly know that. I am very sorry that a proposal was put forward for the safe and immediate withdrawal of the Canadian Forces. Such a withdrawal is, I think, impossible. I would like to hear my hon. colleague, who sits on the Standing Committee on National Defence, say that this is possible.

At this time it is not possible to announce that we are leaving. This is where political work has to be done. We could have worked on this together, politically, in international associations and anywhere there are parliamentarians. We could have said that we will stay for the reconstruction and development, but that it is time for others to go to the south, to the dangerous regions. I think this could be done in a NATO partnership. Let us not forget that Afghanistan is a first for NATO and the United Nations. They are trying to find real ways to help a country in this situation—and God knows there are many ways—to rebuild and to take charge of their own future. Indeed, that is our opinion, but we do not want Canada to take on the full burden when it should be shared by NATO.

Before I wrap up, I want to say that there is a long way to go before Afghanistan is ready to take charge of its own future. Reconstruction, which has barely begun, and economic development are necessary, but the priority is democratic development. The government is weak and is often criticized for being corrupt. It is rather difficult to end corruption if you have a reputation for being corrupt. As an expert witness said in committee, the government will have to clean house to be viable and to truly help the country. Finding a solution to the corruption problem is essential, especially when it comes to drug money and, for that matter, our money, which is not always used for its intended purpose.

Business of Supply

As far as drugs are concerned, the Bloc proposed—and so have many others—buying the crops to produce medically used narcotics. I even heard one expert say that we should simply buy them to prevent them from being used. How much would that cost? It would cost a lot less to buy the crops than to deal with the consequences. Farmers produce these crops because they do not have other options. The money from the crops does not go back to the producers. Most of the money from these crops goes to the middleman and, quite likely, the warlords.

• (1220)

Some say that if we buy the farmer's crop, no matter what we do with it, the farmer will have some money while he waits for alternatives to be found. Alternatives do exist—for example, fruit production—and they must be developed. We know that roadways are needed for this. Therefore, the important work of reconstruction, development and tackling corruption must be carried out. This requires the coordination of aid. The Bloc Québécois proposed that a United Nations representative be involved. The coordination of aid has been very beneficial in other countries in terms of making effective use of the money available.

[English]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments today in the House of Commons and I know we agree on several aspects around this mission. I want to ask her a specific question. For six years the Americans have been involved in counter-insurgency fighting in the south of Afghanistan and in other parts of the country as well. It has not been successful. We can acknowledge it has increased the insecurity in that region of the country.

Therefore, I question the statements the member made that we must stay in this counter-insurgency combat mission for another two years. Our motion does not say that we would not support the Afghans in every way possible. We are saying that this counter-insurgency mission is not the right way to go. It has led to the loss of many Canadian lives as well as Afghan lives.

The Dutch are doing it differently in the south and I am sure she is aware of the way they are doing it. However, I want to make it clear that in no way has the New Democratic Party ever said that we should abandon the people of Afghanistan. We have said there is a better way to do it and that is what this motion encompasses.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her comments and her question, but I will read the motion, which states:

—to begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now in a safe and secure manner from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan;

They are there because of a plan, the NATO plan. Had we had a debate or had we rejected the government motion, we could have debated a slow transformation of the mission so as to not convey this message. I believe that if Canada were to leave now, as a result of such a motion, the message would be that we were abandoning the mission and after that others would follow suit. It is extremely important for the Taliban, and those who support them, to know that what we want is to work on the reconstruction of that country by recognizing that it is their government and their country that must take charge of their own affairs and as quickly as possible.

In my opinion, we cannot begin the safe withdrawal of Canadian Forces at this time. Where would these forces be? The NDP wants to abandon Kandahar but I believe that this is not possible.

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it boggles my mind that the NDP members are saying we need to move out right now, but we want to stay for construction, to build Afghanistan. They are saying we want to stay there, build there, but we want to leave now and they call it counter-insurgency.

The problem is that we have a group of people there who do not believe in human rights and who do not believe in peaceful means. So if Canada withdraws today, this is a test case for our international commitment. This is the first time the international community, NATO, the UN, has come together.

That is the party that always says to stand behind the UN resolutions, stand behind the UN. Here is a UN mandated mission and for the first time the credibility of Canada, NATO and the international community is at stake.

The member rightly pointed out that the people of Afghanistan call us foreigners and they want to see what foreigners are achieving. So we have to achieve, but who will provide the security? Who will provide the security if we follow the motion that the NDP has proposed? I would like to know who will provide that security? Do NDP members really expect that the Taliban is going to say “great, okay now we'll join with you in the reconstruction”?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ken Epp): I am sorry to interrupt but the time is waning.

The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, please, a short answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I have two answers to the question. As I said earlier, this mission is extremely important because it is a new way of doing things. I heard the NATO secretary say so during a press conference. This is the first time that several NATO member nations have shared responsibility for a reconstruction project.

It is also true that a different strategy could have been adopted. Nevertheless, we cannot change our tactics right in the middle of things. That is why I think that the NDP motion, which suggests that we “begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now in a safe and secure manner”, would be interpreted as abandonment—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Parkdale—High Park.

Business of Supply

Having a legal background myself, I would like to address some of the issues that have arisen, particularly in the last several months in terms of our responsibility as a country under the international law system for the planet and the risks with which we are faced because of our conduct in the treatment and the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan.

The law is quite clear, internationally, under the Geneva Convention, on how prisoners are to be treated. We are long past the day when it was accepted practice in warfare to simply kill opponents under any circumstances, including when they had been captured and were defenceless from any further battle undertaking. We are away beyond that, and the convention that we have worked on as a country and with our allies internationally is quite clear on what we are supposed to be doing. Equally clear is that we have not done that.

We see the ridiculous circumstance of what happened yesterday at committee with the Defence Minister making up policy literally at the end of the meeting on the run. For a country with Canada's history and reputation in the international community, that is just simply indefensible and an embarrassment.

Just a few weeks ago I was at Vimy for the commemoration of that battle which has significance to us as a country in the role that our military played. Going back 90 years, even then we should look at how we handled prisoners of war. We did not just turn them over knowingly.

Much as we hear denials from the government all the way up to the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, and Minister of Public Safety that we they do not really know, that they are not sure what is going on, that is not true. It is as simple as that. We do know, even though we try to hide that from the Canadian public. We do know what is going on.

Again, I think back to the way our soldiers, our military, conducted themselves 90 years ago at Vimy and the way they treated prisoners. Then we see the government and our military leadership, I will include them in this, brazenly ignore international law. They ignore their responsibilities.

There is a historical imperative here for this country that is being ignored by the government. I hear the Minister of Public Safety try to justify our unwillingness, our incompetency, because the other side are bad guys. We should stop and think about the logic of what he is saying. He is saying that because they are bad guys, we should be bad guys too. The justification that the end justifies the means should never lie in the mouth of a Canadian politician and certainly not in the minister's mouth.

We have a responsibility, a historical responsibility, to always take the high road. We cannot allow, ever, our public policy, our foreign affairs policy, or our military policy to degenerate to the level of what we are fighting, never. We cannot allow ourselves to do that.

● (1230)

It is happening. We read some of the letters to the editors of our newspapers across this country and we hear the same argument that came out of the mouth of that minister. He says that they are bad guys, they kill men, women and children, so we should not treat them humanely. That is assuming of course that the people we have

in custody are those same people, which of course is a false assumption, in all cases. We hear that we should not care that when we turn them over to some other force or state authority that they are going to be tortured and sometimes summarily executed. We should not worry about that. It is not our concern.

In fact, it is our concern. It is our responsibility. It is our legal responsibility under international law, conventions that we have signed onto going back decades and decades. There is nothing new here. This has always been our responsibility since we signed on and we are abrogating that responsibility.

I want to say in particular on this point how utterly angry I was at the Prime Minister when he stood in this House and repeatedly said, as have other ministers of the Crown, that by raising these points we are exposing our soldiers, our troops, to charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

I want to be very clear to the Prime Minister and to his government. It is not our troops we are talking about here. It is his government that we are talking about. If we in fact have, as I believe we have, crossed over the line, then we have aided and abetted with torture. We know about it. We are aiding and abetting it. We have crossed the line. I believe that, but it is not our soldiers who are doing that. It is the government.

It did not put in place the proper agreements in the first place and when it found out, and it has known now for certainly months if not years, what in fact was going on in terms of the treatment of the prisoners, it did not move on that.

Therefore, it is complicit. The government is complicit not our soldiers. Our soldiers are doing their jobs as they are directed by their superiors. They are not responsible here. The government is.

Where does this come from? We are burying ourselves in this and so we end up in these kinds of quandaries. It goes back to the very basic nature of this mission.

It was interesting to hear one of the speakers from Calgary, in his questions and comments, saying that this is a new experience. We are hearing the same thing from the Bloc. It is not, really. Any number of other governments, other state authorities, have tried to fight state insurgency. They have tried it in this country repeatedly.

We can go back to Alexander the Great if we want to, certainly going back to the British in the 1860s and the Americans more recently. We can look at all the insurgencies that we have tried to fight, whether on an ideological basis or an economic basis, and they do not work.

The very essence of this mission is one that is doomed to failure. We can go from the second world war and look at every single one, I think with maybe one exception that I am aware of, and that was the one in Malaysia where the British used just horrendous tactics to put that down.

One might argue that one was ultimately successful, but barring that one, there has not been one, not one. The best example, of course, we can point to is Vietnam and that is what we are doing. We are repeating that. Or we can point to Iraq and we are repeating that.

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When we do that, we bury ourselves and we get ourselves caught in this situation where we are breaking international law. This country's reputation for decades to come will suffer as a result.

• (1235)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member was talking about history. Let us go back in history.

It was the leader of that party at that time who actually did not want Canadians to be involved in World War II. He did not want to fight Hitler. The leader at that given time said no. That party is known for coming up with situations which are very idealistic but which are not what is really happening out there.

Let me ask the member a simple question. If I were the Taliban, if I were looking at what is happening here today and the motion we have here, I would say I am going to target Canadian soldiers because every time I target Canadian soldiers, and unfortunately there is a loss of life, this party gets up to speak and wants to call them home. If I were the Taliban, that would be the strategy because the Taliban knows it could easily get this party to go out there screaming and shouting that the whole mission is wrong.

I can also say that if we ever pull out of there, this would be one of the major disasters because the NDP is actually asking the Taliban to target Canadians. It is actually not stopping the insurgency, but really it is helping the Taliban win the insurgency.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to avoid categorizing that question when I really would like to. If he believes that, then he is just grossly ignorant of the history of Afghanistan and the insurgencies that have gone on there.

Does the member really think, whether it is the Taliban or the entire country that fought against Russia, that our small force will make a difference?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: You don't know of the Taliban. Go learn the history of the Taliban.

Mr. Joe Comartin: I do know the history, Mr. Speaker. I have read the history of Afghanistan repeatedly. I understand the motivation that is coming from it but I obviously do not agree with it.

Are we going to make one iota of difference there? This is not a peacekeeping mission. This is not even a policing mission. Our soldiers are on a search and destroy mission, a mission that was not decided by them but by the Conservative government.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the opinions of the member who has just spoken.

My colleague mentioned Vietnam. My memory of Vietnam is that the lesson that came out of it, with respect to the values of freedom, human rights and so on, is that these values cannot be fought for by anybody other than the people who, hopefully, will come to believe in them. Those are the people who have a tremendous responsibility to engage the enemy. In Vietnam, of course, it was the North Vietnamese who had invaded.

I have never heard NDP members refute the ideals of our engagement in Afghanistan in terms of human rights and establishing democratic government under the articles of NATO.

However, I will take the member's Vietnam analogy. If those are the values, and they are still relevant and the argument is that there needs to be safety and security, would the member agree that it is incumbent on us to train Afghani personnel and the military in policing, defending and promoting those values? Would he be in favour of that role for our troops?

• (1240)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Not for our troops, Mr. Speaker, because our troops are not trained well enough as police officers. A constituent of mine, a person I have known for a long time, a member of the Windsor police force and also in the reserves, is in Afghanistan right now doing exactly that job. Yes, that is what we should be doing.

I think we have limited expertise within our military, unless we can draw on the kind of expertise that my friend brings. We should be doing it. RCMP officers and police officers should be there, as well as the judiciary and lawyers. We should be there with all the infrastructure that the Afghani people need.

However, that is not solely what is going on and it is not mostly what is going on. The vast majority of the money and the resources that we are putting into Afghanistan is going into a search and destroy mission. It is just completely mis-focused. If we are going to have troops there, they need to be there on a defensive basis not on an aggressive basis.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in support of this motion today.

Canadians are increasingly uncomfortable with Canada's role in Afghanistan. On the nightly news we see growing destabilization, growing counter-insurgency on our part, insurgency on the part of the Afghans, more civilian deaths and increasingly more Canadian deaths.

So far, 54 soldiers and 1 Canadian diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan. This is an incredibly deep tragedy for all those families and all those communities and is a significant loss of life. However, we do not even hear about the loss of Afghan lives. I cannot even tell this House what the number is. I do not know who knows what that number is but I am sure it is very significant.

Now we see something that our defence critic raised a year ago, and it has been confirmed, and that is concerns about prisoner transfer.

Unlike The Netherlands, which secured protection for prisoners that were captured by its troops, we see that prisoners captured by Canadian troops are open to torture and abuse. Here we are as Canadians on an anti-terrorism mission, with escalating violence, escalating deaths and destabilization, and now facilitating torture and violations of international agreements like the Geneva convention.

What is happening? What path are we on as a country? Is this Canada's international involvement? Is this what we aspire to as a country? I think Canadians are very troubled by this.

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Constituents in my riding of Parkdale—High Park have spoken with me about this and many are very troubled by this war. They want to know how much longer we will be there, how many more will die and how many more will be injured. Increasingly, they are telling me that Canada needs to get out.

I have even had some World War II veterans say to me that they fought in the war but that this war is not the same, that should not be there. Canadians are definitely very concerned about this.

Many of the troops over in Afghanistan are injured. We do not tend to hear as much about the injuries and the impact that has on the lives of those soldiers. A good friend of mine had a son in Afghanistan. He is a very proud member of the Canadian Forces. He was completing his second tour of duty in Afghanistan when he stepped on a landmine. I am very pleased to say that he survived but his life has changed forever. I want to affirm to this House that he never questioned his mission. He is a very proud member of the forces. He still does not question his mission and he is proud to serve his country.

However, our job as members of parliament is to question and debate this mission and to ensure that when we send our people in harm's way we are asking all of the difficult, tough questions that they themselves cannot ask. I believe debate is healthy and that differences of opinion are normal but I do resent some of the demonization that takes place around differences of opinion with respect to Canada's role in Afghanistan.

I want to be clear that it was the previous government that got us into this current combat mission, this search and destroy mission, which changed us from our normal peacekeeping role in Afghanistan. We were originally there on an anti-terrorist mission under U.S. command but this has now become a NATO mission.

• (1245)

It was a year ago that the current government rammed through a motion to extend this mission to 2009. At that time, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois voted against that motion, as did some members of the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, the motion passed by four votes which committed Canada until 2009, which is the current mission date. Who knows what the government's plans are in terms of extending the mission beyond that because we cannot get any straight answers.

[*Translation*]

My party's position is clear and well known. The government does not have a clear strategy for bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan. The NDP believes that ever since the mission in Afghanistan began, neither the former Liberal government nor the current Conservative government demonstrated due diligence before getting the Canadian Forces involved in this mission. Our party is asking for the withdrawal of Canadian Forces from the counter-insurgency mission. We should begin to withdraw as soon as possible in collaboration with our international partners to ensure a safe, smooth transition.

[*English*]

We want to notify NATO immediately that we have already made a huge sacrifice, a disproportionate sacrifice, and we cannot allow this disproportionate sacrifice to continue without any clear goal or

definition of success or without any clear achievements in this mission. In fact, I would argue that we are going in the wrong direction and that things are going from bad to worse.

We do not support continuing this anti-terrorism mission as it is, unchanged, for another two long years, as my colleagues in the Liberal Party would have us do with their motion last week. It is not acceptable.

A redeployment would take time, of course. Some have said in the House that we cannot just snap our fingers and have the troops leave. Of course we cannot do that but what we can do and what this motion speaks to is making a decision to change our role and to leave this mission. We can then set in place plans for a safe, measured disengagement from this particular anti-terrorist mission and then maybe we can engage in a more constructive role in Afghanistan.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

This conflict is about political problems, not military ones. Therefore, we must seek a political and diplomatic solution. That being said, we do not want to abandon Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Previous speakers have spoken with pride about some of the achievements that have taken place in Afghanistan. I have no doubt that there are some achievements in Afghanistan but I suggest that they are, for the most part, in the north where troops are predominantly in a peacekeeping role and not in places where NATO bombs are falling on homes and where we see on the nightly news the destabilization and escalating violence. I believe we can continue to provide support where many other NATO forces are located but, with escalating violence in the south, I believe NATO and retaliatory bombs will keep escalating the violence.

Our motion speaks to the safe and secure withdrawal from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan. I believe this can be planned in such a way that our troops are safe and it does not destabilize the south, but the motion also calls for Canada to now focus our efforts on assisting the people of Afghanistan on a diplomatic solution and to redouble our commitment to reconstruction and development.

If we want peace, we need to promote peace. If we truly want to win the hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan, the best thing we can do is give them food instead of violence.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion from the NDP is reckless because it jeopardizes the safety of our soldiers.

The Taliban watch television. They read newspapers. They know what is going on in the House. They know that if they attack our forces and we take casualties, the NDP will be there telling us to pull the troops out of there.

I want to also follow up on what my colleague said. She said that we need to debate this in the House and committee, somehow implying that we are not debating it or that we have not done so in the past.

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I point out for the House that the issue of the Afghanistan mission has come up 27 times in Parliament and in committee. There have been seven appearances in front of the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, fifteen appearances by the minister in front of the Standing Committee on National Defence, two appearances before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, three debates in the House on Afghanistan, including two take note debates and one in committee of the whole, not including the motion that we are discussing today, or the motion that we discussed and voted on earlier this week. This is being debated in the House, but this is a reckless motion.

These types of motions undermine our troops and they jeopardize the safety of our troops? When will it end?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I echo the question of my colleague, when will it end? When will the mission end? What are the plans of the government to exit Afghanistan? We have no sense of what the goal is, or when they will be successful. The government has ordered more tanks. We have no idea when the mission will end.

It is interesting that my colleague focuses on how much debate we have had on this. We ought to be debating this. What I was commenting on is that every time we have a debate, there is an attempt to undermine those who are calling for a debate. That is what is happening here. We cannot have too much debate.

Lastly, on the Taliban watching TV, it would be a better role for Canada to play if we were providing food and ending poverty, rather than worrying about—

• (1255)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Parkdale—High Park for her very reasoned comments. I think she reflects the very deep concerns that all of us are hearing from people across the country, the growing concern about Canada's involvement in this war.

She posed a very good question. We have repeatedly asked in the House when Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan will end.

We know the motion was passed very narrowly in the House, saying the mission would continue until February 2009. However, all the questions that we have now asked in the House of the defence minister, we have been given us different responses, whether it is 2011, 2015, maybe even to 2020 or 2030. There is no end in sight.

This is very crucial to the debate in terms of what Canada is doing there and what its exit strategy is. Would the member to comment on that?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the NDP keeps posing this question. We get different answers. One of the key problems is that the goals are unclear, the timing is unclear, the process and the whole nature of the mission are unclear to us.

Again, it is that open-ended mission, under the auspices of an anti-terrorism mission, that makes Canadians concerned that the current mission has gone on longer than our involvement in the first world war. Canadians are asking how much longer?

I argue that if we were to transfer our focus in Afghanistan to a war against poverty, I have a feeling the violence would end very quickly.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Lethbridge.

The success of the UN-mandated mission in Afghanistan of providing security, promoting good governance and delivering development assistance is important to Afghanistan and Canadians alike.

For the people of Afghanistan, it means a chance to overcome a history of violence, tyranny and oppression in favour of a future built on freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

For the people of Canada, a stable Afghanistan free from extremism means enhanced international security and thus greater security at home.

The NATO-led ISAF mission is solidly supported by the international community through the UN Security Council mandate. We are there to help the Afghanistan government implement the goals set out in the Afghanistan compact, which sets out clear benchmarks to guide progress. The compact's goals are Canada's goals.

The Afghanistan compact was carefully developed jointly by the Afghanistan government as well as by over 60 nations and international organizations.

The compact sets out detailed outcomes, benchmarks, timelines for delivery and mutual obligations between now and 2011, which aim to ensure greater coherence of efforts between the Afghanistan government and the international community. It also spells out the Afghan government's priorities for accelerating development, increasing security, tackling the drug trade and strengthening governance by identifying three critical and interdependent pillars of activity: security and stability; governance, including the rule of law, human rights; and tackling corruption and economic and social development.

The compact commits the international community, along with the Government of Afghanistan and the UN, to achieve progress in these three areas.

Canada is working in close cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan in helping it realize benchmarks for each of these pillars. We are also working in close cooperation with the United Nations and with 36 other ISAF countries. They are valued and trusted partners in our efforts in Afghanistan. This is a community effort.

It is good to know that real progress in Afghanistan can be measured. It is occurring in expanded security, in building democratic institutions and public infrastructure and in providing humanitarian and development assistance. Pulling out now and allowing the Taliban to regain control would result in all of this being lost.

Let us look at political progress. All Canadians can be proud of the progress our collective efforts have achieved thus far.

The first is democracy. The 2004 presidential elections marked a watershed in Afghanistan's transition toward a democratic self-sustaining state. Afghanistan's first parliament in more than three decades was inaugurated in December 2005.

The second is governance. Progress is visible in other areas as well. Governance, the rule of law and human rights form a central pillar of the Afghanistan compact. Canada is helping Afghanistan strengthen governance by supporting and training of judges and prosecutors, encouraging a transparent and qualifications based process for senior appointments such as police chiefs, supporting the reform and development of Afghanistan's legal and justice institutions and improving access to the justice system through legal aid.

In 2006 we saw measurable progress in Afghan governance. An Afghan supreme court was confirmed. An Afghan action plan on peace, reconciliation and justice was launched. A senior appointments panel was established to ensure transparency and accountability for high level appointments to the government and judiciary, including governors and police chiefs.

The third achievement is progress in human rights. Coupled with good governance, Canada has made the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan a priority. We do not believe fear and tyranny should guide the daily lives of people.

• (1300)

We have spoken out clearly in favour of freedom of speech and freedom of religion and are achieving concrete results for our efforts. Challenges do remain. Violence and discrimination against women and girls persist, especially in rural areas. Female politicians, activists and workers face intimidation. Freedom of expression still faces major obstacles, yet progress continues to be made.

Afghanistan adopted a constitution that enshrines the concepts of human rights, equality of men and women, ethnic plurality. With Canadian financial assistance, Afghanistan is working to increase its capacity to comply with that report on its human rights treaty obligations.

Let us now look at the social and economic progress. Canadian assistance is going to provide food, water and basic necessities. It is also going to schools, to villages and to communities, to microcredit for individuals, especially women, so they can start small business, support themselves and their families and take control of their future. Canada is also providing critical food assistance and vocational training to widows and their families.

Where do we go? The Prime Minister recently has announced that Canada is providing an additional \$200 million for reconstruction and development. This is in addition to our allocation of approximately \$100 million per year to development activities, which has made Canada one of the leading donors in Afghanistan. The funds support a wide range of critical Canadian and United Nations programs, including police development and counter-narcotics enforcement.

Progress achieved in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban has been remarkable. Where once there was unaccountable

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tyranny, there is now a democracy. Where once women were brutally oppressed, girls can now attend schools and women are allowed to start their own businesses. Where once the government spawned hatred, intolerance and terrorism, it can now spread security, development and hope. In sum, because of Canadian efforts, Afghanistan's determination and the support of the international community, life continues to improve for ordinary Afghans.

By signalling our intent to withdraw, we would run the risk of losing everything we have worked for to the Taliban. We know well what life was like under the Taliban. Preventing the reconsolidation of this regime is essential to Afghanistan's future. Abandoning Afghanistan prematurely would represent an unprecedented departure from Canada's legacy of actively promoting sustainable peace.

Only if there is security in Afghanistan can development and humanitarian workers get on with their task of helping Afghans. Only if there is security can the fledgling steps in democratic governance and the rule of law be consolidated and extended. Only if there is security can human rights in Afghanistan be grounded and protected in law and enforced in public.

That is why our government has continued to support the deployment of Canadian Forces in the volatile southern region. Thanks to the skills and professionalism and courage of our soldiers, the peace stretching over most of the country has now been extended to large parts of the Kandahar province.

We are now consolidating those security gains and using this opportunity to increase our focus on bettering the lives of civilians, pushing ahead with reconstruction projects, building schools, encouraging small businesses and implementing governance programs.

However, the cost of failure and abandonment would be very high. Afghanistan's poverty, the narcotics trade, the violent anti-government forces in the south all pose a huge challenge for the Afghan people. It also poses a grave and continuing risk to peace and stability, not only in the region but also, as we saw five years ago, spilling out into the world and onto our own continent.

Two days ago a British cabinet minister stated that putting a time limit on our mission, or in this case withdrawing immediately, would send the wrong message to those that would oppose Afghan progress by violent means. I agree, but I also add that it sends the wrong message about Canada to a much wider audience.

If we abandon Afghanistan, we abandon Canadian values that we proudly wear around the world. We abandon our friends and allies and all those who have dedicated themselves to helping the Afghan people realize a better future.

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•(1305)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to 6:30 p.m. on Monday, April 30, 2007.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. I know he supports the government's position very strongly, but I do have to say that when I listen to my constituents and I hear the concerns that people have, there is a growing concern about Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan.

It has now gone on for almost six years. That is actually hard to believe, but it is almost six years and there is no end in sight. It began under the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom. The former government led Canada into the conflict. It is now being escalated by the current government.

I heard the hon. member today quoting other sources saying that it would be a mistake to say when it might end and what the exit strategy is, but I really do think that Canadians have a right to know where the government is going on this mission. Right now we are spending about 10 times as much money on combat and the counter-insurgency as we are on aid and development. That concerns Canadians as well.

I would like to ask the member if he could provide some clarity about what the end game is. What will happen in this mission? We have heard varying responses from the government, whether it is the defence minister or the defence department. It has become very chaotic. It has become very confusing.

If this is a mission in which the member and the government believe, I think they have to disclose to the Canadian public where it is going, what the costs will be, and what the exit strategy is. We have never heard that in the House. Maybe he could respond.

•(1310)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a very important one. During this debate everybody keeps asking what the exit strategy is and what we are going to achieve.

In my speech, I said that the Afghanistan Compact's goals are Canada's goals. This compact was carefully developed jointly by the Afghan government and 60 other nations and international organizations.

The compact sets out details. It sets out benchmarks, timelines for delivery and mutual obligations between now and 2011 that aim to

ensure a greater coherence in efforts between the Afghanistan government and the international community.

Therefore, there is a road map as to where they are all heading. There is a concentrated effort by the international community and it is called the Afghanistan Compact.

Last November I attended the regional economic cooperation conference on Afghanistan in New Delhi. This year, this conference on regional economic development will take place in Pakistan. This is about all the regional players coming out to meet the development objectives of Afghanistan.

So there is a road map, but the question in regard to this motion is this: who will provide the security to achieve these goals? There has to be security. That is what we are doing there.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a point. The NDP members continually say that we should withdraw the troops and not worry about security. Let us deliver our foreign aid, they say, and let us deliver our medical services, et cetera.

What I would like to bring to the attention of the NDP is the Taliban brutality.

For example, in March 2007, authorities found the bullet-riddled body of a kidnapped doctor in Helmand province. Taliban members are suspected of having committed the crime.

On aid workers, the Taliban kidnapped two French aid workers along with two Afghan colleagues in Nimros.

On construction, a civilian vehicle carrying four construction workers in western Farah province was hit by a roadside bomb. As well, six employees of a road-building company were abducted. Four of them were executed.

I have nine pages with me that outline all sorts of Taliban atrocities. I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if he can set our NDP colleagues straight on the need for security in order to effectively deliver aid and services to the Afghan people.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a very important one.

Not only that, but Amnesty International and human rights organizations have recently stated that what the Taliban is doing, because it is killing civilians, is committing war crimes. This is what international human rights NGOs have stated: that members of the Taliban are committing war crimes.

How can we then sit down with these people who are committing war crimes against civilians and talk to them? It is beyond my understanding. It is even beyond my understanding how we are going to provide security when these people do not play by the rules.

Business of Supply

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member talk about the Afghanistan Compact. I am holding it in my hand. I am looking over its objectives very carefully. I am looking at the security aspects. It talks about having security provided and the Afghan national army, the Afghan national border police, et cetera. It also looks at the other goals such as social goals, development goals, educational goals and agricultural goals. Nowhere do I see in this document, in this compact agreement, the words that we have criticized, the mission of counter-insurgency as the way to achieve security.

I would really like to know from the hon. member how he can use the Afghanistan Compact as a defence for the counter-insurgency attack mission. That is what we are criticizing. I do not see his logic in criticizing us by using the compact.

• (1315)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. It is not counter-insurgency over there. These are the words those members are using. What is over there is providing security so that the development efforts can carry forward.

Yes, under the compact, Canada's responsibility is to work for the judicial system. Germany is to train police officers. The U.S. is to train the military so they can take over. However, let me repeat that the issue is not counter-insurgency. It is to provide security so that development efforts can continue in Afghanistan.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak about Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. I appreciate the opportunity, but I will certainly not be supporting the motion put forward by the NDP today.

To abandon our commitment and withdraw the Canadian Forces from Afghanistan today would be irresponsible, premature and devastating to the overall mission.

As my colleagues are all aware, our men and women in uniform are part of a dedicated team of 37 nations in the International Security Assistance Force. We are operating with a UN mandate and under the command of NATO.

We are making solid progress through an integrated approach, civilian and military, that relies on the skills and training of Canadians from across government. This is a moral duty. For generations Canadians have unselfishly stepped up to help those in need. This is a profound legacy that, in partnership with our friends and allies, we are continuing today.

Canada is in Afghanistan for reasons that have been explained many times. We are in Afghanistan because our national interest is threatened. We are in Afghanistan because our allies need our help. We are in Afghanistan because Afghans, people who have suffered from too many years of conflict and neglect, have asked for and need our assistance.

Before we contemplate breaking our international commitments, we need to understand what we would be leaving behind. Afghanistan has not seen real stability for more than a generation. Basic infrastructure and public services such as safe water, access to medical care and schools simply do not exist in much of Afghanistan, but the Afghan people remain resilient and committed to building a better future.

Sadly, as Canadians we are all too aware that a minority of Afghans do not want our help, fanatic insurgents working to undo the good that Canada, the international community and hard-working Afghans have struggled so hard to achieve.

The Taliban extremists, who repressively controlled the country before, have not stopped scheming and working to do so again. They are waiting for us to abandon our commitment. They are dedicated to terrorizing innocent Afghans. They do not hesitate to brutally and publicly execute those who stand against them.

They are willing to adopt any means, be it improvised explosive devices or suicide bombers, to endanger our troops and erase the good progress that Afghans have seen. They focus on undermining the efforts and credibility of the Afghan government and the international community.

This is our enemy.

This is why the Canadian Forces remain a vital part of the Afghan mission. Canadians are helping Afghans and their elected government make headway against a deceitful adversary.

We are joined in our efforts by our friends and allies. Our allies and partners have come to count on the Canadian Forces. Their considerable expertise, skills and training, along with some of the best equipment available, rank the Canadian Forces among the most capable in the world.

As the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence, I had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan at the end of January and we were told repeatedly by our friends, allies and Afghans themselves how the contribution of our Canadian Forces is making a tremendous difference in that country. The optimism that exists over there now is in large part due to our Canadian Forces.

Our troops are sharing their training and knowledge with their Afghan counterparts, building independent Afghan capacity. Afghans are eager to take responsibility for their own security and they are dedicated to building a safe and stable future.

The Canadian Forces, their international partners and the Afghan national security forces are working jointly to bring security to southern Afghanistan. No matter how much some try to deny it, it is only through security that progress and development can continue.

The positive outlook among Afghans, the focus on a more promising future, is impossible to dismiss. When I was in Afghanistan, I heard it from the Afghan people and I saw it in their eyes.

This mission is truly guided by Afghan hands. Afghans are creating development according to Afghan culture and needs. That is why Canadians and local Afghan elders come together in regular shuras or meetings. It is during these shuras that the Afghans share their priorities.

We received a briefing while we were in Afghanistan from Warrant Officer Henley, who takes part in the shura meetings. It was a great briefing on what he is doing. He is doing a tremendous job.

Business of Supply

These priorities stem from the Afghanistan Compact. This five year pact between Afghanistan and its 60 international partners was signed in January 2006. The compact lays out very specific benchmarks that address Afghan security, governance and development needs and set specific timelines for their completion. By signing it, the international community, including Canada, has pledged to provide the Afghanistan government the necessary resources and support.

• (1320)

As the Minister of National Defence stated yesterday before the foreign affairs committee, progress in achieving the compact's benchmarks is being made on many fronts. Some of the progress he cited are the following.

The Afghan national army, which Canada is helping to train and professionalize, is making great strides and reaching the strength of 70,000 troops required by the compact. Villages in Kandahar province are now serviced by some 150 kilometres of new roads, including four bridges, and 50 kilometres of power lines, with 10 power transformers and 42 power generators all built with Canadian help. More than 1,000 new wells, 8,000 hand pumps, four large water reservoirs and kilometres of new water supply have been built in Kandahar province with Canadian support.

The continuation of this progress is reliant upon our ability to maintain the support we promised, and of course, is contingent upon establishing security and stability in southern Afghanistan. Development and reconstruction cannot happen without security. That is why Canada's approach to the Afghanistan mission involves diplomats, military and police forces, and development and correctional officers. All are playing essential roles in the Afghanistan transition.

The Canadian Forces, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Correctional Service Canada and others have formed what the Minister of National Defence rightly calls a true team Canada. They are addressing the challenges they face with an integrated approach and are bringing their respective strengths to bear.

Our embassy officials are providing advice on regular issues to the Afghanistan government and international representatives. In addition to this, Canada supports the Afghan government by providing a 50 member strategic advisory team in Kabul. This team, comprised of military and civilian officials from DND and CIDA, provides planning support to Afghan government ministries in an effort to meet the goals of the Afghan national development strategy.

Canada, having pledged approximately \$1 billion to Afghan development reconstruction projects, also remains among the top aid donors to Afghanistan. In February our government announced a further \$200 million in funding to be used this year and next.

It is understandable that Canadians, in a hurry to see progress, want concrete, easily evaluated proof of progress, new hospitals, clinics, full classrooms and clean water gushing from wells, but we must be patient. Real progress, the underlying proof of development, is difficult to quantify in a country decimated by decades of conflict.

My colleagues in the House have been told about the thousands of kilometres of road that now exist in Afghanistan. They have heard

the news reports about the Canadian Forces' determination since last fall to complete the construction of Route Summit, a two lane paved road that connects the Panjwayi district with Highway One.

Route Summit is only about four kilometres long, but it will make an enormous difference in the lives of Afghans. This short stretch of road will allow people to get to market to buy and sell produce. It will improve security by providing quicker access to problem areas for the Afghan national security force. This road will begin to reunite a nation by allowing people to visit friends and family across Afghanistan. Most important, Route Summit exemplifies the Afghan government's capacity to provide for its population.

Canadians can be very proud of all that has been accomplished because of Route Summit. Local construction crews worked with Canadian combat engineers to build the road while our soldiers protected it. This is just one example of many where the Canadian Forces have made a difference in Afghanistan. One soldier told us that this stretch of road was captured with Canadian blood and it is now being paid for with Canadian dollars.

It is because of our security efforts that we are seeing life blossom in places that had previously seemed deserted. Activity is returning to villages, and communities are buzzing, moving toward prosperity. Prosperity means that children can survive past their fifth birthday. They can go to school and they can help contribute to a better future for Afghanistan.

We need a patient eye in examining Afghan progress. I turn to our critics, those who believe that Canada should abandon Afghanistan, and I ask them to look at the progress that has been achieved. Yes, I know it is different from what we expect here in Canada, but this is Afghan progress. After years of war and poverty, Afghans are defying all opposition and choosing to move in a new direction, choosing freedom and democracy.

Canada has had a significant role in changing Afghan expectations for the future. We have worked to create hope where there had been only despair. Canada has taken up its rightful place in the world. We are making a difference, but I cannot support the motion before the House today.

• (1325)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the member agrees with me or not, but in looking at today's motion put forward by the NDP, I found it slightly misleading in the sense that the motion in three locations refers to counter-insurgency as the mission. That is not my understanding of the mission. Would the member care to comment? I am suggesting that perhaps Canada's mission might be much more than just counter-insurgency.

Business of Supply

Also, it is my sense that if the House were to adopt this motion put forward by the NDP, we would essentially be renegeing on or breaching a commitment made by the Government of Canada to our NATO allies and to Afghanistan, which commitment had subsequently been reaffirmed, I suppose informally ratified by this House. Would the member not agree?

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. We are part of an international security force. Thirty-seven countries have come together to bring security to that part of the world so that we can rebuild it and re-establish democracy and the rule of law. That is what we are doing. It is not counter-insurgency. It is establishing security within a country.

A lot has been said about the amount of money that has been spent on security in comparison to reconstruction. In my mind we have to spend what we need to spend to create the security. Then we will be able to spend the kind of dollars that are needed on reconstruction.

Canada's commitment to Afghanistan over the next number of years is among the highest in the world, \$1 billion to help the country re-establish itself, plus \$200 million more to be spent over the next couple of years.

I want to mention one other thing. Last Friday in my hometown of Lethbridge there was a special event to raise funds for the Wounded Warriors Fund. Canadian entertainer Julian Austin was there. There were 500 to 600 people who showed up. Some \$15,000 was raised in a very short order to help soldiers who are coming home. There is support across this country for what our soldiers are doing. To me that exemplifies that kind of support.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments and his contributions to the committee that he chairs.

I want to ask him a question which really goes back to when his party was in opposition. I recall over a year ago that the NDP asked the same questions that his party asked while in opposition. One of those questions is really critical to where we are right now in the mission. The question is, what does success look like?

I say that because people are confused. I say that sincerely because we hear time and time again that Canadians are in Afghanistan on something that seems to be evolving and sometimes revolving. I want to know from the member, what does success look like? If we are not able to establish an exit strategy and date, we would need to know what success looks like.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, in my mind, success is millions of children going to school, Afghan women by the thousands starting their own businesses and taking advantage of micro-financing.

There was an interesting comment that 99% of the funds that are loaned out through micro-financing are repaid. When the women were asked why it is only 99%, they said that the other 1% was the money the men borrowed. The women consider themselves to be very successful entrepreneurs. That is interesting.

Success is democracy. Success is the rule of law. Success is bringing hope to villages that had no hope. Success is looking into the eyes of Afghans and seeing optimism. Success is seeing girls out on the street. Success is being able to laugh without it being against the law, to be able to go out and play in the streets with a simple toy,

which was not allowed under the Taliban. These are all measures of success. The success that our troops are creating on the ground is converting to this success when we can reconstruct that country.

• (1330)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was kind of disgusted the other day when I heard the Liberals insist that we cut and run from Afghanistan, but today I have been even more disturbed by the fantasy the NDP members seem to have that there can be safety in Afghanistan without security.

I want to mention a few incidents that have taken place in Afghanistan and I would like the member's thoughts on them. I am going to try to put a human face on what is going on in Afghanistan.

On March 1 a roadside bomb targeted a passing police van in Farah province in western Afghanistan and reportedly left three civilians dead and 48 wounded. Of those 48, 10 were children. That same day, authorities found the bullet riddled body of a kidnapped doctor in Helmand province. The Taliban are suspected of having killed the doctor. Two weeks later a suicide bomber struck near a police convoy in the city of Khost, killing four and wounding 35, most of them shopkeepers and pedestrians.

NDP members tell us that we can have success without security in Afghanistan. I would be interested in the member's response to that.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, the tactics used by the Taliban are to indiscriminately kill. They do not care who they kill. Their idea is to terrorize the whole country, whether people are soldiers or civilians. That is what we are seeing.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Western Arctic.

I want to begin my comments on a personal note. My father was a World War II veteran. Both of my grandfathers fought in World War II; one was decorated for bravery in the field. In fact, he was gassed during World War I, and he would not be embarrassed at all. I am hearing some catcalls from the other side. And in fact I have been in harm's way, not with the military but in a conflict zone.

I say that because I have been very discouraged during this debate when we have heard members of this House question the loyalty of members when they stand to actually pose questions because that is what our job is.

If we look at the importance of what we do here, it is exactly what we are doing here, the essence of democracy and freedom that we hear so often as the clarion call from other members. Yet, strangely, paradoxically enough, they say that we should not be debating this issue, that we give some sort of strange aid to the enemy by even discussing it. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

When we take a look at this motion and we take a look at this mission, we need to establish what this motion is about and what it is not about.

Business of Supply

It is about being responsible actors on the world stage. When we take a look at a mission that is not working, in terms of its counter-insurgency aims, in terms of the methods that are being used, it is responsible to stop, pause and tell our NATO partners it is time for us to withdraw responsibly. That is what is in the motion. We believe that real security will not be achieved if we continue down this path that we have continued on in the last couple of years in the south of Afghanistan in Kandahar.

The evidence is mounting. It is not just with the lack of understanding and clarity in terms of turning over prisoners. We have seen in this House the confusion of the government as to how to deal with that. But it is also evidenced on the ground in Afghanistan. What we see are disparities continuing to increase. We see that in places that are more secure, like Kabul, they had electricity on a regular basis. Now electricity is failing there. Yet, we see an increase in the number of people who are benefiting from some of the money that is being poured into the area.

What we need to do is to ensure that everything we do, that all the action our government takes, is going to benefit the people of Afghanistan. To date, we have seen a focus on spending our money, putting our resources into a fighting mission, and not into a mission that will bring lasting peace.

We just have to look at what is happening in the area of conflict in Kandahar to see that not only are men and women in our forces sadly losing their lives, but we also see increased conflict within the region. We see increased deployment of terrorists, for sure, but what are these motivations? What are the motivating factors and what is the success in defeating them? What seems to be clear is that the counter-insurgency tactics we have used have not been working.

We know that other members of NATO have used other tactics. If we look at the success of the Dutch, for instance, who had a full debate before they deployed troops, they had clear mandates in terms of rules, responsibilities, and the handing over of prisoners. If we look at their rules of engagement, they are entirely different from ours. The reason is pretty clear. It goes back to how we got here.

● (1335)

I actually want to turn my attention now to the previous government. I listened earlier to members of the Liberal Party talk about only having a six hour notice for the debate and vote last spring on extending the mission. However, it is really important to recall how we got here.

The Liberal Party, when it was government, gave our military just over 45 minutes notice that we were committing our troops to this kind of mission. That is irresponsible because that was against the advice of the military at the time.

It is also important to know that before the horrific events of 9/11 the military had been studying conflict, the worst case scenario of where our troops could be deployed. Guess what? The region that was identified is exactly the region we are in.

The military had that knowledge. It had that advice and provided it to the then Liberal government. It is well known now the reason the Liberal government at the time provided our commitment to the United States was simply because of a quid pro quo. The quid pro

quo was because we were not going to commit troops to Iraq. There is no dispute about that. That is known.

However, it should be something we remind ourselves of because we have to understand where we are at now and how we got here.

Further to that, after we had committed against the advice of the military to send the deployment that we committed to which was over 2,000 troops, we then found ourselves way behind. Other NATO countries had committed to missions in Afghanistan. Because of our lackadaisical planning commitment and understanding of what we were getting into, we ended up in Kandahar.

It was not because of planning but simply because of a lack of understanding. That is how we got here. The Liberal Party knows that. Canadians know that.

What we saw this week was the Liberal Party trying to reform itself, re-establish itself, and rewrite history, as my colleague says, and no one is buying it. We need to be clear about what we are doing. The NDP is being clear about what needs to be done and that is to give notice to our NATO partners that we will be withdrawing from the south, that we will redeploy our resources in a different manner to have better outcomes.

Quite simply, what we are going there is not working. Canadians understand that. The government needs to understand that. That in no way should challenge anyone's support of our troops.

In fact, I would submit, the only thing that we have going for us right now is the reputation of the men and women who are actually in Afghanistan. They are the ones who are making us credible. Sadly, it is not our government. Sadly, it was not the Liberal Party before and it was not the Liberal Party, when 22 of their members last year voted with the government to extend the mission.

For those who would say this week that somehow the NDP should have joined with the Liberals on their motion, it is not good enough because the Liberals a year ago had the opportunity to tell us what their position was. The fact of the matter is they do not have a position. They did not last year, they do not now, and that is something Canadians need to know.

Finally, I want to turn my attention to what can be done.

What can be done is to push for what many have already done and that is to have what many people are calling a comprehensive peace plan. That needs to be discussed now. Everyone who has fought in a war knows at some point the war ends. We have to turn our attention to that.

I will end my speech with the following. It was this party in opposition that called on the then Liberal government to tell us what success would look like, what the exit strategy was, and what the objectives were. None of those questions have been answered. We needed to know the answers a year ago. The questions have not been answered now. That is why this motion is a responsible one.

● (1340)

It will provide a way for Canadians to support the Afghans and ensure that there is a more secure and prosperous peace for the people of Afghanistan.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I see several members rising. We will try to keep questions and comments as brief as possible, so we can accommodate more people being involved.

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, listening to the member for Ottawa Centre and quite frankly, listening to his arguments, his naiveté on this issue is almost beyond belief.

First of all, the NDP members set themselves up somehow as experts in the military field giving us all a lesson on what our troops should be doing, where they should be, and just how much action they should be in. That is an embarrassment to listen to the member for Ottawa Centre trying to portray himself as some sort of military expert and then the band of Taliban cheerleaders who are encouraging him on, saying that he is doing good stuff.

Do they not understand that if Afghanistan is ever going to be rebuilt after the scourge of the Taliban, after they have destroyed that country during their term in power or dictatorship, that it has to be rebuilt and we cannot simply walk in there with the equipment and men and workers, and rebuild it while the Taliban are shooting at—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I take some offence with his rhetoric. In fact, I would just tell the hon. member that it was this party, before 9/11 happened, who was calling on the UN to pay attention to what was going on in Afghanistan. It was not a deathbed conversion for us to look at what was happening in Afghanistan with the Taliban.

I do not need lessons from him about critiques on the Taliban. We were saying that long ago. In fact, if members look at *Hansard*, we were the only party which was talking about it before 9/11. So with all due respect, I do not need lessons on history from him.

The fact is that it is not working. What I need to know from the government is what is wrong with the government looking for other solutions to make sure that the south of Afghanistan is going to be rebuilt and see peace and prosperity because right now—

• (1345)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member for York South—Weston.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accepting the NDP at face value that it stands for the same values we do, human rights and all of the objectives that we have with respect to Afghanistan, if it could be illustrated that over the next two years that the transfer of authority to the Afghan military, which is being trained and deployed and appears to want to defend the judiciary, defend the educational system, and defend against those who are blowing up innocent women and children, if it could be illustrated that that was actually happening, would the NDP withdraw that motion?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of premises there that I have trouble accepting and there are a lot of what-ifs. What we need to do is look at the present situation. Security is getting worse, not better.

It is incredibly important that as parliamentarians we look at what is working and what is not. What is working are other methods that are being used right now in Afghanistan. What is not working is this counter-insurgency and that is the problem we have in the NDP. We must withdraw from what we are doing presently, so we can change and do and follow those experiences and practices that are working in Afghanistan.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the hon. member to say that no progress is being made in Afghanistan absolutely flies in the face of reality. I have been there. I have seen it with my own eyes. Every briefing we get from General Howard of the military talks about progress, talks about the positive things that are happening.

I will point out to the hon. member that one of the 37 allies there is Croatia. It was not long ago that Croatia was a failed state and we were bailing it out.

Maybe if we get this right, with or without its help, maybe Afghanistan will be a part of a coalition helping to bail somebody else out. Would the member like to see that or not? Would he like to see Afghanistan stay a failed state?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I did not say everything in Afghanistan was a failure. I said what we are doing there is not working. Maybe he needs to turn up the volume on his earpiece.

The fact is by following this mission, we are doing more harm than good in the balance of it. If we have more balance on the development and protection and security side than we do on the counter-insurgency, we might be able to effect change in the way he has submitted we should do.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the motion of the New Democratic Party today.

In listening to the comments by members of other parties, particularly the Liberal members, it seems to me that many members in the House do not get the fact that we have headed down the wrong path with this mission in southern Afghanistan.

It is clear as well that the Liberals have flip-flopped on a very significant issue for Canadians. If they were so concerned about our young men and women in uniform, then last year when we had a significant and important moment in the House of Commons, the vote on the extension of the mission, their full caucus would have shown up to provide the needed support. However, that did not happen and here we are again today having this discussion.

Polls show that the majority of Canadians across the country are unsatisfied with the direction we are taking in Afghanistan. The situation is not improving with Canadians. Canadians are saying, in ever increasing numbers, that it is not working.

I showed up for the vote last year. As a new MP, I thought the vote was a very important event in my understanding of Parliament and the importance of what we were doing. I voted against extending the mission in south Afghanistan, the counter-insurgency efforts we were taking, and I am more certain today that I made the right choice.

Business of Supply

I have spent time reading about it. I have gone to forums. I have discussed this with people. I have listened to the debates. I have listened to Canadians. I made the right choice last spring, the right choice for Afghanistan, the right choice for Canada and the right choice for the world. The counter-insurgency effort in south Afghanistan is bad for Afghanistan, it is bad for Canada and it is bad for the world.

When we first went into Afghanistan, it was at a time when the western world was reacting to the immense events of 9/11. We were hunting down Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda. We turned our backs on the Taliban who were in Washington, negotiating scant days before the invasion. We went in not to take sides in a war, but to clear up an issue within the country.

Today, young Canadian men and women are dying and being maimed because we have taken a side in the war, a war our military and military experts around the world have said is unwinnable. Like every insurgency that is badly handled, for every civilian we kill and every home we blow up, we make the Taliban stronger. Every time we act aggressively in south Afghanistan we create more enemies than friends.

By focusing mainly on combat operations, we are making the work of those, who we all support in the House, more difficult, those who want to better the lives of Afghan people. By taking a war fighting approach, we make all westerners targets.

By pursuing aggressive counter-insurgency, we turn ourselves into the enemy in many people's minds, people to whom we could be reaching out. They are not all Taliban. They are Pashtun farmers. We were told last summer, in the efforts made in the province, that many of the combatants were not Taliban. They were Pashtun farmers who were rising up because of the unfair nature of the police actions taking place in their province.

Instead of uselessly trying to defeat the Taliban on the battlefield, we should be working to show them that we can provide a better way for them and their families. Rather than offering them death or creating a criminal state as the only way people can survive, let us offer life through peacemaking efforts, like reconstruction and finding economic opportunities for the Afghan nation to prosper.

• (1350)

I want to be clear. After nearly 30 years of war, continued fighting is the worst thing that can happen in Afghanistan. For this reason alone, a mission based on combat operations is bad for Afghanistan.

What about for Canada? Since the Korean war, our position in this world has been traditionally that of diplomat and peacemaker. This mission has completely changed that tradition.

How will we regain our international credibility as diplomats and peacemakers when we take on this type of military adventure? How will my grandchildren wear the Canadian flag proudly while travelling around this world, safe under that umbrella, when we behave in this fashion in other countries, where we bomb villages, where we are indiscriminate in our attacks on the enemy?

This mission is bad for Canada. Every Canadian who is killed or wounded in Afghanistan represents a lost opportunity to make our country better. We have fine men and women in Afghanistan who

totally provide us with a great sense of reality toward our armed forces. However, the problem for the New Democratic Party is the mission they have been asked to undertake. NDP members want to build a better Canada. We cannot do that by sending young people off to die in an unwinnable war.

This mission is bad for the world. A well known religious leader said these words more than 2,000 years ago, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God".

War is the greatest waste of resources created by humans. We need leaders who reject war and violence as the key to solving problems. Canada could be a leader, but we cannot be a leader if we believe the main way we can continue in Afghanistan is through counter-insurgency, aggressively pursuing the enemy throughout their villages and farms. We should be showing the world what can be accomplished through non-violent means. We must work toward building trust in Afghanistan. This mission has Canadians destroying that trust.

Because this mission is bad for Afghanistan, because it is bad for Canada and because it is bad for the world, we need to stop and focus our efforts on assisting the people of Afghanistan in a real sense, in a much larger way through diplomacy, reconstruction and redevelopment.

• (1355)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been completely inconsistent on our mission in Afghanistan, and I will give the House two examples.

First, last September and throughout the fall, the leader of the New Democratic Party called for the complete withdrawal of all our troops from Afghanistan. Now the NDP is only calling for the withdrawal of those troops from southern Afghanistan. That is a change in position.

Second, only earlier this week the NDP voted against the Liberal motion calling for the withdrawal of our troops from southern Afghanistan. Today, it is proposing a motion calling for the withdrawal of our troops from southern Afghanistan.

The NDP has completely inconsistent positions on this issue. Would the member for Western Arctic clarify this very confusing situation for me?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I really hope that in our efforts in this debate we can clarify many of the issues for Canadians.

We cannot afford confusion on an issue about the deployment of our troops in Afghanistan. The majority of the troops in Afghanistan are in southern Afghanistan. They are involved in counter-insurgency efforts. Those are the things that we point to as the main failings in the mission. In order to change, we will have to pull back.

Statements by Members

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand the member's logic. Earlier this week he had an opportunity to vote in the House on a motion that would have given certainty to our women and men serving in Afghanistan. It would have given certainty to our partners that we would honour our commitment until February 2009. It would have given certainty to our partners in NATO that it would have to replace us in the combat role in this region at that time. However, we would continue to be available for development and for other missions within Afghanistan to help stabilize that country and to help bring it forward.

The member favours moving out right away without giving that certainty, yet he failed to support the motion this week to give certainty to our troops that they would not serve more than one rotation. Instead, a motion has been presented before the House that he knows has no chance of passing, leaving our troops in absolute uncertainty.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, for any armed forces in this world engaged in active combat, the proposition that one will be there for two years, regardless of outcome, and then be removed is patently absurd as well.

Our position to move the troops out immediately is pretty straightforward. This will happen if the motion is supported. The Conservatives have taken the tack that they will wait to find out what happens with the mission and how successful it is before they decide on extensions. We have three distinct positions in the House of Commons. In letting the troops know what we think, our position is pretty clear.

The member's suggestion that these troops should be in an active war zone that they know they will leave, regardless of outcome, in two years is patently unfair.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout the prairies, producers have asked that the government act in order to provide more choices and bankable investment options for the production of biofuels. Canada's new government has listened to farmers and, more important, we have acted on their behalf.

Our government has extended our commitment to farmers by announcing the eco-agriculture biofuels capital initiative this past Monday. This \$200 million initiative will assist agriculture producers to construct and expand biofuel production facilities. Under this new initiative, production of renewable fuels could increase by 1.5 billion litres.

This announcement builds on our \$1.5 billion commitment to provide operating incentives to producers of renewable fuels. Producers wanted it and we delivered it.

After 13 years of Liberal neglect and ineffective programs, our government is delivering to farmers real opportunity. We have taken

enormous steps to ensure these programs are delivered in the best interests of our hard-working farmers. That is getting the job done.

* * *

• (1400)

JUSTICE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' crime policies are about scoring political headlines rather than making our streets safer. Victims of crime do not care about politics or headlines. They just want to know that criminals will be stopped, caught and punished.

A new Liberal government would continue to pursue tough effective strategies to fight crime and make our communities safer.

We are putting forward a comprehensive crime strategy that is lacking by the minority Conservative government. We are committed to appointing more judges, putting more police officers on the street and more prosecutors in the courts, but also protecting the most vulnerable, including children and seniors, and giving our youth more opportunities to succeed.

A crime prevention strategy involves more than imprisonment. The Liberal government took a proactive role by providing communities with the tools, the knowledge and the support they need to deal with the root causes of crime at the local level.

While I agree with tough punishments for offenders, we must get to the source of the problem to build a strong country.

* * *

[Translation]

JOSÉPHINE DOMENICA SCIASCIA-SORGENTE

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to a young cadet, 16-year-old Sergeant Joséphine Domenica Sciascia-Sorgente, who used the Heimlich manoeuvre to save her grandmother from certain death.

Sergeant Sorgente is a cadet with 2729 Terrebonne Cadet Corps. While she was visiting her grandmother, the older woman choked. The young woman stepped in and performed the Heimlich manoeuvre, which is the only appropriate response in such cases.

In so doing, Cadet Sorgente proved that she has good judgment and that she deserves the admiration of her friends and teammates in 2729 Cadet Corps.

I want to congratulate Sergeant Sorgente on her bravery and tell her that I am very proud to represent her, her family and her cadet corps in the House of Commons.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this Saturday, April 28, communities across Canada will be marking the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job and those who have become ill because of workplace problems.

Statements by Members

The National Day of Mourning is not only a time of reflection and remembrance, it is also a day to rededicate ourselves to the goal of keeping our workers safe on their jobs.

Every day, three Canadians die on the job and each year another one million are injured. Such statistics are clearly unacceptable but equally staggering is the fact that one in seven young workers is injured on the job. These are our sons, daughters, brothers and sisters.

Canadian workers are losing their lives because workplace safety is thrown out the window, down the shaft or derailed in the interests of the bottom line. We see it again and again. When a worker is killed, it is because he or she has been pressured to do unsafe work.

Corporate responsibility is crucial to improving safety for working Canadians. Government plays a key role in legislating and enforcing safe work practices and strict rules for workplace safety.

I will close by echoing the labour movements' most appropriate motto for this day—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

* * *

KIDS WITH CANCER

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, five young heroes battling cancer lived their dreams and became pilots and chefs for a day.

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology Kids with Cancer event allowed these brave youngsters to soar above Edmonton with instructors from the NAIT aviation school and the Edmonton Flying Club and also take a spatula spin with some of Edmonton's new culinary masters at NAIT's chef program.

Putting on my old flight suit and flying helmet for these brave kids was an honour and a privilege. I had the thrill of strapping on a Cessna 172 with a new 17 year old flying buddy named Eduardo Rodrigues. Eduardo was a natural and I felt safe throughout the flight.

Despite our medical advances, cancer still destroys lives and affects millions of others. Every day, brave kids, like Eduardo Rodrigues, Teran Gollan-Boyko, Juan Duque, Nevada Green, Matthew Bryan and their families, climb above their problems and fight to live and live well.

Their battle inspires me and every Canadian who has been affected by cancer. I salute these young heroes who slipped the surly bonds of Earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings, even if just for an hour. I salute them and all Canadians battling cancer.

* * *

• (1405)

PASSPORT CANADA

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, almost a year ago I called upon the government to address the imminent passport problems. The Minister of Foreign Affairs assured us that steps were being taken and that the level of service would be maintained.

It is now painfully obvious that the Conservatives' steps failed miserably. Day long queues now stretch around passport offices and it takes over three months to process an application. Even Passport Canada's help line is overburdened with 124,000 additional calls per week.

Canadians are frustrated and so am I. I receive countless calls for help from constituents forced to cancel business trips, family vacations and pay thousands of dollars in re-booking penalties because of the Conservatives' incompetence.

The minister says that we should be patient. I say that he has mismanaged this file, failed Canadians and he should resign.

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Fabian Manning (Avalon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, the professional theatre company, Rising Tide Theatre, from Newfoundland and Labrador, presented its play *No Man's Land* at the Canadian War Museum.

Written by well-known author, Kevin Major, and directed by Donna Butt, artistic director of Rising Tide Theatre, *No Man's Land* demonstrates Newfoundland and Labrador's remembrance of July 1, 1916, the day the best and the brightest of a generation were virtually wiped out on the battlefields of France during the Battle of the Somme in World War I.

With three more performances to take place over the next few days here in Ottawa, I encourage everyone, young and old alike, to take the opportunity to go see this highly successful and critically acclaimed play.

I want to pass on my congratulations to Rising Tide Theatre. *No Man's Land* is not only an amazing, touching, enlightening and heartfelt production, but its existence will ensure the immeasurable loss of that day will never be forgotten.

* * *

[*Translation*]

42ND QUEBEC GAMES

Mr. Raymond Gravel (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, March 10 marked the closing of the 42nd Quebec Games in my riding.

Today, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone who helped make this event such a great success.

The legendary hospitality and cooperation of the people in the regional county municipality of L'Assomption showed the thousands of athletes, coaches and chaperones that we know how to host an event.

Dany Bergeron, who headed the organizing committee, made the games memorable for the participants from all over Quebec.

Statements by Members

I want to thank the municipal authorities from Charlemagne, L'Assomption, Repentigny, Saint-Sulpice and the town and parish of L'Épiphanie for their support. I also want to express my appreciation to the many partners and sponsors.

The various agencies involved, the sponsors and the organizing committee can congratulate themselves on a job well done. They showed the participants from all over Quebec a fantastic time at these unforgettable games.

* * *

[English]

STORMONT—DUNDAS—SOUTH GLENGARRY

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, the residents in my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry displayed 15,095 Canadian flags at their residences on July 1, Canada's 139th birthday. They did this to indicate to the rest of Canada and to the whole world that our riding was the most patriotic riding in all of Canada.

I was very proud to stand in my place last September and officially declare the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry the most patriotic riding from sea to sea to sea.

I am proud to rise again today to declare to this House that we in the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry plan to again claim the title of the most patriotic riding in Canada on Canada's 140th birthday. I hereby challenge each and every member of this House and their constituents to compete with us for this most prestigious title.

* * *

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May 7 to May 13 is designated as Children's Mental Health Week in Canada. In my home province of Ontario, one in five children is believed to struggle with some form of common mental illness, such as depression, anxiety disorder or bullying.

The chair of the Senate committee on social affairs, Michael Kirby, has described children's mental health services as the "most neglected piece" of the Canadian health care system.

The average cost of treating children's mental health problems in community based agencies is less than \$2,500 per child.

When children with mental health disorders are not effectively treated, they become more vulnerable and less resilient as they approach adulthood, which may result in adult mental disorders, involvement with the law and homelessness.

I raise this important issue today so that we may do our share in combating the stigma associated with mental illness and all work toward a national strategy to address the needs of our most susceptible youth.

●(1410)

DEFENCE SCIENCE

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I stand to recognize the 60th anniversary of defence science in Canada.

In April 1947, the Defence Research Board was established as a single civilian research body within National Defence. The Defence Research Board evolved to become Defence R&D Canada, the research and development agency of the Department of National Defence.

After 60 years, the work of Defence R&D Canada continues to ensure the safety of our soldiers and the security of our nation.

Canadians directly benefit from the defence science and technology.

Our defence scientists created the "Bombsniffer", used to chemically sniff out hidden explosives. They invented the "Franks Flying Suit", the world's first anti-gravity suit to prevent pilot blackouts. In 1985, Canadian defence scientists were at the forefront of an incredible technology when they were the first to open an Internet gateway in Canada.

Today I am proud to pay tribute to the 60th anniversary of defence science in Canada.

* * *

RCMP PENSION FUND

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recent testimony in the RCMP pension scandal has included contradictory allegations of theft and harassment, whistleblowers being reassigned, and cover-ups on top of cover-ups. The whistleblowers range from staff sergeants to a chief superintendent, all veteran police officers.

A full inquiry would have the power to subpoena witnesses and evidence; this investigator will not. If someone does not want to testify, they do not have to and, if they do appear, they will not be testifying under oath. Witnesses will not even be protected from being sued for slander or charged under the Privacy Act. How can whistleblowers come forward if they are not protected?

In fact, the public accounts committee formally rejected the government's ad hoc investigation. Even the Conservative members on the committee chose to abstain rather than support their minister's plan.

I would say to the Minister of Public Safety today that he should not take this shortcut to failure. He should call for a full inquiry and he should stand up for the RCMP, stand up for due process and stand up for getting to the truth.

*Oral Questions***BILL C-278**

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize and offer congratulations to a friend and colleague, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria. Through his private member's bill, Bill C-278, an act to amend employment insurance sick benefits, he was able to bring attention to an issue that impacts on a significant number of Canadians.

All members of this House have heard the stories of Canadians living normal lives, raising families and contributing to their communities until their world is forever changed by cancer, a heart attack or a stroke.

As these brave individuals summon up the courage and energy to fight for what might be their life, they should not be burdened by the additional stress of not being able to provide for their families. Personal financial devastation should not be a side effect of cancer.

This bill was inspired by my colleague's staff, two of whom have waged their own personal battles with a serious illness, and was supported by all opposition members.

I congratulate my colleague from Sydney—Victoria and I call upon the government to find the heart to allow this bill to go forward.

* * *

[Translation]

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to manufacturers and exporters, copyright infringement costs between \$20 billion and \$30 billion annually in losses. In my riding, Polyform Foam Plastics Inc. holds a patent for an insulating foam, and its innovation has been copied by another company. Obtaining a patent is expensive, but defending it in court costs even more.

Today, in the context of World Intellectual Property Day, I once again call on the Minister of Industry to implement the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. The recommendation aims to eliminate this scourge by amending Canada's Copyright Act. I also call on the minister to put in place the necessary measures to eliminate the proliferation of copyright infringement and pirating.

This government's failure to act is distressing. It is about time the government acted on this, instead of attacking the Bloc Québécois' work.

* * *

• (1415)

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the 10th anniversary of the Canada Foundation for Innovation. In fact, it was on yesterday's date, in 1997, that Parliament passed legislation to create this independent public agency responsible for providing money for research infrastructure, free from all partisan or political interference.

Since that day, the CFI has transformed the research landscape in Canada by investing some \$3.65 billion in more than 5,000 projects

led in 129 institutions across the country. These investments create jobs and draw researchers from around the globe.

In one decade, the achievements of the CFI have aroused unprecedented enthusiasm and optimism in the Canadian research community. On the international stage, Canada is increasingly admired and recognized as a prominent player in the field of sciences.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois no longer knows what to say to justify the presence of the Bloc in Ottawa. Recently he incorrectly stated that the Conservative members from Quebec were not defending their province's environmental interests. The criticism from the leader of the Bloc is even more surprising and contradictory given that in just 14 months, the Conservative government has given \$349.9 million to Quebec to help it meet the goals of its 2006-12 climate change plan.

With this \$349.9 million, provided as part of the Canada ecotrust program, Quebec will now be able to meet its Kyoto objectives, which was recently confirmed by Quebec's new environment minister. This is \$22 million more than the Bloc was asking for, and \$350 million more than what the Bloc could ever get for Quebec.

We, the 10 Conservatives from Quebec, say what we do and do what we say.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in a parliamentary committee, less than one hour after question period, the Minister of National Defence proclaimed that he had made an agreement giving our military access to Afghan detainees.

Later, he was a little more forthcoming in an elevator, and even later still in a press release.

Was the Prime Minister aware of this agreement before his Minister of National Defence announced it in such an impromptu and confused manner, and is this a verbal or written agreement?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have said several times this week that the Leader of the Opposition should get his facts straight before speaking.

Canadian government officials consulted their counterparts in the Afghan government. The latter did not block access to prisons, as claimed by the Leader of the Opposition. That is a false and irresponsible allegation. He should apologize to the Canadian military.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is even more confusing than ever. I would laugh if it were not that the lives of human beings are at stake.

The Minister of National Defence said that “our military can have access to our detainees”, but the Chief of the Defence Staff, not aware of the so-called agreement, said, “That’s not our area of expertise”. He said, “It wouldn’t be soldiers” who would monitor the detainee situation.

Who is right? The minister or the general? And if there is an agreement, why will the Prime Minister not show it to Canadians right now?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that he have the facts before making allegations against the Canadian military.

The truth of the matter is that we have consulted with the government of Afghanistan over the past several days. We have found no evidence there is any access blocked to the prisons. In fact, not only are Afghan authorities agreeing to access to the prisons, they actually agree that they will formalize that agreement so there is no potential misunderstanding.

These allegations were made recklessly. They were made without information. The Leader of the Opposition should apologize to the Canadian military.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1420)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Chief of the Defence Staff—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition has the floor. We have to be able to hear the next question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the Chief of the Defence Staff was not aware of the deal. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was not aware of the deal. When caught off guard, he said, “Having just heard about it myself, do I think it’s a good idea? Sure”.

Now the Prime Minister is saying that we do not need a deal because we always have access to the situation of the detainees. It would be a joke if it were not so serious.

My question for the Prime Minister is this. Does he still have confidence in his Minister of National Defence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who I do not have confidence in is the Leader of the Opposition.

We will conclude a formal agreement so that we never again face these kinds of baseless accusations.

The fact of the matter is this. The real problem is the willingness of the leader of the Liberal Party and his colleagues to believe, to repeat and to exaggerate any charge against the Canadian military as

they fight these fanatics and killers who are called the Taliban. It is a disgrace.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how the Prime Minister believes the allegations are baseless if he has not investigated them at all.

The defence minister said yesterday that they had reached an access agreement with the government in Kandahar province. Then he released a statement saying the arrangement was actually with NDS, the intelligence police accused of torture in the foreign affairs report released last week.

Now we have two conflicting stories, plus an improvised arrangement with an outfit known to practise the torture we are trying to prevent. I know the Prime Minister hates to admit when he is wrong, but this farce has gone on long enough—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this government would take the time to get the facts. Public security has consulted with its counterparts in the Afghan prison system. National defence has done similarly. The Department of Foreign Affairs has been in touch with the Afghan government and other Afghan agencies. I gather today that the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission held a press conference in Kabul to correct the record on some of these matters.

The only person wrong is the deputy leader when he made allegations that we could not get access and nobody could get access to prisons in Afghanistan. That is false, and rather than repeat it, he should withdraw it.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot withdraw the allegation because the issue is whether the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has the capacity to investigate these abuses, and it is plain, in fact, that it does not.

[Translation]

Yesterday, the Prime Minister rose in the House and stated that none of his ministers was responsible for the decision made by officials, first, to lie about the existence of a damning report by Foreign Affairs, and then, to censor the content.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to take responsibility for these misleading statements and this cover-up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the member of the Liberal Party of Canada has come up with are difficulties and allegations.

[English]

I also have to address this. Once again, we have these random allegations about the fact that reports may be covered up or not released or blacked out by ministers. If that member is making an allegation against me or any member of this government that we have interfered in the access to information process, the member should have the guts to make it outside or withdraw it.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker —

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1425)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*English*]

If the hon. President of the Treasury Board and the House leader for the official opposition wish to continue their dialogue, I would invite them to do that outside so we can proceed with question period.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte Marie now has the floor.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. No one here is criticizing the Canadian troops. Those being criticized are the Prime Minister and his ministers, especially the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is our duty to criticize them because they are causing confusion. That is what is happening.

We have ministers who do not read briefs as important as the summary of troop activity in Afghanistan in 2006. Yesterday we were told there was a new verbal agreement.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Is there an agreement or not? If so, can we see it?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government alone is supporting the Canadian Forces. This government alone is giving the Canadian Forces new equipment, contrary to the wishes of the opposition and the Bloc Québécois. This government alone is supporting the mission in Afghanistan when our troops are in danger. This government alone is supporting and defending the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, and it is that Prime Minister who is not answering the questions. It is that Prime Minister who is doing everything to discredit Canadian troops. It is that Prime Minister who is a pale imitation of George Bush.

I say to him that, if there is an agreement, then he should table it. If there is one, then that proves there was not one before and that he was in violation of the Geneva convention. That is what the Minister of National Defence did yesterday. I hope he realizes that.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the separatists are claiming to be the real defenders of the Canadian Forces. After making such a statement, they then accuse our military of breaking the Geneva convention.

[*English*]

The separatists get up and accuse our military of breaking the Geneva convention and the Liberals applaud. Shameful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the Prime Minister. The Bloc Québécois is not accusing Canadian soldiers of violating the Geneva convention. We are accusing the government because of all its confusion. We are accusing the Prime Minister and the other two ministers of misleading the House. They are the ones we are accusing of violating the Geneva convention. We are not accusing anyone else.

The Minister of National Defence acknowledged the agreement with the Red Cross and looked the chair of the Afghanistan independent commission straight in the eye. Then, yesterday, sometime between three and four in the afternoon, he picked up the phone, called over there and, presto, a new deal. This can mean only one thing: previous agreements were worthless. Why are we waiting to ask—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our troops in Afghanistan are doing very difficult work in dangerous conditions. I reject any suggestion that our troops are violating our international agreements. On the contrary, our troops from Quebec—the Van Doos—and from the rest of Canada are Canadian heroes.

• (1430)

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister realize that he is defending the indefensible, that his Minister of National Defence completely discredited himself and that, by defending his discredited minister, he is discrediting himself? Is he aware that with this supposed new verbal agreement, he is admitting that Canada violated the Geneva convention?

Can the Prime Minister not see that there is already plenty of evidence and that he should ask for the Minister of National Defence's resignation today?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the member is making irresponsible allegations. The facts indicate that, contrary to what the Bloc Québécois and the other opposition parties are saying, Afghan authorities have not blocked access to prisons. The only ones discredited by these allegations are the opposition parties and the member.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us just consider what is taking place right here, right now. We are watching policy being made on the fly having to do with international law and Canada's responsibilities in that regard.

Yesterday the Minister of National Defence said there was an agreement. There was no agreement. He misled Canadians, crystal clear, after having said for ages that we did not need one. Now the Prime Minister is saying we do not have one now, we have had access all along and we are going to get an agreement anyway.

Have we used the access? Have we used it? Have we fulfilled our responsibilities, and when is he going to fire—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Public Safety has the floor; however enthusiastic or otherwise members may be, he has been recognized and we will hear him.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, they are always intent on wanting to hear false allegations, but when it comes to hearing the truth, they try to shout it down.

Oral Questions

I can tell the House that for a considerable period of time now, our own Correctional Service Canada has had corrections officers working in Kandahar. As a matter of fact, I talked with one of them two days ago. Fifteen times already she has had access to the prison facility in Kandahar. She has full access. She also made a visit yesterday to the detention facility. Improvements are being made. It is difficult, but it is moving. It is difficult, but improvements are being made.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, why was this information, these so-called facts, not brought up in this House before? What is going on here? Are we seeing fabrication on the fly? Are we seeing serious policy making? Are we seeing responsible government? The fact is, no. We are seeing day by day a patchwork quilt of inventions and fabrications.

Canadians want some responsibility here. When is the Prime Minister going to first of all make the decision to stop transferring detainees? That has to happen. And when is he going to fire his Minister of National Defence who cannot even answer the questions?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I said repeatedly to the leader of the NDP and others in the House this week that the allegations they were making did not accord with the facts as we understood them. I undertook that we would consult over the next few days to see what the facts are. I can tell him that the allegation that there is no access to the Afghan prisons turns out to be completely false, and I understand the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has denied other things today that were reported about it.

The question is why the leader of the NDP does not simply withdraw the allegation rather than continuing to bash the mission and the Canadian military.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everybody is trying to understand the new story of the government. It is not the Red Cross any more; it is not the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan any more; it is us, it is Canada, Canadians monitoring to protect the detainees to be sure that their rights are respected according to the Geneva convention. It is Canadians doing that but it is not soldiers since the general said it is not soldiers. So who is doing it? Is the Prime Minister able to guarantee that these detainees are indeed being treated according to the Geneva convention?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will spell it out for the Leader of the Opposition. For four years, in spite of repeated reports about these kinds of concerns in Afghanistan, the previous Liberal government had no policy on detainees whatsoever. In the dying days of that administration an agreement was signed. We have since improved that agreement and we are working with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission on that agreement.

We have subsequently received additional information and willingness from the Afghan authorities to open any prison to any branch of the Canadian government through a formal agreement. We will pursue such a formal agreement.

I wish the Leader of the Opposition, rather than continuing to justify the accusation, would just withdraw it.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government claims it had no knowledge of detainee abuse and yet we now know that foreign affairs knew, the Afghan government knew, and Correctional Service Canada knew. The defence minister continued his strategy until he panicked and pulled out his so-called new arrangement out of the air yesterday.

Does the minister honestly think Canadians are buying any of this? Why should Canadians trust anything the government tells them about this mission?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of state.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I know sometimes ministers rising in the House are greeted with great enthusiasm, but we have to have some order. The hon. minister of state has the floor.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the simple fact of the matter is that the opposition members have been making false accusations all week. Rather than continue to repeat these false accusations, they should simply apologize.

We confirmed for the opposition that there was no blockage to access to the detainees. We also had conversations with the Afghan authorities who have offered to proceed with a formal agreement. We will have the Department of Foreign Affairs proceed with drafting that formal agreement.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the original Canada-Afghanistan agreement included a prohibition against the transfer of detainees into situations of inhumane treatment and torture. There is evidence including from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission that detainees have in fact been tortured in a culture of impunity.

Is the government continuing to transfer prisoners in violation of international law? Is the government seeking to have the return of detainees transferred in conformity with international law? Why should we trust any unseen agreement with those implicated in the torture itself?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are asking why they put so much trust in false allegations.

We want to be sure that whatever act the prisoners may have committed, they are extended their human rights. In all the visits our Correctional Service officers have done, they have not actually seen the evidence.

There is something the opposition should be aware of. The Taliban are like the al-Qaeda. Taliban members train with them and use the same manual procedures. Members of the Taliban have been told, trained and instructed to lie if asked about being tortured. As a matter of fact, they are told directly to say they were tortured even if they were not. That makes it difficult, but we want all prisoners' rights protected.

Oral Questions

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has said that it takes its responsibilities under international law and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms seriously.

Why then has the government in Federal Court moved to dismiss an action by Amnesty International to determine Canada's obligations under international law and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Why has the government sought to claim that the plaintiffs do not have standing before the court?

The government should not say that it cannot answer the question because the matter is before the courts. Why is the government trying to remove the matter from being judged by the courts?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now that they have been exposed as believing false allegations, they are trying to backtrack.

We are concerned about prisoners' rights everywhere. When British soldiers were captured by a regime that tortured and killed Zahra Kazemi, we heard nothing from the opposition about those prisoners. We hear nothing about the prisoners in Cuba and concern about what happens to them in prisons there.

The Taliban are the most serious killers in the 21st century. All we hear on the Taliban question is the suggestion a little while ago from the Leader of the Opposition to build a Guantanamo north here in Canada and to bring them here. Why? Why do they get that kind of attention?

• (1440)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the government representative responsible for signing treaties, was surprised yesterday to hear that there was a new verbal agreement on the treatment of prisoners. This same minister said yesterday that he had not read the report from his senior officials on the torture carried out in Afghan prisons.

Does the minister think this is a normal state of affairs? Does he plan on finally assuming his responsibilities?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last February, I was very proud when I said goodbye to two of our federal prison system officials who are now in Afghanistan. The official I spoke to two days ago said that he had been to the prison at least 15 times. This is not an easy job, but the officials are present.

We take the rights of prisoners and the human rights of all people very seriously, and we will continue to use this prison system.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that none of Canada's agreements contain the right to access at any time throughout a prisoner's detention. That is what is missing, and that is what I was asking the Minister of National Defence yesterday.

Did he read the agreements? Why did he not ensure access at any time? The 15 times the minister is talking about took place after a request was made for access at any time.

Does the Minister of Foreign Affairs plan on assuming his responsibilities and ensuring that there is a real agreement that upholds the rights of soldiers and prisoners?

[English]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder why opposition members did not read the information that I and others were putting out about corrections officers going to Afghanistan. We put that out a long time ago. They were never interested in that. They never wanted to talk to our corrections officers. They never wanted to heed the very laudable reports that even prisoners gave about how they were treated by Canadian soldiers. But when somebody makes a false allegation with nothing to back it up, those members are so quick to believe it.

We have been putting the information out there about our corrections officers visiting those prisons. Opposition members have never asked one question about that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs cannot guarantee that this verbal agreement his colleague is talking about will turn into a written agreement that he can table here in this House.

Can the minister assure us that this agreement will lead to compliance with the Geneva convention, which Canada has signed, and that he will make sure it applies throughout Afghanistan?

[English]

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes. In fact, to assure there are no such reckless, false accusations going forward, foreign affairs officials will proceed in drafting a formal agreement.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence claims to have reached an agreement recently with the authorities in Kandahar to allow Canadian emissaries to visit Afghan detainees and make sure they are being well treated.

How does the Minister of Foreign Affairs intend to make sure that all the prisons, even the ones outside Kandahar, can be visited, so that Canada does not violate the Geneva convention?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our intent is clear. We are going to continue doing what we have been doing for a long time. Yesterday, federal corrections officials and Foreign Affairs officials were in the Kandahar detention facility, not in the prison itself, and again received an open invitation to visit anytime to make sure no one is being tortured, we hope, in these places.

• (1445)

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the chief of the defence Staff and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were unaware of a new agreement that would give access to prisoners transferred by the Canadian Forces. Now we know why: there was no agreement.

Oral Questions

Now, we are being told that there will be an agreement, but when? When will we have details about this new agreement? What will the government do to make sure these prisoners are being well treated?

[*English*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad that the millions of viewers who are glued to their television sets right now cannot see the panic on the opposition side as those members are backpedalling, changing notes and changing questionnaires because they realize that they have been caught.

They have been caught for leaking false allegations and for not coming to us and asking what the real situation is. Time and again we have confirmed what we have been saying. They have been caught red-handed in believing false allegations about our brave and dedicated troops.

We will continue the process of respecting prisoners' rights and ensuring their rights are respected, regardless of false allegations from the opposition.

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to talk about panic. First it was the Red Cross, then it was the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, then it was some other body and then last night we heard we would have a new agreement. I have heard that Correctional Service Canada will be involved.

Will Correctional Service Canada be the body charged with monitoring full time the conditions of detainees? When will we see this agreement?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is common in debate, when someone raises his or her voice in panic and just fires out a bunch of questions, that the person has lost the issue. That is what we are seeing across the way.

As I have already indicated, Correctional Service Canada has been involved for some period of time. We have let people know that but they have never been interested in asking what our Correctional Service officers are observing there.

A supposed or purported Taliban prisoner, they will believe right away, but dedicated Correctional Service officers who actually are putting their lives on the line even going to Afghanistan and some of those areas, they will not listen to and will not believe. We believe in our dedicated people.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prison officials in Kandahar, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, distinguished Canadian, Louise Arbour, and the government's own highly censored foreign affairs report have all warned that detainees in Afghan prisons are routinely tortured and abused, contrary to the Geneva convention.

In the so-called inspections by Correctional Service Canada, have all the detainees under Canada's responsibility been accounted for per date, yes or no?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only yesterday our Correctional Service people and the foreign affairs individuals who went into the National Directorate of Security facility, which is where detainees are usually held for a month to two months, asked that question and the registry was

shown to them. We do not know for how many years or whether it was always intact but there is a registry of all the names and our officials were allowed to inspect those names.

Medical officers visit that facility once a week. Family members are notified when their relatives are in there.

In terms of that particular facility, yes, they saw the registry yesterday.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the registry is one thing, the people are something else.

The minister cannot say how many detainees Canada is responsible for nor can he say who they are, where they are or what condition they are in.

He has repeatedly given false information, as has the Minister of National Defence who, yesterday, claimed to have some new agreement that we know today is not true.

Will the Prime Minister support our courageous forces in Afghanistan by picking, from any number of his more talented backbenchers, a new defence minister to be a leader that our troops can finally respect?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are serious matters so it is hard not to find it a bit humorous when the member gets up with his first question thinking he has us on the registry and then, when I say that the individuals saw the registry yesterday, he says that the registry is not important.

The individuals also saw the people who were detained. Now he is saying that we are lying and I hope he apologizes for that.

We saw those people. We are concerned about those people. Two of the individuals talked to our officials about their treatment and our officers raised the issue of their being in leg irons. We do not think they should be in leg irons.

* * *

● (1450)

MEMBER FOR OKANAGAN—COQUIHALLA

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, accusations were made by the Liberals that the Minister of Public Safety was involved in the Jim Hart issue. They were calling for an RCMP investigation and the member for Ajax—Pickering even called for the minister to step aside.

Has the minister heard back from the RCMP and, if so, would he report to the House what the answer was?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I received a letter from the RCMP today informing me that it has reviewed the information that it was given by the member for Ajax—Pickering and all the documents. The RCMP's investigation on this matter remains concluded and therefore there is nothing further on this matter.

When we come into this place we hope to leave it with at least our reputation intact. I hope the member for Ajax—Pickering will follow the time honoured tradition now, since we know this will not be a big headline item in the news as the accusations were, and at least stand and apologize.

*Oral Questions***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new sponsorship boondoggle goes right to the minister. Yesterday, when she was scrambling to justify herself, she tried to implicate the member for Windsor West because he was quite rightly doing his job when he wrote to her as minister to ask for ideas about festival funding.

What she did not tell the House is that this past week she personally wrote him and said that she had no idea about any funding sources. At the same time, she was personally trolling Conservative backbenchers for ways to spend \$30 million.

I am asking the minister to do the right thing, to apologize to the House and correct the public record.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we receive a number of requests for festival funding. We recognize that there is a community need there, which is why we announced our intent in our budget to create a program. The criteria has yet to be established, which is why we are asking all MPs for their input.

We want to ensure we are a government that meets community needs, as has been outlined by all members, but we will do it through a transparent and accountable process.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is not a case of another rogue bureaucrat. This is a case of a rogue minister. She has failed the arts sector, the voluntary sector and the museum sector and, by personally involving herself in this boondoggle, she has abused her role as a minister. She has failed to meet any standards of ethical accountability.

This is not the first time she has stepped over the line. She is personally going around asking for ideas and she is personally telling other members of Parliament that she has no funding.

When will the minister do the right thing and finally resign?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government wants to meet the real needs of our communities. This government believes that with full and robust consultations we will establish a program that will meet the real needs of those communities in celebrating their arts and heritage.

I have asked all members of the House to give me their input because we want to ensure we get input and ensure the process is accountable and transparent.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Prime Minister to confirm the new, new, new version of his government.

The Minister of Public Safety said that, in the last weeks and months I guess, it has been Correctional Service Canada that has protected and ensured that every detainee was monitored regarding their rights under the Geneva convention. It has been done. These are not paper records. These are people who have been protected.

After all these weeks of our asking questions of the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, they did not say so because I guess they were not aware of what the security minister was saying.

• (1455)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I committed to the opposition earlier in the week when these allegations were first made that the government would consult with its officials and with its Afghan counterparts and that we would respond with any evidence we received. We are doing that and we have done that today. More is to be learned and I will have further reports for the House.

What is obvious is that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues are making up their QP lineup as they go today.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are only trying to follow the contradicting versions of the government.

The Prime Minister must understand. His security minister not only said, “We have no proof of the allegations”, he also said, “We know that it is false that people have been tortured”. He knows that this is false because they have monitored the situation with Correctional Service Canada. This is his new version.

Does the Prime Minister confirm this new version?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has totally lost it today.

However, I just want to say that I said that we were upset about the false allegations and that how very quick they are to believe a Taliban individual but are not prepared to believe the hard-working, dedicated men and women in our military and in our correctional services.

I want to make it clear. They believe false allegations. We want to ensure prisoners rights are respected. Now they are taking what we have said today and trying to torque it and twist it again into something else. We are there and we are observing. We cannot provide perfect protection, but we—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the most controlling Prime Minister in the history of Canada seems to be losing his grip on the Afghanistan mission and now the same is happening in his own caucus. Here is the latest.

A report last night from Radio-Canada says that his Atlantic colleagues are seeing the light, or perhaps feeling the heat. Now they are considering voting against the budget, the budget that is hammering them and is hammering Atlantic Canada.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to put out the fire in his own caucus?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has tabled a budget today that involves record spending, paying down the debt and decreasing taxes. It sounds like a good Conservative budget to me. It also sounds like it is having awful rough treatment and it wants it to continue.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last thing the Conservatives did was break their promise. That is what the government prides itself on doing.

Recently, even the great Progressive Conservative, John Crosbie, says that he supports Premier Williams and admits that a promise was indeed broken.

This week we have learned the Prime Minister's need to cover up anything that may tarnish his sterling facade.

How will he cover up the fault lines in this budget that is opening up all over this country of Canada?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is wishful thinking on the part of opposition members. They seem to indulge in a lot of that and a lot of false allegations.

The fact is this is a good budget for Canada, a good budget for Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are proud to support it.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 23 the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and the Minister of Public Safety announced the appointment of Steve Sullivan to the position of federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

There is no doubt that Mr. Sullivan is qualified and compassionate. However, the problem lies in the fact that he is a unilingual anglophone, which is unacceptable.

Does the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada agree that it is unacceptable for a person to hold a position as strategic as ombudsman for victims of crime when that person is not functional in French?

• (1500)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Sullivan has promised to improve his French. He has the necessary resources to do so.

[English]

One thing is for sure. This man is an outstanding advocate on behalf of victims in our country. He will give a voice to victims and he will do it in both official languages.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after several attempts, the Minister of Canadian

Heritage still stubbornly refuses to tell us what her government plans to do to implement the conclusions of the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage concerning national status for the Delson-Saint-Constant railway museum.

Through her refusal to meet with the stakeholders from my region, the minister is demonstrating once again the disdain her government has for the people of my region, as well as her indifference to the majority will of this House.

Can the minister simply tell us why her government is hesitating to grant Exporail this status?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fulfilling my duties I am always willing to meet with any organization or representative group.

We have a request that is being analyzed and reviewed by the department. I will meet with the representatives as soon as that analysis has been completed.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader.

Bill C-278, an act to amend employment insurance, deals with Canadians battling illness with no financial support. On two separate occasions in the House, the bill was voted for, not to mention receiving approval of the Standing Committee on Human Resources and Social Development.

Will the government bring forward the necessary royal recommendation in order to allow the bill to be voted on at third reading?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Speaker has ruled. The answer is no.

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HEALTH

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, respiratory diseases affect more than 3.5 million Canadians. According to the World Health Organization, lung disease will be the third leading cause of death in the world by 2020.

The government has delivered by introducing patient wait times guarantees with the provinces and new Canada food guides and we have provided funding for heart disease and cancer.

Could the Minister of Health inform the House how our government is working to improve the respiratory health of Canadians?

Points of Order

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that earlier today Canada's new government contributed over \$1 million in funding and support to develop a national framework on lung health. This represents a coordinated approach for better policy, leadership, research, innovation, education to combat asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis and the like.

Once again, on the same day the opposition issues sound and fury signifying nothing, we are getting the job done.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the leader of the government could advise the House of the agenda he intends to follow for the rest of this week and through next week. In particular, could he tell us when he will bring forward the bill on clean air, namely, Bill C-30, for final consideration in the House?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we will continue debate on an opposition motion.

On Friday, we will resume debate at second reading of Bill C-43, the senate consultations bill. That is the bill to strengthen accountability and democracy by giving Canadians a say on who they want representing them in the Senate.

Next week we will focus on making our streets and communities safer by cracking down on crime. It will actually kick off tonight with the Prime Minister's address to the annual police appreciation night in York region where I live. Getting tough on criminals is the best way parliamentarians can show our appreciation for those brave men and women who put their lives in danger every day while protecting and serving their communities.

Our plan for next week's focus in cracking down on crime will begin with Bill C-48, the bill dealing with the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. There will hopefully be an agreement to pass that bill at all stages.

Following Bill C-48, we will consider Bill C-10. That is the bill to introduce mandatory minimum penalties for gun and violent crimes. Our government will be proposing amendments at report stage to restore the meaningful aspects of the bill to ensure that violent criminals actually serve time in jail, all of which was gutted by the Liberals in committee.

Bill C-22, the age of protection bill, was reported back from committee and will be considered at report stage and third reading.

Following Bill C-22, we will move on to Bill C-27, the dangerous offenders legislation, which would require criminals who are convicted, for example on three separate occasions of a violent sexual assault, to prove to the court why they would not a danger to the community.

Tuesday, May 1 shall be an allotted day.

If time permits, we will seek to call Bill C-52, the budget implementation bill.

With regard to the question on the environment, our government is taking action on the environment. Later today he can look forward to seeing a cornerstone step in taking action to reduce greenhouse gases with the environment minister's announcement, action that has never been taken by another government and more action than any government in the world is taking.

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS DURING ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it remains to be seen whether the government House leader's final comment with respect to the environment happens to come true, but I do have a separate point of order.

At 2:25 this afternoon during question period, on two separate occasions, in comments that were heard by many people on this side of the House as well as a number of members of the press gallery, the President of the Treasury Board pointed to the opposition benches and said "you and your Taliban buddies", obviously an intention to very harshly and falsely demean the character of members of the opposition. In fact, it could be taken as an accusation of a criminal offence. It therefore does impinge upon the privileges and the good name of members of the House of Commons.

I wonder if the President of the Treasury Board would take the first opportunity to simply remove those intemperate remarks from the record. Surely he must agree, as all Canadians would agree, there is not a person in this country who is a buddy of the Taliban.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the President of the Treasury Board was making reference to the fact that the Liberal opposition has been very quick to accept any allegations of maltreatment that the Taliban prisoners have made in Afghanistan, and it seems to be a cause that is taken up by the Liberal Party. That was his meaning.

I would welcome the opportunity to invite him to expand further on that when he gets a chance to return to the chamber.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is important to note for the record, in support of the member for Wascana, is that if this side stands in support of the Geneva convention, it does so on behalf and for the purpose and benefit of our fighting women and men, who in this conflict or future conflicts could be prisoners of war. We would expect that they be treated in accordance with the Geneva convention. The best way to do that is to—

The Speaker: I think we are getting beyond the point of order here. We will wait and if the President of the Treasury Board has something to say, we will hear from him in due course, as indicated by the government House leader.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for West Nova.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House and represent my constituents of Don Valley East on an issue that is of great concern to every Canadian, namely Canada's participation in the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.

As this is the second major debate on this issue in as many days, it is no wonder why more and more Canadians are expressing interest in the courageous services being provided by men and women of the Canadian armed forces currently serving in Afghanistan.

There is no doubt that all Canadians fully support our armed forces, but lately people across the country are beginning to harbour certain doubts about the Minister of National Defence and the Conservative government's future plans for Afghanistan.

Earlier this week the Liberal caucus introduced a motion in the House, which would have provided Canadians with a definite conclusion to Canada's combat mission as scheduled in February 2009. The motion would have given our NATO allies sufficient time to find a replacement country and still permit Canada to continue its diplomatic and reconstruction efforts throughout Afghanistan.

No one is under the illusion that Afghanistan will become a fully self-sufficient state when our troops are scheduled to depart in February 2009. It will take a concerted effort by the entire international community to a solid foundation upon which Afghanistan can provide the basic needs of its people.

When Canadian Forces first arrived in the country after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, Afghanistan was already a failed state, wracked by over 30 years of civil war and the disastrous occupation by the former Soviet Union. After the anti-communist mujahdeen forced the USSR to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989, the country descended into a series of civil wars and was divided up among warlords.

When the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan in 1996, they did not inherit a country but rather a landlocked region that featured few natural resources and a mountainous terrain that made control of its borders extremely difficult to secure.

Indeed, the diverse population of Afghanistan is a reflection of many of its neighbours and its cultural mosaic of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazaras, Uzbek, Aimaks, Turkmen and many other minorities make it difficult for a population to assume a single national Afghan identity.

So far the road to political reconstruction has been a hard journey. Damaging earthquakes, limited fresh water resources, inadequate supplies of potable water, soil degradation, overgrazing, deforestation, air and water pollution and a crumbling infrastructure have all

Business of Supply

combined to make civil reconstruction a daunting task in the midst of continuous attacks by suicide bombers launched by the Taliban.

That is why the Liberal Party does not support the NDP motion before us. It is an irresponsible motion. To immediately withdraw Canadian combat troops from the area, as the NDP proposes today, would not only send a disturbing message to our NATO allies, it would send a confusing and ambiguous message to the people of Afghanistan.

Canadian armed forces are in Afghanistan for a purpose. I can assure the House that no Liberal government would ever shirk our obligation to NATO. Nor would we break our promise to the Afghan people.

A Liberal government would engage in real diplomatic efforts with our NATO allies to share the burden in southern Afghanistan and press Washington and Islamabad to do more to stop the infiltration of foreign fighters from outside the border.

To win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, perhaps the first major step forward would be to end the chronic water shortage. Poppies, which fuel the illegal heroin trade and fund the Taliban, are one of the few crops in Afghanistan that can survive the arid climate without proper irrigation. With a rebuilt water reservoir and canals, farmers would no longer be forced into the poppy trade by the Taliban and they could begin to branch off into different crops to feed the domestic market and perhaps develop foreign markets.

• (1510)

By February 2009, when Canada is scheduled to end its combat role, our forces will have served for seven straight years, three of those in the most dangerous part in southern Afghanistan.

Canadians are fully aware that success in Afghanistan cannot be achieved by military means alone. Furthermore, the Afghan people should not be led to believe that the battle against the Taliban, the protection of villages, the construction of schools and roads are the responsibility of foreigners. We need to help Afghan people build capacity.

Canada should provide much more training and assistance to the Afghan army, police, and doing more to improve its justice system. We should not be building prisons as the public safety minister recently suggested.

Earlier this week the NDP had an opportunity to join the Liberals and provide Canadians with a clear military mandate for Canadian troops in Afghanistan. They chose instead to side with the Conservatives to continue the military mission for an undeclared period.

Today the NDP has suddenly changed its mind and is now trying to cover its tracks by insisting on an immediate withdrawal. This is not the leadership that our armed forces overseas deserve.

For the good of Canadians and for the good of our armed forces, the Liberals call on the Prime Minister to fulfill our mandate until February 2009 and immediately inform our allies that Canada will end its combat role in Afghanistan on schedule.

Business of Supply

• (1515)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always amazed at how the Liberal Party can twist facts and figures, and completely deny what it has done.

First, she says the Liberal government would work with NATO. The Liberals were the government until 2006. What did it do? Nothing.

Then she says that the mission in Afghanistan is of an undeclared time. The House passed a motion that the mission in Afghanistan is until February 2009 and that was very clear. Yet she wants to say an undeclared time. At the same time, she stands up and talks about the reconstruction of everything, as if Canada is not doing enough.

Perhaps the member can look at the Afghan compact and see what Canada is doing. She mentioned that Canada was building prisons. No, we are training police officers and the Afghan army. We are doing everything that is in the compact, and that was agreed to with the international community and the government of Afghanistan.

Perhaps the hon. member would read the compact and see what has been achieved in Afghanistan, and then make an informed decision on these things.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the first thing that the member should remember is that it is the defence minister of the Conservative government who has been flip-flopping. We made a decision to stay until 2009. The defence minister kept saying it might be 15 years. It would be better if the government would remove an incompetent defence minister from the House.

Second, in terms of the successes that we want from Afghanistan, when a people do not have the ability to feed themselves, if they do not have economic security, then they must have economic security. We need to be able to help them feed themselves and find alternatives, which is what the government has not done.

In fact, the previous Liberal government put in money for diplomacy and development. It is through those developmental efforts that Canada went in with the NGOs to build schools, build infrastructure, but we need to do more to help the Afghan people. We have to ensure that the Afghan people understand that we are there with them to develop sustainability and transfer knowledge. We have to be there in a diplomatic and a development role.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the presentation by the Liberal member and now I think it is fair to say in this corner of the House we are more confused than ever.

The Liberals came out in favour of the actual position. The combat mission in Afghanistan was essentially a Liberal concocted strategy. Then they voted against the extension of the mission though enough Liberals, including the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, voted in favour of the extension of the mission which led to the situation we are in now.

Then the Liberals tried another flip-flop and said essentially they want to extend the mission for two years and then afterwards there may be a withdrawal. Now they finally have in front of them a motion that is very clear and the Liberals are all over the map again.

It is fair to say, for Canadians who have tried to follow and have tried some faith in Liberal policies, it is just another sign that they just do not know where they are going. They just cannot get things done.

Here is a motion that says very clearly that we would begin withdrawing Canadian Forces in a safe and secure manner from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan. It appears that the Liberals, who a couple of days ago were saying that they were not in favour and a few days before that saying they were in favour, are now saying they do not really know, or perhaps they will vote against it, or perhaps they will vote in favour.

I simply have to ask the member this. Does she understand that every time the Liberals come up with a new position, how much that undermines their own credibility with the Canadian public?

• (1520)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is very concerned about the confusion that the NDP is creating by supporting the Conservatives. When the Liberal government sent troops, we sent them to Camp Julian. Our mission was development, defence and diplomacy, and we have stuck to it.

The NDP motion asks for immediate withdrawal which is a very irresponsible motion. The NDP could have voted for the motion that was put before the House a day or so ago which talked about the fact that an exit strategy should be there by February 2009. That would give an opportunity for NATO to find a replacement. The NDP is being irresponsible and it can keep on being irresponsible because it will never be government.

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this motion which I cannot support.

I look at this motion and I remember the debate last year or maybe the year before when NDP members were saying that our troops should not be in Afghanistan but that they should all be in Kandahar. I do not know what they thought they would do in Kandahar. Maybe they thought they would have a marshmallow and a weenie roast. I think the bullets pierce the skin there also. It is just as dangerous.

[*Translation*]

I was part of the government that, in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, had to come to grips with a brand new international situation. The West went through something it had never experienced before: a major terrorist attack at home. A NATO member country, a Canadian partner, was attacked by an organization sponsored by a country. An attack on one NATO member country is an attack on all member countries, and they must respond. That is what Canada did. We made a commitment, along with other NATO partners, to oust the Taliban regime, which had planned the attack with al-Qaeda. We knew that we were not setting out on a quick, three to six month-long international mission. We knew that our soldiers would not be coming home soon.

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As a member of this House and a minister at the time, I knew in my heart that it would be a long mission. We were going into a country in trouble, and if we ousted the regime, we would create a period of total instability, which is what we have now. NATO asked us to play a very demanding role: to go into Kandahar, probably the most difficult region in all Afghanistan. We agreed.

The current Conservative government introduced a motion in this House to increase our involvement and guarantee to NATO member countries that we would remain in Afghanistan until 2009 at least. I voted in favour of that motion, not because I agreed with it, because I was opposed to it in principle. But I maintain that this is a decision by the government. The government has to explain it to Canadians and suffer the consequences. The decision cannot be made in the House of Commons after only three hours of debate and without all the information we need to come to a decision about something like this.

The decision was imposed on me, and I voted in favour of the motion, which supported our men and women serving in Afghanistan or preparing to leave for duty there. The motion also supported the other NATO member countries which, like us, are taking risks.

I believe that it is quite reasonable to tell the other member countries that we are going to put an end to this situation, where we are most at risk. I do not believe that we need to tell NATO right away when we are going to withdraw completely from Afghanistan. Our party proposed a motion saying that we would withdraw from the Kandahar region in February 2009, which would have given the other NATO members plenty of time to find a replacement to take over our role in that region.

That is not what is being asked here. The New Democrats voted against our motion and today they are asking us to say so long to the member states of NATO, to say we are leaving, we are gone. They want us to say the same thing to the Afghans whom we are currently protecting and who, like us, had hopes for a better country. We have to tell them that we are no longer there to protect them, to help with their development, and that they can be massacred by internal factions in Afghanistan that want to go back to the days of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and all that. They want us to leave these people behind. I cannot accept that.

I attended a conference organized by the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre from my riding, at the building across the street, the National Press Club in Ottawa. I listened to soldiers who served over there. Some sergeants said that Canadians had won all the battles in Kandahar—all of them. I also listened to representatives from the Red Cross and the RCMP who told us that if we withdraw, it would be game over. We want there to be to assist in development and bring in diplomacy. The Liberal Party, and everyone else, wants the 3D system. We cannot have development and diplomacy without security, and that is what our troops are there for. This is a difficult role that they are fulfilling wonderfully, and I commend them for that.

However, we must protect them. We have to let them know how much longer they will be there and what their involvement will be. We have to assure these troops, these young men and women, that there will be one rotation, not two or three. They are not going to be

in that region for 10 or 15 years because there is going to be one rotation and they will no longer be there.

● (1525)

[English]

What I should absolutely mention, and what I think is important for Canadians to understand if they are questioning the decision of whether or not we should be in Afghanistan, is what our military stands for, and that is the right to debate the decisions of the government. That is what freedom is.

It is not an absence of support for our troops when Canadians say we should or should not be there, or when they have their discussions or we have them here in the House. When I hear the government say that people who question the role are not supporting the troops, I find that completely idiotic and completely counter-productive. I support the role they are playing. Others may not. They have a right to that opinion. That is democracy.

The other question that I think is very important to raise at this time is the question that we have been debating on the Geneva convention. If we members of the opposition in this House are so strong in support of the Geneva convention and making sure that we are not contravening it by turning our prisoners of war over to people who may be contravening it, it is in defence of our fighting women and fighting men.

Either in this conflict or future conflicts 50 years down the line, our fighting women and fighting men may be prisoners of war. Their protection of not being abused and tortured is that all countries live with the agreement of the Geneva convention. They live within its boundaries and its restrictions. If we knowingly or unknowingly break the convention, we are ultimately putting at risk our soldiers, our fighting women and men, in the future.

Therefore, I hope and I ask that the Prime Minister will take this question seriously, that he recognize that his government has been unable to do that at present, that his minister has been unable to have the confidence of Canadians, of our allies and of our military. He has the ability to do that.

It is not the fault of the military. We do not blame the military. The members of the military do their role in the field and they turn prisoners over in accordance to the instructions that are given. The instructions have been to turn them over to the Afghani authorities rather than create prisons.

There are serious questions, questions brought forth at many levels by Canadian organizations, the foreign affairs department and Corrections Canada, and by the Afghani government and international organizations that say these prisoners may be at risk.

I am not going to give absolutes as to whether or not they were tortured because I do not know, but they may be at risk. That in itself is a contravention. If we are turning them over in a situation where we are not sure, where even our Department of Foreign Affairs tells us that it is not sure, that it cannot guarantee they are being handled properly and in accordance with the Geneva convention, I would not accept that for a moment if a combatant country, an enemy of Canada, was doing that with our soldiers in a conflict.

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I would not accept it for a moment if a country that kept prisoners, rather than treating them in accordance with the convention, turned them over to another country where they might be at risk. I think it is what we talked about in the Arar case, where the Americans turned over to Syria a person they had in their possession. We know about the rest of that case.

I think it is important to take this matter seriously. I think it would be the wrong message to send to our partners and to Canadians and to our military if we did not. I went to three funerals of soldiers who died in Afghanistan. I have seen their families.

There is a soldier in the last incident who is from the Yarmouth area, whose legs were severely damaged. Six of his colleagues were lost. He supports the mission. To tell him today, without any resolution to the conflict, without any security for the Afghans, that his six colleagues were lost for nothing, for no resolution, for no future for this, and that he will have difficulties with his legs for the rest of his life and it was all for naught, it would be completely irresponsible.

To tell Jim Davis of Bridgewater, whose son died there, that his son was lost for nothing, that it was a mistake, that in one resolution of the House without fully considering the repercussions on those people for whom he lost his life to improve their situation, to do that with one vote, it would be completely irresponsible.

To tell the Thibodeaus in my riding, whose son took a year off university with the reserves and is now in Afghanistan, that his risk is all for naught, it would be completely irresponsible.

I cannot support the motion.

• (1530)

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. Certainly I think he was speaking from the heart, especially at the end of his remarks when he was talking about the soldiers and the families of the fallen.

I could not agree more with him that this is a reckless and irresponsible motion. It puts our soldiers who are still in theatre at a greater risk. It is of comfort only to our enemies, not our armed forces personnel.

I would also draw for the member a similar perspective on the motion on which we just voted and the hon. member supported. February 2009 is still almost two years away. There is a lot of work to be done. As he just admitted by his own remarks when he talked about a tragically injured soldier who had returned home, he still supports the mission. He still supports the objectives and the goals and the things we hope we can accomplish in concert with the Afghan people.

I would point this out to the hon. member. We are debating a motion today that I agree is completely irresponsible. In fact, I would use the term ludicrous. It is irresponsible to send a signal that we want to pull out immediately. It is also irresponsible to send a signal to the Taliban and to our enemies, the terrorists, who are fighting our brave young men and women in Afghanistan, that if they can just hold on and inflict as much damage as possible to February 2009, then no matter what happens in February 2009 we will pull out, no

matter what stage the conflict is at. That, too, is completely irresponsible.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member understood the motion that was put before the House by the Liberal Party on an opposition day motion.

The motion was not saying that the Government of Canada would remove its troops from Afghanistan. The motion was that we advise our partners within NATO that we would be withdrawing from the mission in Kandahar in February 2009, as per a previous vote of the House, that we would maintain that commitment in that time, and that we would give a lot of time for our allies to find a replacement nation to carry on that role in that area.

We did not say that we would bring out all our military. We did not say we would stop the diplomatic or developmental work. All we are saying is that within that one region, that one mission, perhaps it is time for another one. Perhaps we should be telling our men and women that one rotation is enough.

When we hear the minister saying that 2009 is the limit, which is what the minister stated in the House, that 2009 is the limit for now, but we hear that he has made some orders for tanks to be delivered in that area after February 2009, our men and women in the service are nervous. They remember that not too long ago he thought about extending terms of service within the rotation. He talked about cross-training from other services, that perhaps the navy or—

• (1535)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear today that the Conservatives are prepared to send the sons and daughters of more families to Afghanistan, even though everything that is happening with the mission in Afghanistan makes no sense to Canadians, and even though it means placing our brave men and women in a very dangerous situation.

The Conservatives are willing to do this. They are not thinking about the full implications. They are willing to send the sons and daughters of even more families. I think it is very sad. I do not understand why the Liberals are prepared to give the Conservative Party carte blanche for the next two years, and allow the Conservatives to do whatever they like with our brave men and women.

The Liberals say they are willing to give this carte blanche, while the NDP is proposing a reasonable and important solution, which involves the safe and secure withdrawal of the Canadian Forces from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan. The NDP calls for Canada to focus its efforts to assist the people of Afghanistan on a diplomatic solution, and redouble its commitment to reconstruction and development—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for West Nova.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the New Democrats are not proposing any solution. They are saying simply that we should suddenly and immediately pull out of this mission in the Kandahar region of Afghanistan—goodbye, we are leaving—without any replacements.

We are not giving the Conservatives carte blanche. We are talking about a withdrawal in 2009, as voted in this House. That is the will of the House and therefore must be respected.

We predict that in February 2009, we, the Liberals, will form the government. At that time, we will make the decisions and take action as the government. We are in no way giving carte blanche to the Conservatives, who will then be on the opposition benches.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Victoria.

The most difficult moment in my parliamentary career was on May 17, 2006, when the House voted to extend the current mission in Afghanistan. It was difficult because, of all the decisions that I am called upon to make as a member of Parliament, the decision to be at war has to be the most significant. It is a decision that I took and that I take with absolute seriousness.

Like my party, I believe the mission in Afghanistan is the wrong mission for Canada and that it is not a mission that is ultimately destined to bring peace to Afghanistan and its people or to the region or to the world. I do not believe that it increases Canada's security or the security of people around the world. I do not believe that it can protect us from terrorism. I believe that we are in a war that cannot be won militarily.

I believe this war represents a huge departure from Canada's hopes for our armed forces and for their role in the world. I believe that Canadians are heavily invested in Canada playing a peacekeeping role in time of conflict and that they believe the men and women of our armed forces have developed special skills, special expertise and hard won experience in that vital kind of work. Canadians know and are proud that the Canadian armed forces are respected around the world for their ability to do that specialized, dangerous, hopeful and necessary kind of work.

I cannot think of a more important vote in the history of the 39th Parliament. Perhaps there are not many more important in the longer history of this place. I have to say I appreciate that the Conservative government gave MPs the opportunity to vote on the extension of the mission last May. I do have problems with the speed of the process, but an issue such as this should be decided here. That at least was the correct decision, one which the previous Liberal government did not afford us.

It is important because war making is something we must never do lightly. War always involves a huge compromise of our hopes for humanity, our hopes for our country and how we resolve conflict in our world. A decision for war always involves a decision to ask many people to put themselves in danger, to risk their lives for our decisions, as we have asked the men and women of the Canadian armed forces to do.

As we knew they would, these men and women have answered our call and are serving bravely and with distinction. We have seen tragedy and many lives lost due to our decision. However, we must never ask them to do that kind of work without ensuring clarity of our request and solid and deep support for the mission they have been asked to undertake. Sadly, I do not believe that there exists in Canada the necessary level of support for this kind of mission.

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Therefore, it is with sadness and frustration that I come to this debate, sadness because if the Liberals had chosen, if they had been clear and if they had all bothered to attend the vote in May 2006, we could be on the way to being withdrawn from this mission already. We already could have made a decision that this was not the right mission for Canada and we could be pursuing other solutions to this conflict, solutions more in keeping with Canada's traditional peacekeeping role and with the way Canadians want their country to act in the world. We could be undertaking peacekeeping in other parts of the world.

The NDP position has been clear and consistent. We have voted along clear and consistent lines since the beginning of this conflict.

We raised serious questions about our participation in the mission when it was originally proposed as Operation Enduring Freedom by the Liberals, despite the difficulties and fears that surrounded us at that time immediately post-September 11.

We have consistently called for a peacekeeping role, for development aid and for diplomacy.

Last August the federal NDP convention passed a very clear resolution that called for a safe and immediate withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan and said that we should continue our aid, undertake diplomacy, support our troops and participate in peacekeeping missions through the United Nations in other areas of the world.

I, like many Canadians, support a full withdrawal from Afghanistan. I do not believe we can play a significant peacekeeping role there now that we have been a combatant on one side of the conflict.

In past debates in the House I have raised concerns about the militarization of development aid.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember a take note debate in the previous Parliament where I asked you in the course of that debate about that very issue.

I still believe that Canada must hold the tradition of civilian, not military, delivery of development aid. I remain convinced that development projects done by the military become targets for our enemies, endangering those who utilize those projects and, should they actually be destroyed, wasting precious development dollars.

● (1540)

We have committed a serious error in not maintaining responsibility for prisoners taken by Canadian troops in Afghanistan. It has been clear that the government does not understand the gravity of our ill-informed policy to turn over prisoners to the Afghan government. It is clear that torture happens in Afghan prisons. The Afghan human rights agency has acknowledged this. The U.S. State Department has acknowledged this. We know the Afghan ability to monitor the conditions of prisoners is almost nil in Kandahar province.

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We in this corner of the House have known and raised our concerns about it for many months. Our defence critic, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam, raised this issue in her very first question in the very first question period following the most recent election.

We know the monitoring by the Red Cross often mentioned by the Minister of National Defence was a fiction. This should never have been left to chance. We should have taken responsibility. When problems were identified, we should have addressed them.

I remain very concerned that our actions in Afghanistan have been in violation of our commitment to the Geneva convention. Our commitment to the Geneva convention must be absolute. We must follow its spirit and principles to the letter. This is not the fault of the men and women of the Canadian armed forces. This is the fault of our political leadership in both the previous Liberal government and the current Conservative government.

Canadians want Canada to play a role in Darfur. There is now an opportunity to participate in a key role in a UN peacekeeping force in Somalia and in Darfur. Our commitment to peacekeeping has dropped dismally since the deployment to Afghanistan. I am told that our entire peacekeeping contingent would fit on one bus with room to spare.

Canada must be sure that we have the ability to respond to peacekeeping missions. We have particular expertise and experience and a good reputation for that work, and we know it is very dangerous work. It in no way represents the easy way out or an avoidance of responsibility. It calls on the men and women of our armed forces to risk life and limb.

I want to express my condolences to all who have lost loved ones. My thoughts and prayers are with those who serve in Afghanistan in the armed forces or are doing diplomatic or development work. My thoughts and prayers are with those who have been injured physically and psychologically related to their service for their country or the service of a loved one.

In the end, I believe this is the wrong mission for Canada. We must begin immediately to withdraw safely and responsibly. We must take that decision now, not two years from now. This is the wrong mission for Canada. We must begin the process of withdrawal, not wait for years.

I did not support the Liberal motion last week to withdraw in 2009 because I believe that this is the wrong mission today. If I believe it is wrong to ask the men and women of the Canadian armed forces to remain in Afghanistan one minute longer than necessary.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because there are so many people who want to ask questions, I will try to be quick. However, because I am quite emotional about this issue, I may not be too quick.

The member said today was a sad day for him to rise in the House. Let me tell the member what a sad day was for me. It was when I walked into the House the other day and had to vote on a motion from the Liberal Party.

There is a saying that evil thrives when good men do nothing, which is so true. This place is full of good men and good women who want to see evil defeated.

I do not want anybody to forget 9/11 when the great towers came down and a number of Canadians lost their lives with thousands of others because of the evil jihad by the Taliban and al-Qaeda, which had a mission to destroy.

What I want to see happen in Afghanistan is called victory. Victory is possible as long as good men and good women do their—

• (1545)

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to cut the hon. member off there because there are a lot of people who want to ask questions.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is anyone in this place who would ever say that what happened on September 11 in New York City and in Washington was anything other than an expression of the most evil to which humanity could rise.

We can reasonably disagree on what appropriate action to take in light of the expression of that kind of evil. I do not happen to believe a war on terrorism, the kind that we are undertaking in Afghanistan, is the kind of response that will protect us from the expression of this kind of evil. I do not believe this kind of military operation, this kind of ground war, is a significant way of dealing with the issue of terrorism around the world.

If I had seen anything that would convince me of this, maybe I would be in a different place today. I do not believe we address terrorism by the kind of war that we are indulging in Afghanistan.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member raised the issue of the detainees, which seems to have seized the House for most of this week.

The issue here, and I would like the member's comment, appears to be the Geneva convention. It appears the government is of the view that anything that has been said are simply allegations. Those allegations include matters which have been revealed to show that the Afghanistan military intelligence and police forces have been accused of involvement in arbitrary arrest, kidnapping, extortion, torture and extrajudicial killing of criminal suspects.

If the government believes there are allegations of these matters, surely under the Geneva Convention there is an obligation and a duty of the signatories, of which Canadian is one, to follow up on those allegations and to take all necessary steps to determine the facts rather than continue for a whole—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, it is even more serious than that. I do not think Canada should be turning over prisoners of war when there is an outstanding allegation of torture, when there is any evidence that torture might be practised on those people by the organization to which we are turning them over.

The Afghan human rights commission itself has said that torture is regularly practised in prisons in Afghanistan. The U.S. State Department has said that. I do not think anybody would disagree with those statements. In this situation we should not be turning prisoners over to that system. This puts us in violation right at that point. We do not need an inquiry. As soon as that statement is there from those kinds of authorities, we should have stopped that process of prisoner transfer. It is utterly inappropriate—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's position on this issue has been completely inconsistent. Last fall the leader of the NDP called for the complete withdrawal of all our troops from Afghanistan. Now, in this motion, the New Democrats are calling for the withdrawal of troops only from southern Afghanistan. The wording in the motion reads, “from this counter-insurgency mission”.

Could the member clarify the NDP's position on the mission in Afghanistan?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, the NDP's position is absolutely clear. It calls for a safe and immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. I have been very clear in the House. In May 2006 I stood and said that we should withdraw immediately from Afghanistan. I was very clear in my speech today. I believe there is no other military role for Canada in Afghanistan as a result of our participation in this counter-insurgency combat mission. It is very difficult for us to transfer into a peacekeeping mission after we participated in the current mission in Kandahar.

Therefore, I favour fully and completely withdrawing in a safe and responsible manner, but doing that immediately.

• (1550)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by acknowledging, from the bottom of my heart, the dedication and the courage of the women and men in the Canadian Forces, and to express my sincere condolences to the families of the fallen.

It is for that reason that I refuse to ask them to continue to risk their lives in an ill-thought out strategy. The mission we are asking them to carry out is simply the wrong mission. It is government's role and government's decision to ensure that this is the right mission.

This discussion today is important. We want to ensure that what we are doing is indeed the right tool to accomplish Canada's goals. We should be asking whether this strategy will solve the growing hostility between the west and some in the Muslim world, whether it will achieve a just and sustainable and peace in Afghanistan.

Last August, the NDP called for the end of Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan. After five years in this war, a war longer than the first world war, the Conservatives and the Liberals, who put us there, should be rethinking Canada's role.

I am especially troubled by the Conservatives' view of the world and of Afghanistan, which was well summarized by the member for Edmonton Centre last week when he said:

This is a war against evil, pure and simple. It is a war against an outfit called the Taliban, which is associated with an outfit called al-Qaeda, which is associated...with

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a whole bunch of other outfits around the world. They are, pure and simple, in four letters, evil. It is a four letter word.

This is a simplistic mindset, reminiscent of George Bush's approach in Iraq, that I suppose allows the Conservatives to think that complex problems of a different civilization can be solved militarily with air strikes.

The situation in Afghanistan is, by all authoritative reports, incredibly complex. The threads go far beyond the Taliban. The forces of the warlords, who are still in control of militias in Afghanistan, the criminal elements, the porous border with Pakistan, the fact that insurgents can go back and forth across the border with impunity and the criminal elements involved in the poppy production in Afghanistan all contribute to the negative security environment.

[*Translation*]

I will admit that I do not know much about military tactics and strategy. I leave that to our very competent generals and soldiers.

However, I understand the nature of the conflict, the sociology, and it is not a struggle between good and evil. Saying that it is shows an obvious lack of understanding of the nature of the conflict and of foreign affairs. I do not think the government knows what it is doing in this area. The confusion of its own minister makes that clear.

[*English*]

The Senlis Council and many others continue to say that this war is unwinnable militarily. The government's own Minister of National Defence said the same thing in an interview I heard. The Senlis Council has added that to continue this asymmetrical war risks killing far more civilians and works against Canada's goal.

Because Canada took over command of a previously U.S. led Operation Enduring Freedom and became involved in war fighting, we were seen by many of those that we are trying to help as the enemy. Although Canadian Forces are working hard to promote stability, the security situation by all objective accounts has deteriorated.

Ms. Adeena Niazi of the Afghan Women's Organization of Toronto stated that Afghans do love the Canadians who bring security, peace and development. However, she then asked how we could bring peace when we bring war. It is past time to rethink Canada's current strategy now, not in 2009.

The resolutions to many modern conflicts over the past couple of decades have come about through a peace process that genuinely addresses the political causes and issues of the conflict and, in so doing, isolates the criminal elements.

Eventually, those with genuine political objectives will come forward and those with alternative objectives will be isolated. Those who seek peace will gravitate toward a peace process. If there is no peace process, there is nowhere for them to go.

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Canada must begin to work now with their allies to establish a comprehensive peace process and that means with all those involved in the conflict, including neighbouring countries. A sustained program of development aid to help Afghans move out of abject poverty is required to bring a truly lasting peace.

As John Watson, the director of CARE Canada, said:

...we [cannot] keep concentrating on the military/technological side without undercutting the world view that motivates our enemies.

I want to acknowledge the important role of the military in such a peace process, but it should be one of protection, not aggression. We cannot achieve peace without that cordon of protection but that is far different than the American style, seek and kill, counter-insurgent mission that is presently alienating many Afghans.

Contrary to the claims by the Conservatives that our party does not support the forces, I want to clearly say that I do not doubt that the intentions of our troops or our commanding officers is to achieve peace. I believe that the ultimate goal of the Canadian Forces, like all Canadians, is peace. I do not doubt their courage nor the calibre of their competence.

It is the government's errant strategy that we oppose. It is the government's insensitivity to our international agreements, turning a blind eye to the Geneva convention until prodded by the opposition.

• (1555)

In the NDP, we have a vision for the role Canada can play in the world. We believe Canada can and should be a leader for strategic diplomacy, international law, reversing the arms race, conflict prevention and eradicating world poverty because it is the most effective, proven and ethical approach to global security.

The reason the NDP could not support last week's Liberal motion to extend the Afghan mission for another two years was that it was impossible to reconcile the increasing evidence that this is a failed mission, the insecurity that is growing and the growing number of deaths among our troops and Afghan civilians. The Liberals' motion was not about changing course on a wrong-headed mission. They refused to admit that they got us involved and now they are trying to stand firmly, I would call it, on a paper fence.

If we have the right mission, peace takes a very long time and we cannot put an end date on it two years from now, which is why the motion just did not make sense to me.

At the beginning of every speech that I have heard, everyone has expressed support for the troops but those are just words unless we truly stand up for what we believe would be in the best interest of the troops, of Canada and of global security.

I believe in a mission to bring sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Such a mission would justify asking our troops to make the sacrifices they are willing to make. The current mission is precisely the opposite of such a mission and to support it, based on a narrow and sometimes, as it has seemed to me, cartoonish understanding of the conflict, is not supporting our troops. It is asking them to be cannon fodder in a backward strategy with no hope for success, and I cannot accept that for one more day.

Today's motion would end this wrong-headed counter-insurgent mission and begin immediately with the right mission, one for a just, prosperous and sustainable peace. There is no other way.

• (1600)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the Taliban not just love this Parliament voting in favour of this NDP motion? Would they not love the Canadian troops, who are making such significant gains in the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the murderous regime of the Taliban, to be pulled out? Would they not just love the other countries to take a similar path like the NDP are suggesting and pull their troops out?

Would the Taliban not love the ease with which they could return to their murderous regime, murdering anyone who was of any assistance trying to rebuild the country and the women and children indiscriminately returning to the gross and obscene oppression that they forced upon the people of Afghanistan?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question but I did hear a comment. I think the Conservatives would have us divide the world into good and evil.

I understand that Prime Minister Karzai has in the past few months invited moderate Taliban to become part of his government. I do not know how we can lump all these people into one group as the evil.

I think we are thinking of the past. There might have been a time where there was one state against another, one clear enemy in uniform against another. We are talking about a very real conflict between an invisible enemy and the way that we are going about it is putting the very civilians, the very—

The Deputy Speaker: Further questions and comments. The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was not so long ago that Saddam Hussein went through his very lengthy trial process, was convicted and was executed. Under the Geneva convention, even an evil person such as Saddam Hussein was still entitled to the protections provided for by the Geneva convention.

The member has heard that the Conservatives do not really care about human rights and that anybody who is known to have committed any heinous crimes, even if it is not known, that they should have absolutely no rights.

My view would be that if we do not protect the rights of all human beings under Geneva convention, then we are putting our own troops at risk if we do not enforce and respect the terms and provisions of the Geneva convention. Could the member comment on that?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, human rights are fundamental to the basis of what our country was built on and, therefore, it is important that we defend those rights.

I believe I heard the Minister of Public Safety state in one of his last responses that we cannot protect the prisoners. I find that shameful.

Our party has, for a long time, asked the government to stop the transfer and placement of detainees in circumstances that cannot be assessed and where there have been very serious allegations.

Business of Supply

•(1605)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about women's rights.

As the House knows, under the Taliban, women were not allowed to leave their homes except in the company of their husbands. We know they were not allowed to go to school. We know they were not allowed to start businesses. In fact, if they committed minor violations of sharia law, they would be herded into stadiums and executed. That was the state of the country under the Taliban.

Today there is freedom. Women go to school. Children can go to school. Girls go to school. Women are allowed to start businesses.

How does the member square her party's position as being a defender of women's rights with the proposal now to pull the troops out of Afghanistan and allow the women to basically try to defend themselves without any support or security?

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, the laws to protect women in Afghanistan are certainly important. While the laws have changed and while they recognize the rights of Afghan women, from the reports that we have read women are still subject to arbitrary imprisonment, rape, torture and forced marriages.

In the past months we heard a disturbing number of cases of women committing suicide by self-immolation, by dowsing themselves in gasoline. This is not a black and white issue.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the members opposite and the NDP get some snippets from the newspapers and make speeches which are absolutely not relevant, I will endeavour to not be political about it, but bring before the House the development that has been taking place in Afghanistan.

I would like members of Parliament to consider that without the security in place our Canadian armed forces help to provide, our ability to redouble our efforts in reconstruction and development would be severely hampered.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Oxford.

Canada is helping make a difference in Afghanistan and I would like to call the attention of the House to the latest results from the field. Let me share with the House some of the achievements in which our assistance has contributed.

Canada is among the top five donors to the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund, a multilateral fund managed by the World Bank that provides regular salaries to more than 270,000 civil servants, including 144,000 teachers.

Two weeks ago the Minister of International Cooperation and her parliamentary secretary travelled to Afghanistan. They met with the Afghan education minister, Mr. Hanif Atmar, who described in glowing terms the difference Canada has made in getting children back to school, in paying teachers' wages, and in providing education for these teachers who can in turn impart knowledge to the children, so they can have hope for a better life.

Truly, we are helping Afghanistan invest in a better tomorrow by providing education to the young people who are, after all, the leaders of tomorrow.

Our security situation is also improving. The Minister of International Cooperation also reported to the House in mid-April how she was able to travel in Afghanistan outside the wire where Canadians and civilians would not have dared travel a year or two ago. I can tell the House they had a marathon of 100 Afghans participating in Kandahar.

This is a clear example of progress being made and an example of how many things are improving as Canada and Afghanistan work together to rebuild the country. This is the opportunity that we have provided. We ought to be proud as Canadians.

We are also helping with democratic development. Through CIDA, the Government of Canada is also helping Afghans participate in grassroots democracy in action, in virtually the four corners of the country. It is called the national solidarity program and it has been successful in Kandahar and elsewhere across the country.

There are now more than 16,000 community development councils elected by the local village people that make decisions as to what community priorities should be funded. They select the projects and implement them. They tell us what project they want and we help them complete those projects.

Women are participating as full members in many of these councils, making important decisions about projects to improve public health and education in their communities. Five years ago women had no voice in public life.

As for redoubling Canada's commitment, the Government of Canada has already been reinforcing its commitment to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. Our assistance in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2011 exceeds \$1.2 billion, which includes \$200 million recently announced by the Prime Minister.

We have disbursed \$130 million during the fiscal year that just ended, including \$39 million in Kandahar. This is seven times the amount spent in Kandahar during the previous fiscal year. That is progress.

When we formed the government, funds for development were set to decrease until 2009. One of our first acts was to increase development spending and we intend to do more for the people of Afghanistan and Kandahar in particular.

May I remind members of the House that in January of this year my colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation, announced almost \$24 million for projects based primarily in Kandahar.

These projects include: demining activities to enhance stability and security, funding for a literacy program, and support for a maternal health initiative that will promote healthy pregnancies and safe childbirths.

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•(1610)

These efforts are delivering results. There has been a 55% drop in the average number of victims of landmines every month since 2001. Six million children are in school and a third of them are girls. In 2001 there were only 70,000 children in school and there were zero girls. I call that progress.

In Kandahar we have delivered blankets and tents to 20,000 families and medical supplies to 140,000 people. Last February the director of Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan travelled across Canada. He spoke to Canadian non-governmental organizations and to Canadian parliamentarians about the work his facility is doing with support from the Government of Canada to provide the people of Afghanistan with access to financial services.

During this visit Canada's Minister of International Cooperation announced an additional contribution of \$16 million for this initiative. This fund has exceeded expectations. It is a success story. The world is looking up to it and praising it.

As of February 28, 325,000 Afghans, almost three-quarters of them women, have obtained small loans and savings services. Each month the program reaches an average of 10,000 new clients. Those women and men get loans to start businesses, such as bakeries, tailor shops and carpenter workshops. They buy farm animals, tools and seeds to improve their production.

The IMF predicts that Afghanistan's economy will grow by 12% this year. Canada, through its support for Afghan national programs, is helping to make that happen by helping to create the jobs that are key to reducing poverty. Indeed, Canada is supporting projects that are changing the lives of the people of Afghanistan, but it takes a military presence to provide the security for this type of progress to be achieved in such a challenging environment.

In a newspaper article published yesterday in the *Ottawa Citizen* a local school principal in Kandahar said that part of the reason he is able to operate a school is because the security situation in Kandahar is getting better.

In conclusion, I would remind members of Parliament that the tremendous efforts related to reconstruction and development are already taking place. Recent announcements by my colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation during her trip to Afghanistan in mid April, confirmed that Canadians remain strong.

Canada will contribute up to \$10 million for food aid and humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced people in Afghanistan. Canada is contributing up to \$5 million to help more than 3.4 million Afghans participate in food for work programs, training and education.

In addition, Canada is providing up to \$5 million for immediate assistance to returning refugees and internally displaced people within Afghanistan. This will ensure that the most vulnerable people are assisted with shelter, food and fuel, and are helped to reintegrate into the local population.

Canada continues to redouble its efforts in terms of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, but it would be nonsense to imagine that Canada and its implementing partners can continue this

demanding work without the enabling element of security provided by our armed forces.

Security provides the space for development to take place and the impact of the development world will bring about the stability needed to make sure the residents of southern Afghanistan can live their lives in safety and build a future in a land that is at last peaceful. Canadians can be proud of our contribution.

While I was in Afghanistan, I met the ISAF commander and he had high praise for Canadians. Canada is one of the only countries that assisted with the military operation that was successful in 100 projects inside Kandahar.

•(1615)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. I know that he supports his government's position on Afghanistan, but I feel that I must ask a question in terms of where the emphasis is from the Canadian government.

The numbers show us that Canada is spending about 10 times the amount on the military combat mission that it is on aid and development. We have now spent over \$4 billion on the military mission and really a very small amount in terms of aid and reconstruction. I think it really begs the question in terms of the emphasis of this mission and the fact that Canada is still continuing down the wrong path. I would ask him to comment on why there is such a huge discrepancy in those figures.

Second, I would ask him to comment on the whole issue around detainees. It seems to me that if Canada cannot even deal with the processing of detainees in a credible and proper fashion, and there is no accountability on that issue, then how on earth can we be involved in this kind of engage?

The chaos and the mess that we have, that we even heard in this House today, over this question is something that remains unanswered by the government.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, that is what I said in my initial comments, that we are not looking at the mission. We call it a war making mission. It is absolutely not a war making mission. I would like to ask my hon. colleague a question in answer to her question.

In Kandahar, 100 projects have successfully been completed, some more are in progress, because of the security forces. There is the Kajaki dam just northeast of Kandahar which the military is trying to secure. It is not for military purposes. It is for provincial purposes. This dam has broken down. There is a power station there. We are trying to fix it, so we can provide electricity to two million citizens and businesses.

When I was in Afghanistan, I found out that there are three companies, an American company, Phelps Dodge, a Canadian mining company and an Indian mining company that are building, 50 kilometres south of Afghanistan, a copper mine project worth \$1.8 billion. Why would they go there if they did not see prosperity and success? What does the member have against helping the poor Afghans who want the same life the member and I?

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Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville for his appointment as special advisor to the Prime Minister on issues to do with Middle East and this region that he was mentioning.

The other issue that I want to touch on is the fact that I was taking his advice as well in May 2006 when he and I both voted against extending this mission.

When we look at this mission, I would also like to agree with the member for Vancouver East who said that 90% of the money is spent on the combat mission. I do not think any member of Parliament in this House is against reconstruction and providing the tools for those children that the member for Abbotsford was talking about. It is the 90% that we are spending on the combat mission.

Could the member tell me how he would make a difference as a special advisor to the Prime Minister to cut that money on the combat mission and instead spend that money on the reconstruction in Afghanistan?

• (1620)

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Speaker, that is the party that sent the troops to Afghanistan and that is the party, in 2003, that provided the troops in Kandahar. Now it is saying that it is a different mission. Now it is saying we are spending too much on the military.

I mentioned just a few of the successes we have in Afghanistan and Kandahar. Our SAT, strategic assistant team, is taking the Afghan ministers into the rural area. I talked to the minister of rural development. They are very pleased with the work. I will tell the member, when I was in Kabul, about 250 women and 100 men were being trained. That was a Canadian project, my friend, and these women and men were getting a salary of \$120 to \$150 a month. That is higher than anybody in Afghanistan.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to address the House today on a matter which concerns many Canadians.

Canadians tell me every day that safety is one of their most important concerns and that they expect their government to take every measure available to address threats to their safety, whether those threats occur in Canada or anywhere else in the world.

Canadians understand that terrorism is one of the biggest threats to global peace and security, and we have all come to understand, through difficult experiences and tragic incidents in the past years, that threats to global peace and security are threats to the peace and security of Canadians.

In the past, Afghanistan has been used as a base for terrorists, who have inflicted suffering around the world and whose presence in Afghanistan has only served to destroy the lives and livelihoods of Afghan men, women and children. No responsible government wants this for its citizens. That is why the government of Afghanistan has asked Canada and 36 other nations to join together in a partnership sanctioned by the United Nations to help build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society.

Canada has committed its support to the people of Afghanistan and we stand by that commitment.

To decide when we should leave Afghanistan prematurely would be detrimental to the mission and to the work we are doing to help rebuild that country.

It is naive and disingenuous for the opposition to suggest that fostering human rights and reconstruction will happen without the great work our troops are doing to secure Afghanistan from the Taliban. It is reckless of the official opposition to attempt to signal to Afghanistan that Canada's Parliament is going to vote for withdrawal. Such a reckless decision will not only endanger the lives of our troops, but also those of diplomats, Canadian civilian police and members of Correctional Service Canada.

Pulling out our troops prematurely would also jeopardize the great work our civilian police and correctional experts are doing in Afghanistan. I am very proud to inform the House today about the contribution being made to honour this commitment by Canadian civilian police and correctional experts.

It is clear that one of the key points in assisting Afghanistan to achieve its goals is the establishment of an accountable justice system that recognizes the fundamental importance of the rule of law and respects international standards of operations.

In addition to other Canadian civilian police, Canadians are fortunate to have two world class criminal justice organizations, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Correctional Service Canada, which are ready and able to assist international peace support, security reform and development efforts. These civilian police officers and correctional experts are carrying on a proud and illustrious Canadian tradition of helping rebuild parts of the world that have seen turmoil and upheaval.

Correctional Service Canada has been involved in this kind of work for several years. The service has important experience in Afghanistan. Correctional Service Canada has deployed one of its senior officers to serve as a corrections adviser to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which is known by its acronym, UNAMA. The corrections adviser has worked closely with his colleagues and with the Afghan minister of justice and central prison department to lay the foundations of a modern and professional correctional system.

Canadians can be proud of what we have accomplished. Correctional Service Canada advisers played a key role in discussions which led to the decision to locate the central prison department in the ministry of justice. Similarly, they supported and assisted in the development of drafting the new legislative basis for the department.

I do not need to tell the House that there are complex and difficult decisions and processes which lie at the heart of creating a correctional system that advances human dignity, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and one that is accountable for results.

Business of Supply

Once on location, they conducted an assessment of the prison which they were assigned and immediately made changes and improvements to the conditions of imprisonment for women and juveniles. I am pleased to report today that conditions have improved significantly for these groups and they are now located in facilities or sections of a facility separate from male prisoners. This is a standard requirement of international standards concerning imprisonment, and again, Canadians were influential in identifying the issue and working toward this resolution.

This work continues today in key areas such as the development of training standards for prison staff and the effective implementation of training to enable the central prison department to do its job effectively and humanely.

Canada's work in Afghanistan is in support of the Afghanistan compact, which in January 2006 was agreed to by the government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and 60 nations from all parts of the world. The compact provides a five year framework for coordinating the work of the Afghan government and its international partners by outlining specific outcomes, as well as the benchmarks and timelines for their delivery.

• (1625)

One of the specific commitments in the compact is to improve the prison system in Afghanistan. It became clear that Canada could not do this simply through the efforts of the corrections adviser in Kabul. Canada decided to focus further efforts in Kandahar province, which is the home of the Canadian provincial reconstruction team.

The PRT, as it is known, is one of the ways Canada assists in extending the authority of the Government of Afghanistan to all its provinces through support for reconstruction and development. In February 2007 Correctional Service Canada deployed two of its expert staff to join the PRT and contribute to the reform of the correctional system in Afghanistan.

The Minister of Public Safety had the opportunity to be briefed by these officers when he visited Afghanistan two weeks ago. He was briefed on the work performed with the Afghan prison officers and administrators on how to manage a detention facility and ensure the safe custody of prisoners while at the same time respecting their human rights.

The correctional officers informed the minister this was some of the most rewarding work they had ever done. That says a lot. It speaks to the real contribution Canadian civilian personnel are making in Afghanistan alongside their military colleagues.

Although these officers have been on the ground for a relatively short time, they have already made progress. They have established a good working relationship with the director of Sarposa and their presence has been welcomed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

They visited the Afghanistan national police detention centre in Kandahar and have made several visits to Sarposa provincial prison, the main prison in Kandahar, where they have worked closely with prison personnel on improving their management practices.

In both cases it is clear that Afghanistan wants to make changes and improvements to its prison system and that Canadians are at the

forefront of the effort. In the coming months, the CSC staff will be working toward their primary goal, which is to extend existing authority of the Afghan ministry of justice central prison department to the province of Kandahar by establishing a training and mentoring program for prison staff and administrators, by providing advice on enhancing security and living conditions for prisoners and providing a better working environment for prison staff and administration.

The missions undertaken by these dedicated CSC staff in Afghanistan are among the most challenging correctional assignments in the world. This is tough and sometimes dangerous work. They leave families and friends behind in Canada so they can serve their country under very difficult circumstances as we honour our commitment in Afghanistan.

Pulling our troops out of Afghanistan prematurely would endanger our correctional experts. It would make Afghanistan a more dangerous place for our correctional experts to do their important work of bringing human rights and a professional correctional system to the people of Afghanistan.

We cannot deny Parliament the opportunity to make the decision of when our troops should withdraw from Afghanistan, at the appropriate time, with all the current facts in front of it. We brought forward a motion in the House of Commons to extend the current Afghan mission to February 2009. The government has been clear that if it were to seek further extension, it would come to Parliament to do that, and this remains our position.

These staff members deployed from Correctional Service Canada deserve the full support of the House. The government is very proud of their efforts and we look forward to being able to advise the House of continuing successes.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Before proceeding to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Kenora, Softwood Lumber.

• (1630)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the hon. member. My impression is that his government will come back to Parliament for another vote. The vote that took place in May 2006 was a sham. The Prime Minister said that he would extend the mission for a year whether the House voted for the extension or not.

The NDP has brought forward a motion that calls for our forces to be pulled out now and that member feels it is too premature. If we keep dragging this on and do not commit to February 2009 as the date our forces will come home, then the member will come up with the same reason why we cannot leave everything just like that and bring our forces home.

Could the member commit to February 2009 as the date our forces will leave, or does he agree with his minister that it could go on for decades in Afghanistan?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest there are a couple of errors in the member's comments. First, that was the first opportunity the House had to vote on the mission. His government sent our troops there without a motion. That took place in a cabinet decision.

The member had the opportunity to vote and when the opportunity comes again for the House to make that decision, he will have the opportunity, as will all members, to vote on the issue at that time.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to thank my colleague for his very important speech. I know he speaks with some authority, coming from his background in the police force. I come from a military family and recently I had the honour to speak to some of our returning heroes, some Afghani veterans from Oshawa's own Ontario Regiment. They told me about the good things they were doing there, the progress they were making, how hard they were working and how much they were appreciated.

What disturbs me today is the naiveté of this motion. Could the member explain a bit more to the NDP and the House why the motion is so dangerous to our troops and why we need security in order to have development? Those members seem to say that they want this development, but they do not want to have our troops there. Could he please explain the importance of having them both together?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, there is an organization perhaps of which the NDP is aware called Human Rights Watch. It has compiled a number of incidents that occurred just in the year 2006. On August 28, 2006, a bomb detonated in the middle of the day in a crowded bazaar in Lashkar Gah, Helmand. The bomb killed 15 civilians and wounded 47 others, including 15 children. A Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for the attack and stated that the target was a civilian businessman.

That illustrates very clearly why Canadians are there and why they have to be there. There has to be security in the country before we can help to build the country. NGOs from every country in the world that are there have told us they need the security of the armed forces personnel from Canada and other countries. This is not a Canadian mission entirely in any way, shape or form. We are part of a coalition of countries on a UN mission.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East.

I am, with some chagrin and some sadness, speaking to the motion before the House today. The difficulty that faces us in this motion is the fact that we have had two debates within the space of a little over a week around the mission in Afghanistan. I think the fact that we have had two debates within a week reflects, not only that the House is deeply divided but also that the Canadian public is deeply divided.

That goes back to the time when we had a vote in the House to extend the Afghanistan mission to 2009. The deep division in the House is reflected by the fact that the vote passed by merely four votes. It is that kind of division that continues to be reflected in the hearts and minds of people in the House and certainly Canadians at large.

Business of Supply

I am proud that New Democrats had the courage to stand up and present this motion before the House today. I want to read some important points in the motion because they are fundamental to why we are standing and asking for the responsible withdrawal of the Canadian troops. The points read:

- (1) all members of this House, whatever their disagreements about the mission in Afghanistan, support the courageous men and women of the Canadian Forces;
- (2) the government has admitted that the situation in Afghanistan cannot be won militarily;
- (3) the current counter-insurgency mission is not the right mission for Canada;
- (4) the government has neither defined what 'victory' would be, nor developed an exit strategy from this counter-insurgency mission;...

I want to touch on the first point. I think I can speak, certainly on behalf of all New Democrats but I am sure all members of the House, that we absolutely support the men and women in Afghanistan.

Like many other members of the House, I too come from a military family. My father was a career soldier. He was a proud member of the military and proudly served his country from coast to coast to coast. I have firsthand understanding of what it is like to be a member of a military family and I have deep understanding of the sacrifices and the commitment that our military families make.

I speak with a great deal of confidence when I say that New Democrats absolutely support the men and women who are serving in Afghanistan and our hearts go out to the families of the men and women who have given their lives on this mission.

Because this is such a deep emotional issue, it is important that we talk about the facts as we understand them and know them. New Democrats expect that when Canadians ask men and women to serve in a mission like this that there are some clear questions that we need to answer. We not only need to answer them for the Canadian public but we also need to answer them for the men and women who are serving for us.

The member for New Westminster—Coquitlam has, on a number of occasions, put these questions to the House. In a speech earlier, she said:

I said then that any time we put the lives of Canadians in harm's way, we have a duty to determine clearly a number of points and those were: is this mission really necessary; is it a mission that can succeed, has it a good chance of success; and are we doing everything possible to ensure the safety and the well-being of our soldiers?

When we ask men and women to serve our country, we must be able to answer those questions unequivocally for them. If we cannot answer those questions, I would wonder why we were sending them off to missions where, as we have seen, they end up giving their lives.

It is not just parliamentarians who have been asking these questions. These questions have also been asked by many groups across the country. One of the groups is a peace group in British Columbia called BCVoice which put out a newsletter in 2006. This is from a citizen's perspective and not a parliamentarian's perspective. The newsletter reads:

Our job as Canadian citizens is to find the answer to the simple, large, policy question: WHY?

The article is entitled, "Why Afghanistan?"

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• (1635)

The article goes on to state:

What are they in Afghanistan for? I was asked a number of times. Is it worth the lives of friends and colleagues?

I think those are questions that we must be able to answer.

Further on in the article it states:

We have spent over \$4 billion or 68% of all our international missions since the fall of 2001 on Afghanistan.

We are there because our leaders make bad policy.

Kipling had the answer. If any question why we died, Tell them, because our fathers lied.

I am not suggesting anybody in the House is lying but I am certainly saying that we must provide clear answers to those questions posed by the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

A number of other organizations have talked about elements that are very important to examine when we look at this mission and one of them wrote a paper entitled, “Canada and Afghanistan: Considerations for a Parliamentary debate”. This was in March 2006 but I think a couple of these questions are still relevant.

A number of points were made that we must absolutely consider but I will only touch on two of them. One is that expressions of support for Canadians serving in Afghanistan should also include calls for full disclosure on issues related to strategic objectives and the handling of prisoners.

This week we heard many questions about what Canada has done around the handling of prisoners. I believe many Canadians have very serious concerns about Canada's role. It is the government's role, not the role of our military, to provide the direction.

The other points the paper raised were:

The real solution to the crisis is known from lessons learned in other complex humanitarian/security emergencies: restoring human security in Afghanistan will require a rejection of a military-centric counter-insurgency strategy in favour of a long-term commitment to sustained economic, social, political, and security measures that create conditions conducive to human safety and well-being.

It is not just parliamentarians who have these questions. Many organizations and Canadians across this country also have these questions.

Much has been said about the role of women. In a letter dated October 24, 2006, an Afghani Canadian woman by the name of Angela Joya wrote about the issues that are important to women and children. She said:

More Afghans feel less safe and less secure now than they did now under the Taliban. The failure of the central government to provide any services or employment has discredited it in the eyes of all Afghans. As an Afghan woman, I cannot understand how [the Prime Minister] can defend Karzai's government as a democratic one. As one villager noted, democracy to Afghans means food, jobs, clean drinking water and security. The foreign-supported government has failed to provide any of these things.

Further on in her letter she states:

In light of what Afghans face today five years after the invasion in 2001, Canada's involvement in Afghanistan can only be explained as blind and uncritical support for America's “war on terror” — a view supported by even Canadian military leaders who have recently disclosed that political pressure from the Bush Administration led to the Canadian government's decision to join the current mission. If Canada really wants to provide genuine help with the reconstruction of Afghanistan, we need to

bring the troops home now and formulate an independent strategy that keeps interests of ordinary Afghans at heart.

This was from an Afghan woman. Surely one of the lessons that we have learned is that it is important to talk to the people who are most affected by these policies. We have seen that in so many other venues. I would encourage the government to look for ways to talk to the Afghan people and meet the goals around development and reconstruction. I have received numerous other letters from constituents in my riding.

One of the fundamental things we must look at is how we treat veterans when they come home. A recent *Macleans* article indicated that people who were injured and, after three years, were not deemed fit to return to full combat duty, were medically discharged. I would argue that we need to look for ways to support our veterans and ensure that when they return home, even if they are not fit for full combat duty, that we provide them with employment within the military that meets their capabilities.

I urge all members of the House to support the NDP motion and bring our troops home in a responsible fashion.

• (1640)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset that I am somewhat troubled and always confused by the NDP position when it comes to dealing with issues like this. I am not quite sure what the NDP position is with respect to terrorist organizations.

Last summer I was in Quebec City at the NDP convention. I was there on behalf of my party as a media observer and commentator. I recall vividly listening to debate at that time about the Middle East conflict between Hezbollah and the Israelis.

I remember very vividly the hon. member for Winnipeg North getting up to the microphone and reminding the delegates at that convention that Hezbollah in fact is a terrorist organization. The response was that she was booed away from the microphone. It was not an isolated boo or a catcall. It was a chorus of boos.

It made me wonder what the NDP actually thinks. Does the NDP not recognize that terrorist organizations in this world are a real threat to the security of all Canadians?

The question I had for the member from Halifax later on a panel show was, “Do you not agree that if Canadian troops and in fact all troops were removed from Afghanistan the Taliban would regain control, and what would that mean to the women and children of that country?”

I never got a complete answer and—

• (1645)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

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Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have always called for a responsible withdrawal. That does not mean we get up tomorrow morning at eight o'clock and say that the troops are out by the end of the day. What we have talked about is working with our partners in Afghanistan to ensure that the Canadian mission changes from one of counter-insurgency to one of redevelopment and reconciliation.

We clearly believe that Canada has a responsibility and a role in Afghanistan. Given the fact that we have been in there now for a number of years, we cannot just abandon the Afghani people, but we are strongly opposed to a counter-insurgency mission. Instead, we want to see Canadian dollars and Canadian troops focused on redevelopment and reconstruction that will actually lead to ongoing peace and security in the long run.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 27 five Afghan medical specialists were kidnapped by the Taliban while returning from their work at a displaced persons camp outside Kandahar. The five are still being held by the Taliban. On April 22 local media reported that one had been killed.

On April 4 the Taliban kidnapped two French aid workers, along with two Afghan colleagues, in Nimruz province. The Taliban claims to have executed the women, although we do not have proof of that.

On April 17 five UN aid workers were killed by the Taliban in an attack that took place in Kandahar city.

This is not about the Taliban targeting Canadian soldiers. This is about the Taliban targeting anybody who is trying to make life better for the Afghan people.

I want to ask my hon. colleague if this is the kind of partner that she would like to work with. Does she not recognize that it cannot be won militarily but it cannot be won without the military protecting the kind of people the Taliban are murdering every day?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely condemn acts of torture and acts of violence.

Again, we only have to look to the Canadian government's current role in what is happening with prisoners that we are turning over and the allegations of torture that are currently under way.

What we have to do is work with partners in Afghanistan, with other NATO countries that are supporting redevelopment and reconstruction, in looking for ways that we can work toward that long-lasting peace and security.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan asked a question. I do agree and support the courageous men and women who are serving on behalf of Canadians anywhere in the world.

I agree with her on all of the issues that she mentioned and all the perspectives of her speech except one. That one thing is that she now wants to bring the forces home right away.

In fact, when I look at the difference between the Liberals on this side and the Conservatives over there it is this: whenever any agreement was made, whether it was the child care agreement for our children or the Kelowna agreement with our first nations, the

Conservatives have always backed out. In fact, they have backed out of the Kyoto agreement, which we made on the international stage.

However, now the government has made an international agreement with that country until—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I certainly think that what the member has raised is an issue and people do not trust the Conservatives in terms of what they are saying about this mission.

However, if we are saying the mission is wrong now, why would we continue to ask our troops to stay there until 2009? Although I certainly respect the member's comments around not trusting that the Conservatives will fulfill their commitment to withdraw the troops in 2009, I just cannot see us continuing with this mission when we do not believe that counter-insurgency is the route to go.

• (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Before resuming debate, I want to say that twice in the last five or ten minutes a cellphone has gone off in the House. It is against the rules to have cellphones on in the House and have them ringing.

For the same member, the member for Oakville, who is outside talking on her phone, I just want to say to her, and to anybody else, because she is not the only one and she is not the first one, that it is against the rules to have cellphones ringing in the House.

Let us please desist. I do not want to let one person get away with it, because then somebody else tries it, and somebody else, and the next thing we know we have a culture of cellphones going off in the House of Commons. Let us cut it off right now.

Resuming debate, the member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate and support your point about cellphones, as I think we all do. They are very distracting. We will try to make sure that our cellphones are turned off.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak in support of the NDP motion put forward on Afghanistan. I have been in the House all day listening to the debate. It has been very interesting because there are obviously very strongly held viewpoints from different parties in this House. The points have been well argued. Sometimes there has been passion. Sometimes there has been a bit of conflict in the debate. It has gone back and forth. In a debate like this, we can expect that to happen.

I think it does reflect the kind of public discussion and debate that is also taking place outside this chamber in communities right across the country. We come here reflecting those views on what this mission is about and what Canada should do. What is the future of Canada's role in Afghanistan? That is really what we are getting down to here today.

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I would like to go back for a moment to October 2001, because it was in 2001 that President George W. Bush spoke to the U.S. Congress and uttered his now famous assertion that “you are either with us” or with the terrorists. It was very shortly after that, hours after that, that the brutal bombing of Afghanistan began and, in October 2001 as well, Canada joined what was then Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

Here we are almost six years later, an enormous amount of time, with an enormous human casualty from that war, not to mention what is going on in Iraq. Canada is still deeply complicit in the U.S. war, with no end in sight, despite, I believe very strongly, Canadians' growing anxiety and opposition.

I have heard from many constituents on this issue in Vancouver East, and indeed from Canadians across the country, who have expressed to me their very deep concern about the war in Afghanistan and Canada's participation and where it is headed. In fact, many people draw the links between the war on Iraq and the war in Afghanistan and the American government's agenda to use military force in the name of fighting terrorism.

There are a lot of people who see this new global reality as something that is very dangerous and harmful. It really demands of us as parliamentarians that we provide some answers as to Canada's willing involvement and support for this agenda being put forward so powerfully, with such destruction, by the U.S. government. We are very involved in it.

Let us then fast forward to March 2003, when, thank goodness, the then prime minister, Jean Chrétien, made the right decision following enormous public pressure, not the least of which was from the NDP in this House day after day, and said that Canada should not participate in the war and invasion in Iraq. That decision was made. I believe it was the right decision. It was supported by the Canadian people. People have understood it to be an illegal occupation.

Nevertheless, Canada was still involved in Afghanistan. Again, I think that many people have drawn the link that our involvement in Afghanistan is helping the U.S. administration's effort in the war in Iraq, because it of course has a huge number of troops in Iraq. The Americans have a large number of troops in Afghanistan. Our complement in Afghanistan is assisting the Americans in terms of the pressures they face in Iraq.

What we have seen since that initial involvement in 2001 that was begun by former prime minister Jean Chrétien, was continued by his successor, the next Liberal prime minister, and now has been escalated by the Conservative government, is something that we are debating today. I think it is a very important debate.

Today in the debate I heard members from the Conservatives and even from the Liberals say they are confused about the NDP position. I want to say and put on the record that I am very proud of the NDP position. I think New Democrats have been clear from day one, because we have questioned and we have opposed this mission and we will continue to do so.

• (1655)

We will continue to speak out and demand answers, and in fact to some of the same questions the Conservatives asked when they were in opposition, ironically, and we will continue to call for the safe and

immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan because we believe that is actually the right thing to do.

We believe that Canada has gone down the track a long way on a wrong mission that is now supported by fewer and fewer Canadians. We can see from the debate in the House today and over the last few days on the question of detainees just how controversial even the question of detainees is becoming.

Right now Canada spends nine times as much on military combat in Afghanistan as it does on aid and development in Afghanistan. We believe that fighting the counter-insurgency is not going to resolve Afghanistan's security problems. What Afghanistan needs now is a peace agreement. Therefore, Canada should pull its troops out and take leadership. We should be using our influence in the international community within NATO in creating opportunities for peace and increasing significantly our support for reconstruction aid and development.

I have been involved as a peace activist for over 30 years. I believe very strongly that Canada has a responsibility to uphold international law, human rights and social justice, both in Canada and around the globe.

I believe that the NDP position has been very principled. It has been a position of integrity. It came from our convention, where our members spoke loudly and clearly. Again I think that is reflective of large numbers of Canadians who said that this was the wrong mission for Canada.

We have had a lot of debate today about the Liberal motion that came forward in the House on April 19. I have heard many Liberals say it is terrible that the NDP was supporting the Conservatives. Let us be very clear about what took place here. I have to say that I found it impossible to support the motion that was put forward by the Liberals on their opposition day, as did all of my colleagues, because it was a wrong motion.

Basically that motion confirmed the position that had been laid out by the Conservatives and voted on in May 2006. This was not an issue of the NDP supporting the Conservatives. Nothing could be further from the truth. We were opposing a Liberal motion that we believed to be utterly wrong because it confirmed the vote that took place in May 2006 and it confirmed the position of that party.

Let us actually go back to that vote, because that was the critical test. That was the critical point at which this House had to make a decision. It was a government motion that was laid down as to whether or not our involvement in Afghanistan would be extended until February 2009.

We had a choice. We had a decision to make. That choice was made. It was very close. As we know, 149 votes were in favour of extending the mission for a further two years and 145 were against. Four votes separated that decision. I would remind the members of the House that there were 22 Liberals who voted with the government on that day. There were also many Liberals who were absent.

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That was the test. That was the measure in terms of where we were going as a Parliament representing the Canadian people and Canadian views. It is incredibly regrettable. At that time we had an opportunity to say to the government that we would not extend that mission, but because of the position the Liberals took that unfortunately did not happen, so here we are today now confirming that position that has been taken by the Conservative government.

I would like to quote from a very good report done by James Laxer, in the "Mission of Folly", where he says:

The war in Afghanistan, like the struggle in Iraq, is doing more to promote the cause of terrorism throughout the Islamic world than it is doing to win the so-called War on Terror. The argument made by some that to advocate withdrawal is appeasement and that we have a choice between fighting this enemy in Asia or on our own doorstep is a completely phony one.

Like previous invasions of Afghanistan, this one is almost certain to end in failure. Eventually, the West will decide to pull its troops out, leaving an even more despoiled country to sort out itself.

That is the real tragedy in this horrible situation that has unfolded. The Soviets could not do it with 140,000 troops and a massive intervention.

• (1700)

We need to be very honest. That is a very brutal assessment. We need to have a very honest assessment and to be clear that this military mission has no end. It has no clear strategy. It has no sense of what it will accomplish. It is something that, as we know from the government's own admission, could go on for 10, 15 or 20 years. We say that is wrong. Change the mission. Begin a peace agreement. Begin aid and reconstruction and development. Use Canada's influence in the traditional way that has met with success. That is what we should be doing.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am confused about the NDP's position on the mission in Afghanistan. I will explain why I am confused. Last August, last September, last fall, last year, the NDP demanded the immediate withdrawal of all Canadian troops from Afghanistan, point final. But today, the NDP is demanding the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from "the counter-insurgency mission". In other words, the NDP is demanding the complete withdrawal of troops, but only from southern Afghanistan.

Which is it? Is the NDP demanding the complete withdrawal of all Canadian military personnel from Afghanistan, or is that party demanding the withdrawal of troops only from southern Afghanistan? Which of the two positions is it? I would like some clarification on the NDP's position on this.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I have been in the House all day so I have heard the member be confused all day, and I am sorry for that. I have a feeling that my response is not going to end his confusion. I have a feeling that he would like to remain confused because it happens to be a convenient question.

When we look at the position of the parties in this House, the NDP has been very consistent in its position, even going back to 2001, in terms of the questions we have raised, the position we have taken, the motion at our convention, the motion before us today, which is to say that we should be withdrawing our troops, we should be ending the military mission.

We certainly are not saying that we will abandon Afghanistan. Our leader was very clear on that today. The member maybe was not here to hear that. We have been very clear that we think there is a different kind of role that Canada should be playing.

We should be at the point where we are now using our influence in the world with our NATO allies, with people in Afghanistan, to actually engage in a peace process. We are not alone in that. I know the Conservatives do not like to hear that, but we are not alone in that position. There is a growing body of academics and former foreign affairs officials who are saying exactly the same thing, as are former military personnel and present military personnel.

I know the Conservatives do not want to hear it, but that is the reality of the debate that is taking place.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I doubt the member for Wellington—Halton Hills was greatly enlightened from what he was before the answer to the question.

What strikes me as very strange indeed in the motion is that the NDP calls for us to notify NATO of our intention to begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now in a safe and secure manner from the counter-insurgency mission in Afghanistan.

Apparently according to the NDP all we have to do is notify that we are going to be withdrawing in a safe and secure manner. I do not know what a safe and secure manner would be from a combat zone. All our allies would just sort of understand and say, "Well, have a nice day. We appreciate your coming. Safe trip home."

I appreciate the wishful thinking on the part of the NDP, but if Canada is to be taken seriously in this mission and indeed around the world, it does need to be serious and give a very clear timeline as to what its commitment is.

The commitment from this Parliament and indeed from the government is to February 2009. I do not understand why the NDP refuses to accept the will of Parliament on this matter.

• (1705)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is very unfortunate that sometimes the debate becomes very trivialized.

The motion has been put forward with the most serious intent. Certainly it does say that we should notify NATO of our intention to begin withdrawing Canadian Forces now in a safe and secure manner. Obviously, that is something that is worked out in terms of the process.

I just do not understand why the member would call into question that kind of language. It is the kind of language that would be used when signifying an intent to change a position. I really do not understand the question other than it is really just a bit of a cheap shot.

The real issue here is to recognize that the Liberals through their own motion have signified their support for the Conservative mission to February 2009. That is what they want to hide behind.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my speaking time with the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

I am pleased to participate in today's debate on the motion introduced by my NDP colleagues concerning the future of the mission in Afghanistan.

The Bloc Québécois' position can be summarized as follows: we oppose this motion because it calls for a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan. Canada must inform its allies before withdrawing its troops. On the basis of the information available at the moment, the Bloc believes that the mission should end in February 2009. Between now and then, we are calling on the government to reconfigure operations there. Unfortunately, the use of force is necessary, and at this stage, a solely diplomatic and humanitarian solution is bound to fail.

We believe that NATO must be informed now that Canadian troops will not remain in Afghanistan beyond 2009.

That being said, sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan would be irresponsible toward the people and the government of Afghanistan, as well as toward our allies, who are counting on Canada's collaboration until then.

However, it would be just as irresponsible to carry out this international mission without modifying our approach or accepting criticism, as the Prime Minister is doing. We must find a better balance.

The Quebec nation has its own set of values and interests. The Bloc Québécois' role is to express these values and interests internationally and in Parliament. Every time the Bloc has to take a stand, it tries to imagine what a sovereign Quebec government would do, given the same circumstances.

We are not like the other opposition parties. We have won a majority of the seats in Quebec in each of the five elections in which we participated, which means that we represent Quebec in Ottawa.

Quebeckers have everything to gain from advances in international law, multilateralism, and better distribution of wealth among rich and poor countries.

We do not believe that we should respond to terrorism with force, but that when force becomes necessary, it must be grounded in international law and the principles underlying the charter of the United Nations.

Those are the guiding principles we have applied in the case of Afghanistan.

The international community's activities in Afghanistan are a test for the United Nations, for NATO and for the future of multilateral interventions around the world.

The reconstruction efforts are focused on fighting poverty, injustice and corruption, all of which create fertile ground for terrorism and instability.

This is why the Bloc Québécois supported this international intervention from the beginning, and continues to support it.

However, we have no intention of blindly supporting the Canadian government, its policies and its decisions.

This explains our refusal to give the government a blank cheque at the vote in May 2006 on extending Canada's mission.

The Conservative government would like to engage us in a never-ending "war on terror" alongside the American administration.

The Minister of National Defence said that Canada was at war in Afghanistan in retribution for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He does not realize that we are long past September 11 and have moved on to a new stage.

In the beginning, western countries decided to intervene in Afghanistan to prevent al-Qaeda from carrying out more terrorist attacks under the protection of the Taliban regime. In doing so, we had the opportunity to stop the atrocities being committed against the Afghan people. At the time, the Bloc Québécois supported this international intervention.

Once the Taliban had been removed from power and the terrorists had been scattered, disrupted and driven into hiding, the nature of the intervention had to be drastically altered.

After the departure of the Taliban, the priority was to help Afghans rebuild their country, to not return to how things were before 2002. The United Nations then came into the picture.

●(1710)

At the 2001 Bonn conference and the 2002 Tokyo conference, the international community set the objective of focussing international intervention on reconstruction of the country.

Rebuilding the Afghan state requires ensuring security until the Afghan government can take responsibility for protecting its territory. However, it is unrealistic to believe that security can be provided by military means alone. Defeating the Taliban regime was relatively easy; achieving peace and rebuilding a viable Afghan state is a far more demanding task. The fundamental objective of the international coalition and the United Nations is to reconstruct the economy, the democracy and a viable Afghan state enabling Afghans to take control of their country and their development.

Afghanistan is one of the most impoverished and devastated countries on the planet. Per capita income is less than \$1 per day, child mortality is very high and life expectancy is no more than 45 years. We are talking about a country with the youngest population in the world. We must give these young people hope for the future. It was in this context that the London conference was held in early 2006, bringing together the Afghan government and the international community. On that occasion, the participants adopted the Afghanistan compact, and set goals and a five-year timetable to improve three key areas: security and governance; the rule of law and human rights; and economic and social development.

The Canadian government must explain to the people that we are not in Afghanistan to serve American interests or to wage war. The Prime Minister must also clearly recognize that the situation is about to become critical in southern Afghanistan and, that if nothing is done to address it, we run the risk of getting stuck there. He must acknowledge the urgency and the need for real progress in the areas of development and humanitarian aid before the summer and the next Taliban offensive.

The Prime Minister must show leadership on the world stage and convince NATO and our allies in Afghanistan to change the direction of the international intervention quickly and thoroughly, and to do more.

He should also quickly correct the deplorable way he is conducting his foreign policy. The Conservative government has alienated a number of Canada's partners on the world stage. It has done so at the worst possible time, when it should be convincing our allies to contribute more to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Some changes are essential, and these changes are necessary and urgent. The reason for the urgency is that the situation has deteriorated since 2006, especially in the south and the east.

Between 2002 and 2005 there was some notable progress: free elections were held; the foundation for rule of law was laid; the economy grew; real progress was made in the creation of an Afghan army; there was significant mine clearance; schools and clinics were built; and infrastructure was restored. However, since the beginning of 2006, things have been spiralling out of control. There is still time to change the direction of international intervention, but it is becoming an urgent matter. We will not earn the support of the Afghan people simply by fighting the Taliban with weapons and chasing them into the mountains. I must say that the first major change that needs to happen in Afghanistan is to make clear and tangible development aid a top priority. The objectives of the international community must first and foremost be the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan and its democracy.

Since I am short on time, I will not take this any further, but these are a few of the reasons why we are voting against today's motion.

• (1715)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a little over a year ago, the hon. member for Saint-Jean promised our soldiers the support of the Bloc Québécois. He said in this House:

Imagine how soldiers would feel tomorrow if we could tell them that 270 of 308 members of Parliament voted in favour of this mission.

Has the hon. member of the opposition thought about the effect it would have on our soldiers in Afghanistan, to learn that this House refused to promise them its support? Has the member thought for a second about how devastating this would be for their morale?

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I believe the hon. member has misunderstood what I said. We oppose the motion as it is currently worded.

Furthermore, for the past few days, the government has been telling everyone that the Bloc, in particular, does not support the soldiers. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are proud of the soldiers fighting for the freedom of the Afghan people and we

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support the work they are doing. Soldiers do what they are asked to do. What we are questioning, however, is how the government can get away with, first of all, not providing our troops with the tools they need and, second, not giving them realistic objectives.

We are saying that war is one thing. Sending our soldiers is one thing. But it is another thing altogether to focus only on one way to achieve results. There is also the whole development aspect that is extremely important and deserves an equal amount of attention.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc member said just a few moments ago that our goal should be to provide concrete assistance to reconstruction and humanitarian activity. I am a little confused by that statement.

I want to ask the member this. Does she not recognize that our soldiers are preventing the Taliban from killing the humanitarian aid workers, the people engaged in rebuilding the infrastructure, the people engaged in training the police forces, and the people engaged in training the new government in forms of democracy?

Does she not think in any way that this is some type of concrete assistance to the rebuilding of Afghanistan? Does she not understand that this is an integral part that must be accomplished, that must be carried out, in order to assist aid workers and the Afghan government? Otherwise, the Taliban insurgents would kill them.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, what I understand is that Canada is one of the partners in Afghanistan. What our party is saying about the war is that we believe our efforts have been sufficient in that regard. Our citizens want us to be engaged in reconstruction and development. Other countries are involved. Canada could perhaps use diplomacy to ensure that others contribute what is required to the war effort.

As far as we are concerned, our citizens are asking the Government of Canada to now put itself in the reconstruction and development mode. In my opinion, the Canadian government should respect the will of the people.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the motion calls for the troops to withdraw in a safe and secure manner. This, of course, is an interesting concept in a combat zone. I wonder if the hon. member could flesh out for us what she considers to be a safe and secure manner. It does strike one as a bit naive under the circumstances.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Mr. Speaker, the member may consider it naive, but what I said earlier is that there is a situation throughout the country. We do not understand why only Canada is contributing in the combat zone. Our citizens want us to work on development. In Afghanistan, there are areas where that is happening and we could be there and put more emphasis on that aspect. We should not put all our money into the war effort; it should also be allocated to reconstruction and development efforts.

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate.

I would like to inform the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord that he has four minutes for his speech.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on the NDP motion about military operations in Afghanistan.

As I said last week, I want to commend the people in my riding, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, and the Canadian Forces personnel from 3 Wing Bagotville who are serving in Afghanistan. I salute their bravery and their generosity.

The NDP motion has some similarities to the Liberal motion we debated last week. The difference is this: the NDP take the position that Canada should put an end to this mission immediately, whereas the Bloc, like the Liberal Party, believes that we should tell the international community that the mission will end in February 2009.

It is true that, whatever disagreements the members of this House may have about the mission in Afghanistan, we still have full confidence in the men and women on the ground.

Even though we supported the Liberal motion, we propose a rebalancing of the operations in Afghanistan, particularly in regard to Canada's strategy for supporting peace in Afghanistan and the mandate and methods of the Canadian Forces.

The House of Commons has made a commitment until 2009, and it must honour that commitment. To my NDP colleagues, I say that it would be irresponsible for the members of this House to support this motion.

Just imagine what would happen if the Government of Canada adopted such a motion. Imagine how the members of the coalition, NATO and the International Security Assistance Force would react. We would be sending the message that we are giving up, and that could tarnish Quebec's and Canada's international reputation.

It is crucial, however, that we inform our allies that the Canadian Forces will no longer have a mandate in Afghanistan in February 2009.

The Bloc Québécois has always supported sending troops to Afghanistan as part of a NATO mission. Unfortunately, that mission has become a war operation. The framework of the operation has changed, but Parliament has made a commitment until February 2009, and we must honour that commitment.

The Bloc Québécois deplores the fact that this motion suggests that we withdraw. Once again, we will vote against the NDP motion.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:27 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Monday, April 30, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of Bill C-299, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act and the Competition Act (personal information obtained by fraud), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question of the motion to concur in at report stage

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having rise:

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 2, 2007, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If I have been following what has just transpired in the last few moments correctly, according to procedure we have to go immediately to adjournment.

• (1730)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I was tempted to do something that I would not like to do, which is to suspend until the hour of adjournment.

Adjournment Proceedings

The hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, while we regret very much that the members opposite did not recognize that this was report stage of a private member's bill and we could have proceeded to debate on third reading, I guess we have to forgive the Liberals for not being on the bit today.

Therefore, I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you seek unanimous consent now to see the clock as 6:30 p.m., so that we can go forward to adjournment proceedings.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, with all due respect to my learned colleague from Edmonton—Sherwood Park, I believe if we follow correct House procedures, we do not need unanimous consent to see the clock as 6:30 p.m., we immediately go to adjournment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I appreciate the contributions of both hon. members and of course the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is right.

It was with pleasure that I listened to the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park, especially that in order to achieve our aim we needed to have the specific members involved in the House, and I know that they are in the House now.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period on March 21, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development neglected to answer my question on aboriginal poverty. His responses were a deflection whereby he falsely claimed that I had committed to certain positions that in fact I had not committed to, and he neglected to speak to the issue of aboriginal poverty.

At one time though the same minister called aboriginal poverty the most pressing social issue that we faced as a nation. I too agree with the minister's comment, but I am dismayed that this meanspirited government has failed to take action to combat this very pressing issue.

First nations people experience horrific poverty across the country and it is not disputed by anyone. One in four first nations children live in poverty. This is compared to one in six children of the non-aboriginal population. Twenty-seven thousand first nations children are in care, most often because of the impoverished circumstances in which they live. One in eight are disabled, double that of the non-aboriginal population of Canadian children. Suicide rates are incredibly high, accounting for 38% of all deaths of first nation youth.

Their homes are unbelievably over-crowded. In some instances, 28 people live in a two bedroom home. This is in large part due to the lack of social housing in first nations communities and a lack of commitment by the government to remedy this issue. Many of their homes are contaminated with mould.

Many first nations people have to boil their water. Responses to a water strategy only comes about when there is a diversion of funds from other capital projects, such as education.

First nations people are more susceptible to disease. We know that diabetes and tuberculosis in particular are rampant. We heard earlier today and this week about tuberculosis in residential schools in the past century. I hope the day does not come when aboriginal peoples will come to us to ask for an apology for the neglect that has been imposed on them by not dealing with tuberculosis at the moment.

Eighty per cent of first nations people have personal incomes below \$30,000 and more than half are unemployed.

These living conditions are unacceptable. This is a country that the minister likes to speak of as being a compassionate country, but it is a compassion that the government certainly lacks as it has failed aboriginal Canadians. It has not done enough.

It says that it has spent \$10.2 billion, but it has miscalculated because it includes legal obligations. It will not apologize for the residential schools legacy and has totally ignored the Kelowna accord, which we know from aboriginal people across the country provided an opportunity for hope.

Aboriginal people across the country area starting to speak out in peaceful protest. Collaboration and consultation seem to not be available with the government. The role seems to be one of intimidation, and peaceful protest seems to be the only way of responding.

• (1735)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend speaks of aboriginal poverty, but I am proud to point out that since assuming office, Canada's new government has made significant progress in a number of areas that address the root causes of poverty, issues concerning housing, employment and skills development, and family supports. Budget 2007 is supporting this progress with real resources.

Unlike the Liberals who left Canada's aboriginal people with nothing but empty promises, we are moving forward with real action to improve the lives of all aboriginal Canadians.

For instance, in keeping with a commitment in budget 2007, on April 20 Canada's new government announced a \$300 million fund dedicated to the development of a housing market in first nation communities, including innovative approaches to support the development of individual home ownership on reserve. This represents an estimated 25,000 homes over the next 10 years.

Adjournment Proceedings

What is more, budget 2007 commits \$105 million over five years to the aboriginal skills and employment partnership. As a result of this investment, an additional 9,000 aboriginal individuals will receive skills training and an additional 6,500 will secure sustainable skilled jobs.

Furthermore, in order to identify an effective legislative solution to the difficult issue of on reserve matrimonial real property, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women's Association of Canada conducted consultations across the country in the fall of 2006. These are now complete and Ms. Wendy Grant-John, the ministerial representative for this initiative, has produced a report that was tabled in the House on April 20. We welcomed Ms. Grant-John's recommendations and are looking forward to introducing legislation this spring.

Jobs, housing and stable, healthy communities are the elements that will ensure the eradication of poverty for aboriginal people and provide them with the tools they need to build prosperous communities for the present and a brighter more promising future for their children. Working with our aboriginal, provincial and territorial partners, and backed by the resources of budget 2007, we have and we will work to build on the progress we have made in these areas.

Our commitment is firm. We have and we will make headway on addressing the issues that plague far too many aboriginal people and communities. Our approach is moving us steadily forward, and we will continue this progress.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, those may be fine words, but it is empty rhetoric.

The member spoke of the \$300 million for housing on reserve. It is the same \$300 million that was announced last year and not acted upon. He talked about the housing market and the 25,000 homes. We have to ensure people have sufficient income to take advantage of market opportunities. We know from the numbers I have cited that this is not the case.

The member has neglected to mention the water situation that many people are living with and the fact that his government has chosen to divert money from education projects in order to respond to it.

I want to read to the House something that I received from a gentleman from Winnipeg, talking about poverty. He said, "I'm talking about the evil of poverty that—

• (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Rod Bruinoog (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform for filling in on my behalf.

I again point out that the member opposite and her party had a number of years throughout the nineties to address so many of the

issues with which aboriginal people throughout Canada are faced. We can look back to their attempts to bring changes to governance, but unfortunately it was neglected by the previous prime minister when he had the opportunity to bring that back.

This government has moved forward with the residential school compensation. We were able to finalize that agreement, and we are delivering on it right now, with initial payments being brought forward to the claimants.

The member mentioned drinking water. In fact, the minister has brought forward remediation of the terrible situation that was left at our feet. The minister has brought forward drinking water standards.

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 18 I had the opportunity to ask a question to the Minister of International Trade, and I will do it again here tonight.

In September the government announced its version of the softwood lumber deal. In reality, the deal was little more than a sellout to the United States, leaving \$1 billion of Canadian company money in the hands of the United States.

The forest industry in Canada is in crisis and instead of recognizing the insecurity of thousands of families across Canada and fighting to protect their jobs, the government would rather appease its American counterparts.

Thousands of jobs have been lost in northern Ontario alone and countless mills have been closed down. Communities have been devastated by these mill closures. In 2005 Abitibi announced the closure of their operation in Kenora, 500-plus jobs gone. A week later in Dryden 100 or more jobs were gone. Last year, just one week before Christmas, the Ignace sawmill went down and 50 jobs were lost. This was a direct result of the softwood lumber deal and the quotas that the Ontario government was forced to accept.

Our communities in northern Ontario are dependent on an integrated forest industry. We need a federal government that is taking an active role in protecting and supporting our communities, not one that is protecting our competitor's industry.

It is not only the municipalities that have been abandoned by the Conservative government, but many first nations communities have been adversely affected by this shoddy deal. Many aboriginal people and aboriginal businesses are being hurt by this. McKenzie Forest Products Inc. in Hudson just lost 90 jobs last month. Many of those workers were from first nations.

Across Canada 17,000 aboriginal people are employed in the forestry sector and 1,400 aboriginal businesses are impacted by this industry. We need to support these types of initiatives, not abandon them.

Adjournment Proceedings

It is not my intention this evening to debate the merits of the deal, which are very few. It is however my intention to question the minister on the false sense of security the Conservative government tried to provide to the industry. Nearly seven months later, after the Minister of International Trade announced that he had achieved in this so-called deal, the Americans are back criticizing the operations of our industry. The letter sent by President Bush's trade representative on March 30 to the minister requests formal consultations regarding several programs in Ontario with which they are not happy.

The minister promised peace and now the United States is back with concerns over programs ranging from loan guarantees, which are essential to our industry, to initiatives meant to assist companies with construction and maintenance of access roads, and the list is long.

The Americans are questioning the safety of some of the roads we use and they are not allowing the \$75 million that Ontario put toward making these roads safe and usable for the companies.

The letter also mentions a request for consultations on programs intended to strengthen our industry and ensure its sustainability, such as value added manufacturing. Essentially, the United States has taken issue with the Canadian industry ensuring its competitiveness in the world market, and our government is letting it. The extent of the sellout is becoming only too clear: forest sector loans; prosperity fund; \$75 million for access roads; northern Ontario grow bonds; and Ontario wood promotion.

Everything that the Ontario government has done to try to help the forest industry and the people who live in our communities is now back on the table.

When will the minister admit that he has failed to protect the forest industry in Ontario? When will he stand up to the United States and stop selling out Canada's forest industry?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the question asked by the hon. member concerning the United States' reaction to certain provincial programs announced by Ontario. I would like to take this opportunity to once again remind my colleagues of the wide ranging benefits of this great agreement.

Key lumber producing provinces like British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, as well as a clear majority of the industry players signalled their strong support for the agreement from an early stage. We worked hard together with the provinces and industry to address a broad range of concerns.

The final agreement reflects this work. It revokes the U.S. duty orders and terminates all litigation. It provides at least seven years of stability to the Canadian softwood lumber industry. It includes a number of initiatives to make North America's lumber industry more competitive over the long term. And importantly, it safeguards the provinces' ability to manage their forests.

The softwood lumber agreement was and is the single best way forward for this industry and the hundreds of thousands of Canadians in communities that rely on it every single day.

I can assure my colleague, the hon. member for Kenora, that the agreement has not suffered any lack of attention from the Government of Canada. Our work certainly did not end on October 12, the day the agreement entered into force. The enabling legislation was passed on December 14, 2006. The government has continued to consult closely with provinces and industry as we work to implement the agreement. Federal officials are in regular contact through conference calls and face to face meetings with their provincial counterparts and continue to consult with industry stakeholders. For example, federal officials have held several consultation sessions with industry in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec during the last three months.

As provided for under the agreement, we have established a binational softwood lumber committee to supervise the administration of the agreement. Its inaugural meeting took place in Washington, D.C. on February 22 and 23, 2007.

This meeting was an opportunity for representatives from Canada and the United States to have a useful discussion on issues related to the softwood lumber agreement, issues of importance to Canada, such as setting up a process for determining regional exemptions from export measures and possible exclusions for softwood lumber products made from logs harvested from private lands.

The softwood lumber committee also established three technical working groups that began exchanging information and that will continue to facilitate communication between Canadian and American technical experts to assist in the smooth administration of the agreement.

As has been reported, the United States indicated prior to the meeting that it intended to raise some questions about certain programs implemented by the federal, Ontario and Quebec governments aimed at addressing certain challenges faced by the softwood lumber industry.

Ontario and Quebec government officials participated in the softwood lumber committee meeting and their respective programs were discussed with the United States. As my colleague the hon. Minister of International Trade already stated, this was a very cordial first meeting with positive, constructive dialogue taking place.

Following the softwood lumber committee meeting, the United States requested consultations under the agreement on a number of provincial programs as well as federal programs and Canada's interpretation of a provision of the agreement. As the government has pointed out before, consultations involve a more formal exchange of information and are designed to help resolve differences through a better understanding of the measures at issue.

The consultations occurred in Ottawa on April 19, 2007 between Canada and the American federal officials. Provincial officials from Ontario and Quebec attended the consultations for the portion of the discussion related to their respective provincial programs. The consultations were constructive and positive and provided a useful opportunity to clarify issues and concerns identified by the United States. U.S. officials are now reviewing the information that Canada provided and will contact us if they have any further questions or concerns.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we have always maintained, both Canada and the United States have an interest in ensuring the agreement operates smoothly. Disagreements are inevitable in administering and implementing such a complex agreement. It was for this reason that we included in the agreement various provisions to allow for a full exchange—

• (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Kenora.

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that answer, but in his comments he promised seven years and we did not even get seven good months and they are back for formal consultations. They can use the excuse of the market in the United States, and there are lots of excuses they can use, but when an industry, one of the largest in Canada, is in crisis, the government has to respond. The government has to support and acknowledge the importance of this industry. It owes it to the forestry workers and their families not only in Ontario, but right across Canada.

When the going got tough, the Conservatives sold out to American lumber lobbyists and left \$1 billion behind. That is Canadian company money and guess what? They are back now. There is no more money to take so now they are after the forestry jobs in Ontario. When will the Conservatives support every part of Canada and support us in our forest sector?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that for 13 years the Liberals could not get this done.

The world is a competitive place. As trading partners and as a continent we are competing directly for business and investment dollars with places like Europe and Asia. The softwood lumber agreement is a good reminder of how Canada and the U.S. can work together through our own domestic challenges and turn our focus on creating a more competitive North American lumber industry.

I have to remind the member that he voted against this deal. He voted against security for the softwood lumber industry. He voted against return of duties to the industry. He voted against jobs for workers in the softwood industry. He voted against communities that rely on the softwood industry. While his party did nothing, our minister got the job done because the Liberals could not get it done.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

[*English*]

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 5:50 p.m.)

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

April 24, 2007 issue of Hansard:

An intervention by Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8628 immediately before the intervention by Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ).

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):

Mr. Speaker, I first wish to inform you, very seriously, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Jeanne-Le Ber. I recognize how important it is to give that kind of information since I am now in a position to fully understand that your job is very demanding and that it requires wit and wisdom.

As far as the Bloc Québécois opposition day motion is concerned, I have to say that environmental issues are amongst the most important concerns on the planet. Without a clean and healthy environment, nothing would be possible and nothing would matter anymore. Inspired by the Earth Day celebrations, I had decided to talk about the little things that each of us can do individually. Simple but effective individual actions are often the key to solving major collective problems. I changed my mind though when I received some very disturbing correspondence from a group of students in my riding who expressed concerns regarding their environment.

I am not an expert on the environment. I yield that role to my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. I am the critic for labour. Astonishingly—if I may be permitted an aside—I notice that the Conservative strategy is the same for almost all issues. When their arguments are weak and they do not agree with our proposals, they launch into a fear campaign and they project total disaster. They are not believable in terms of the effects of the anti-scab legislation and the fear campaign against the Kyoto protocol.

However, as I stated earlier, I am sensitive to the concerns of my fellow citizens. The young children in my riding reminded me recently that this Earth was not handed down to us by our ancestors, but is borrowed from our children. Two teachers of the grade five and six classes of the Courtland Park International School in Saint-Bruno, Laura Sollecito and Madeleine Farrah, sent me letters from some 30 students in their school. Those students want me to be aware of their concerns, in particular, oil spills and their effect on the quality of their environment. They also raised other environmental issues.

It is interesting that they took the time to present their ideas and their solutions to their federal member. They obviously went “outside the box” of their normal school assignments. I want to thank their teachers for their initiative and for sending me these letters. In my opinion, the best response to the entreaties of these students who are concerned about oil spills—the best service that I can render them today is to echo their concerns here in this House, in front of the Minister of the Environment and the Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic Party members.

It makes me feel I am doing my work as a member, by acting to represent the residents of my riding and to defend the interests of

Quebec and also these young men and women of my riding, by bringing to your attention some extracts from the 30 hand-written letters from these young citizens who are extremely aware of their environment. The intelligence and clarity of vision of these young people is astonishing. They are concerned about the environment, as I said earlier. They have the intelligence to reflect on it, to read, to analyze and develop various situations. They are anxious to find solutions. They are also worried to see the deterioration of the planet. They want to see political leaders intervening to stop that deterioration. They also have the intelligence to alert political leaders to their concerns and to share their thoughts. Some of them clearly call on the government and the Minister of the Environment to take action.

One of the letters I received was especially touching. Young Sara Moreau wrote:

Take the time to consider our future and think of what it will be like.

I will have to tell her that her request has been heard by the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, if no one else, who is taking the time to consider our future and to think of what it will be like.

I also received a heartfelt plea from Annie Foisy, who wrote:

I would like you to take a look outside and tell me what you see. I see a horrible world filled with one thing: pollution.

These children are just 10 years old. Others are very anxious, sad, worried and concerned. Laura La Rocque wrote to me, and in so doing, wrote to us all:

We may have tornadoes or even hurricanes if we are not careful enough.

(1510)

Andrew Goill said:

I am writing to you because the earth is dying. There are oil spills every day, which means that every day, we pollute.

Christian Poirier said:

I want to help prevent oil spills because I like nature and oil spills kill wild animals.

Jean-Sébastien Fontaine asked for action:

I am writing because I find it alarming that there is so much pollution and that it is increasing. Also, it seems as though people are not doing anything about this problem.

There is also a personal request from Émilie Rose Fuoco-Laflamme to the Minister of the Environment.

The Minister of the Environment is responsible for the environment, so he should try something before saying that this cannot be stopped.

Now, in response to their requests for action, I am taking action. I am relaying their requests and asking the minister questions. He boasts about representing a new government and claims that he is taking action instead of just talking, so I am asking him to intervene.

Young people in my riding are very candid about asking us to intervene. It is our duty and responsibility to do so. Like 76% of Quebeckers, these young people believe that the government must do whatever is necessary to reach the Kyoto protocol targets. The Bloc Québécois has proposed implementing the polluter-pay principle, setting absolute reduction targets that comply with the Kyoto protocol and enabling Quebec and other provinces that wish to do so to adopt a territorial approach.

The Conservative government must realize that, with its partisan politics, it is denying the reality of climate change. What the government is doing is twisting the facts and numbers to make them say what it wants them to say. It is waging a campaign of fear by changing the premises on which the analysis of the situation is made.

For example, why is the government saying that the elimination of one tonne of greenhouse gases costs \$195, when international experts said, in their report to the UN on April 7, 2007, that it would cost between \$25 and \$50 a tonne? Is it because the Conservative government has its base in Alberta that it is always trying to protect oil companies by penalizing them as little as possible and by refusing to admit the harm that oil companies can cause to the environment?

But in the real world, for people and children who are aware of their environment, it is clear that the minister simply must act. I would add that he must stop saying that the previous government did nothing. I remind him that the Liberals were too often stopped in their efforts—sometimes rather timid, I must admit—by the fierce actions of the Conservatives who then were the official opposition.

The young people who wrote to me asked what the Bloc Québécois was doing to make the environment better. As I said earlier, their concern began with oil spills. I answered that, in the Bloc Québécois, we were well aware of the problems with oil and thought that one of the ways out was to reduce our dependency on oil through applying six principles.

First, we should become more energy efficient, for example by using less energy to heat our homes. Second, we should promote the use of clean energy like that from water, wind and the sun, instead of oil. We would need to replace trucks by trains and ships, which use less oil and gas. We also need to make it easier to buy hybrid vehicles, which generate less pollution, and to make public transit more accessible. And we should also make sure our gasoline contains less oil products and more biofuels. Finally, we should invent other means of transportation and energies that pollute less, like electric cars.

With these six principles Quebeckers would use less oil, they would need to move less petroleum products and thus the risk of spills would be reduced. I would add that these six principles would also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is the subject of the motion before us today.

I should add for their information that the Bloc Québécois brought this debate to the House to make this government change its mind and is suggesting concrete ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve the environment and impose some discipline on the oil industry.

It is really quite motivating to know that these young people are concerned with the well-being of our planet, and that they are ready

to do something personally to make it better. I encourage them very much to keep their interest in their environment—in all meanings of the word—and to demand policies that will change things.

The actions and efforts of the Bloc in this House are far from useless, and they have shown that they are to the point and efficient.

April 24, 2007 issue of Hansard:

An intervention by Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8652 immediately before the intervention by Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.).

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleagues in supporting this bill to declare the week of June 14 national blood donor week, as have 192 other countries around the world. I cannot imagine why anybody would oppose this.

The 192 countries that are members of the World Health Organization have already done this. As a country that cares about its health care and its health care system and wants people to be treated quickly, efficiently and as meets their needs, then we can do no less than acknowledge that.

It is important to look at where we have come from and where we are but also to look at what declaring the week of June 14 blood donor week would really mean and what we might need to do. I think my colleague from Newton—North Delta referred to this earlier.

Let us think about what it used to be like even in 1943 or after the war when blood banks were established and we saw blood being donated and used more frequently in terms of blood donations. We were still seeing babies who died because there was no such thing as transposing blood for a baby who had an O positive mom and an O negative dad and was not able to mix those bloods together. Today we would just do a blood switch, or we could actually treat the mom earlier, but in those days before we had the evolution we have seen now, that baby would have died.

Perhaps members of our families who were in accidents or perhaps in surgeries died from lack of blood being available. It is not that we did not know we could transfuse it. It is not that we did not know it was possible. We had learned that during the war, and actually before that, but there just was not enough. It was not available or the right kind was not available.

We have come a very long way in the last years since the mid-1940s, but what is the current situation today? Let us look at this. We have 192 countries and many provinces that have blood donor days. We celebrate that, but I do not know if everybody truly understands it, because for us in Canada it is a resource that has always been there for us.

In most hon. members' memories, I would think, it has always been there. We have not had to buy it. We certainly do not get money for selling it, as happens in some countries that are actually quite close to us, so we have almost taken it for granted as something that will be there when we need it, but there will be people for whom it will not be there when they need it, particularly when we look at the large scope of what blood products actually are.

I do not know if people really appreciate how little blood people have and how much is used during some major surgeries. Others have referred to this. If one has five litres of blood circulating in the blood system, and if someone has a liver transplant, and I am using a more traumatic event to talk about, one needs 100 litres of blood for the transplant. That means all the blood in the bodies of 60 people is needed for one liver transplant.

I do not think that people understand the full scope of what it takes and the amount of blood it takes to provide quick, efficacious and safe treatment for people who may require a blood transfusion. I have certainly seen this in my own community. When we think that blood is reasonably available, it does not mean that every type is reasonably available.

Can we get O positive most of the time? Sure. Can we get O negative? Sure, but when we start to get into the rarer blood types, it is quite possible for it not to be available even now, particularly if we live in a rural area where there may not be a big enough local population base and blood has to be transported. Certainly that is done, but it does not mean that it is immediately available for everybody.

If our current situation is that only 4% of our eligible population donate blood, that does not mean 4% of all people, so that is a very large load for 4% of the population to carry. If we were to ask 308 people in the House when they last gave blood, I do not know what the answer would be. If every one of us in the House who is eligible to give blood were to commit to do that on a regular basis, what a difference even that would make. What a wonderful commitment that would be. That would be a real celebration of blood donor day on June 14 if the House committed to do that, but this needs a much bigger population than 4% of us.

It becomes a part of everybody's minds when we hear the ad on the radio saying that the long weekend is coming up, particularly in the nice weather, the May 24 weekend and the weekends of July 1 and August 1. The ads say more blood is needed on those weekends because more people will be on the road and there will be more accidents. There is a little surge of people who go in to donate because the ad on the radio has reminded them that they may be able to help. They go in and donate blood, but they do not make it part of their annual routine or every three months or whatever works for people, and that is really what we need to happen.

That is the current situation.

The other thing I would be very concerned about is that we have people who are waiting unconscionable lengths of time for surgery. I would be absolutely appalled if somebody with a rare blood type had to wait a long time for surgery and suddenly the blood needed was not available. I cannot even imagine what that would do to

somebody. That would not happen with a more typical blood type, of course.

Another point that we do not always understand is that bone marrow is considered part of blood donation. It is not that we go in and donate bone marrow, but we do sign up. In the community that the member for Newton—North Delta and I come from, we have had major challenges around bone marrow transplants, because there has to be a registry that is large enough to support a very mixed population in Canada today.

That is great, because we have a very textured and wonderful mix of people, but that means people have not in any way been able to find a bone marrow match. We have had several instances of this in the community of Surrey. People from the South Asian community or the Chinese community, particularly children who have a mom and a dad with different ethnic backgrounds, often find it much harder to get a bone marrow match if there is no family match. People die every day because they cannot find a bone marrow match. We see it on TV. We read those stories.

This legislation would allow a much bigger registry. It does not mean that all those people would then put up their hands if they were called and say that of course they would give bone marrow, because that is a very serious decision, but at least there would be more people to ask for that little four year old who is lying in hospital. Her mom and dad and her sisters and her brothers have no idea what will happen and are totally unable to do anything. Anybody who has children knows how powerless it would feel to watch one's child and know there is not a single solitary thing one can do to find a blood donor or a bone marrow donor and find them fast.

(1840)

Declaring the week of June 14 as national blood donor week is incredibly important, but only if action comes with it, action around awareness. I am not sure that everyone knows the things we have talked about in the House today. We have to get more of that information out.

We have to at least get the information out to younger people. When I go into a blood donor clinic, and I am stereotyping a bit here and it is not to say that everybody who gives blood is older, but I think there are a number of people who have been donating blood for 20 to 30 years. They remember when blood was not always readily available.

As with any kind of education program, we have to start with younger people so they understand. Nobody is asking high school students to give blood, but surely we should be talking about it so that when they are older they will be able to make that decision for themselves.

As others have said, I am not sure everybody realizes as well the number of volunteers who are involved in the collection of blood.

I am pleased to stand and support all of my colleagues in having the week of June 14 declared national blood donor week.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

April 25, 2007 issue of Hansard:

An intervention by Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC) was omitted from the left-hand column of page 8695 immediately after the intervention by The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau).

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC):

(1830)

Mr. Speaker, I encourage the House to support getting Bill S-213 to the committee.

I need to get a couple of items down that I was getting to before my time ran out the last time I was speaking to this.

First, I want to remind the House of the 110,000-plus signatures I tabled in the form of a petition. They are calling for harsher penalties for individuals who abuse, just for the heck of it, animals for whatever motive they may have. The petitioners want animals to be protected.

On these petitions, a great majority of people were opposed to Bill S-213. Because of that and because of the fact that numerous other individuals have contacted me by way of email and other sources and are highly supportive of Bill S-213, it is necessary to move the bill forward to committee to have a close look at it to see if there are things that can be done to make it better and that will satisfy all parties that are concerned.

In regard to the number of signatures on the petition, two young ladies from my riding worked hard to get these signatures. I appreciate their efforts. They did that in memory of a dog in Didsbury, Alberta, called Daisy Duke. The dog died a horrific death for whatever reason. At this point we are not too certain because it is still before the courts.

Because a great chunk of the petition was formulated in my riding, I was able to talk to a great number of people who signed the

petition. They really are not aware of the intent of Bill S-213. This is why it is so important, if this is going to go before the public, if we are going to have a debate, that we have witnesses, like the two young ladies who started this bill and the idea, before the committee to give them an opportunity to express their opposition to the bill and where they feel it can be altered, or amended and fixed.

I also believe we need the opportunity to hear from others who are quite concerned about our treatment of animals. They want a good bill. They want to make certain that ranchers, farmers, hunters, trappers and those people who have legitimate animal businesses are protected from arrest for normal practices that deal with animals.

I think of rodeos, which are big events in my part of the country. Thousands of people participate. It would be a great opportunity at committee to take a close look at the bill and decide what we can do with it in terms of amending it or making it better, if that is possible.

I want to once again commend the people who signed the petition, who got the petition together. It is not often that we table petitions with that many signatures, and I was pleased to do so. However, we need to be very cautious about where we move on this. Whatever we decide could have an impact on a great number of people who deal with animals in one way or another.

Thousands of people in my riding have horses, dogs, pets and anything we can name. Unfortunately, the very few decide that they want to do something really stupid when it comes to the abuse of animals, and I will not tolerate that. I do not think any of us should, but at the same time I do not want to see what I saw with one farmer in my riding. He took a cow that had cancer eye to auction and he was charged by the SPCA. The only reason he took the cow in was to cull it out. Nothing can be done for cancer eye. It is due to normal causes, yet he was fined for abuse to an animal.

That kind of thing happened to my friend, Dave, and the cost to him was very unfortunate. We have to make certain that we look after people who I know love what they do and will do their utmost to look after the care and welfare of their animals.

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