



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 053 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, February 25, 2008**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 25, 2008

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[*English*]

### INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from February 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-219, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction for volunteer emergency service), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to join in today's debate on Bill C-219, if for no other reason than to spend a moment talking about what emergency service volunteers, especially our volunteer firefighters, mean to communities across Canada.

I do not believe that anyone in the House would argue the notion that we as a society tend to have an elevated view, and rightly so, of those among us who don the uniform of the firefighter, if not for the risks they take, then for the noble purpose for which they take them in the service of others and their communities.

It is little wonder that Edward F. Croker, a New York City fire department chief in the early 1900s and a pioneer in the movement to safeguard against fire hazards, once remarked:

When a man becomes a fireman his greatest act of bravery has been accomplished. What he does after that is all in the line of work.

That sentiment of gratitude and respect is especially true in smaller communities and towns in Canada, places where, amazingly to many of us, firefighters serve voluntarily in addition to their regular 7 to 3, 3 to 11 or 11 to 7 work duties. Or he or she may be a small business owner.

These men and women are ready to serve their communities at any hour, night or day. They serve in circumstances of grave danger to their own personal safety. As Mike Walsh, past president of the Canadian Volunteer Fire Services Association, noted:

Volunteer firefighters are the first-line defenders against many domestic threats involving fire, medical emergencies, hazardous materials, motor vehicle accidents and rescues....

With every call and every fire, these brave men and women face consequences that we would rather not contemplate, because our heroes are not supposed to die.

But they do. They are heroes like Gary Bryant. Mr. Bryant was a member of the 24-person Wolfe Island volunteer fire department in the Kingston, Ontario area. A few years back, Mr. Bryant tragically passed away in the line of duty. His colleagues and friends remembered him as a human being who put his community before himself. As one close friend noted, "To Gary, everybody came before him".

Wolfe Island volunteer fire chief James White recalled a man who was very eager to join the fire department because he wanted to "give back to the community", a community for which he would make the ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice few of us have the inner strength to even consider. That is why, as Chief White sombrely remarked, we should "be proud of him because he died as a hero to us", a hero to us in life and in death. And so we honour and thank them all.

As legislators, though, we can and do thank them with more than mere words. We can thank them by supporting their efforts. That is why I was so pleased when my government's last budget included an important measure to assist firefighters to ensure they have the training they need to safely and effectively react to emergencies.

A key part of that means helping them deal with hazardous materials, including chemical and biological emergencies. Do members know that volunteer firefighters are an integral part of our emergency measures plans all across Canada? That is why budget 2007 provided \$1 million to the Canadian arm of the International Association of Fire Fighters to help put in place a hazardous materials training program, which is available to all first responders such as firefighters.

IAFF general president Harold Schaitberger hailed that announcement as a major advance for public and first responder safety in Canada and expressed his gratitude to the government for "listening to the IAFF and acting decisively on this issue".

• (1105)

Local fire departments also welcomed the announcement. Bruce Carpenter, a firefighter in St. Catharines, Ontario, and the IAFF's 13th District vice-president for Ontario and Manitoba, said:

*Private Members' Business*

With the announcement in Budget 2007 to fund the IAFF's training programs in Canada, the Conservative government has demonstrated that it's serious about public safety and about protecting Canadians and Canadian first responders from the aftermath of a haz-mat or CBRN incident.

The income tax system also includes measures to support our emergency service volunteers. Presently under the current Income Tax Act rules, volunteers can receive honoraria from a public authority of up to \$1,000 exempt from income tax, meaning they pay no tax on the first \$1,000 they receive from a public authority.

That brings us to the measure under debate today, one that is very similar to two unsuccessful ones proposed and previously debated in the 37th and 38th Parliaments, one of which, in fact, was voted against by the Liberal member sponsoring this bill.

This proposal, somewhat like the previous two, seeks to establish a tax deduction for emergency service volunteers who do not qualify for the existing \$1,000 income tax exemption. More precisely, the proposed bill would allow qualifying emergency service volunteers to deduct from their income tax between \$1,000 and \$2,000 depending upon the number of hours volunteered.

However, as we move forward, we must recall that very similar proposals have been defeated twice after concerns were raised by members of this House and at the Standing Committee on Finance, concerns ranging from equity, physical cost and complexity to the definitional issues and effectiveness.

For example, some people have suggested that such a proposal would provide no relief for volunteers with little or no taxable income. Others contend that it will only add administrative complexity for both the volunteer organizations and the volunteers themselves, while yet others feel that it fails to clearly define who should be considered an emergency service volunteer. These concerns and many others were raised by the all party Standing Committee on Finance when it recommended that the House not proceed with a nearly identical piece of legislation in 2005.

What is surprising, considering that a Liberal member has sponsored this legislation, is the degree to which some of his current colleagues have been critical of similar legislation in the past and the tenor of that criticism.

Let us consider that his Liberal colleague from Richmond Hill once stated that such a measure:

—would hardly be fair or reasonable from the perspective of other persons who also contribute to society.

For instance, consider the plight of a single parent of young children working at a fast food restaurant. This person probably has little time to devote to volunteer activities and thus could not gain access to the deduction because he or she is raising young children, and yet the worker's income is fully subject to taxation.

Or what about his Liberal colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, who scorned such a proposal, remarking that it would be “difficult to justify to other Canadians who work at low wage jobs” and that it would “put a value on one type of volunteerism as opposed to others”.

As well, the Liberal member for Halifax West dismissed a similar bill by simply saying:

I do not see that this bill is going to make it more likely that we will have more volunteers in our society.

Plainly as we move forward there will be certain questions that must be addressed when undertaking a thorough examination of the issues surrounding such a proposal, but what cannot and will not be questioned is our unresolved gratitude and admiration for those brave men and women who give of themselves so selflessly, heroes like Gary Bryant.

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, speaking to a bill like this one is a wonderful way to start the week. This bill would improve tax deductions for volunteer firefighters. It would also apply to volunteer ambulance technicians and to volunteers who assist in the search and rescue of individuals or in other emergency situations. It would apply to anyone considered to be a first responder.

The initiative of the member for Malpeque deserves our support; however, we must be careful not to turn this into a partisan issue.

The maximum deduction for a volunteer firefighter is currently \$1,000. I have represented a rural area for 15 years, and I know what a valuable contribution volunteer firefighters make to society. There are a few women, but the volunteers are primarily men. These men have other jobs and agree to training so that they are prepared to fight fires. They also work hard on fire prevention.

I currently represent the regional county municipalities of Montmagny, L'Islet, Kamouraska and Rivière-du-Loup, but I have also represented Témiscouata and Les Basques in the past. I had the opportunity to attend several competitions in these regions to showcase the work done by these volunteers. I can say that one does not agree to be a volunteer firefighter in order to fulfill an administrative role. These people must carry heavy equipment and be prepared to face dangerous situations, and are occasionally called on to save lives.

In turn, our society has decided to offer them a \$1,000 tax deduction, to which I think they are fully entitled. The member is suggesting that we increase the deduction to \$2,000 when an individual volunteers 200 hours in a year. This is not too much to ask. This amount better reflects the current reality facing these volunteers. I hope that, after the debate in this House, the vote will enable us to examine this bill more closely.

My Conservative colleague who spoke before me alluded to previous debates, when it was argued that this measure was not totally warranted and would not necessarily help boost volunteerism. We have to consider these remarks as constructive proposals.

The committee members will have to make sure that this measure is in keeping with the spirit of the Income Tax Act, but also that this additional recognition is feasible. The men and women who do this work do it voluntarily; it is a choice they make. They are compensated for what they do, but often this compensation amounts to no more than they are already making at their regular jobs.

*Private Members' Business*

People tend to make a personal choice to become a volunteer firefighter. They are contributing to the quality of life in their community. Essentially, their aim is to prevent, as much as possible, fires that cause property damage and sometimes cost human lives. There have been disasters in the past.

Volunteer firefighters have been around for some time now. Decades ago, there were far more fires out in the country than there are today. Mutual insurance companies had to be created so that people whose homes had unfortunately been destroyed by fire would have a future. A number of prevention measures were developed, and one duty of volunteer firefighters is to promote them.

Initially, volunteer firefighters stepped forward out of the goodness of their heart in the event of a fire. Over the years, their job has become increasingly complex. They have to take a number of training courses, and the cost of that training is not necessarily covered by the tax deduction. It covers only costs associated with fighting fires or providing emergency assistance.

From the standpoint of recruitment to renew the ranks of volunteer firefighters, this measure serves as an added incentive or benefit for someone who has obtained his employer's authorization to leave work when called to respond to an emergency. Such a person should not be penalized, but should be able to benefit from this very minor tax advantage, which at the very least would enable him to keep on volunteering.

• (1115)

Under the bill presented by the hon. member for Malpeque, a person who meets specific criteria—they get a \$1,000 deduction for the first 100 hours of work and up to \$2,000 when the number of hours worked in the year reaches 200—is sent a T4/Relevé 1 form by the government for this income. The first \$1,000 will be excluded from the slips since that amount is not taxable.

The purpose of Bill C-219 before us is to improve the tax exemption by making it \$1,000 when a person has worked 100 hours and \$2,000 when that person has worked 200 hours, in order to take into account roughly the average salary that a volunteer firefighter could make.

However, if the person is employed in a non volunteer capacity to provide the same services or similar services, then they cannot benefit from the federal deduction. It is not a question of granting a deduction to someone who already performs a similar task in their regular job, but to someone who made the personal choice to devote themselves to this type of role in their community when they already have an entirely different job.

The big cities have permanent and regular firefighters. Throughout rural Quebec and Canada the people concerned have to take very rigorous and demanding training to help them not only prevent fires, but also develop a sense of discipline to cope with any emergency situation. On occasion I have seen—with my own two eyes—that this training means people react properly and quickly to cardiovascular problems, when a person has a heart attack for example, or to any other difficult situation. The fire training they receive can also apply to many other situations. Often this results in a life being saved to carry on in an acceptable manner, rather than resulting in a death.

In that sense, our society, which must be judged not only by its capacity to produce wealth, but also by its capacity to share it, has an opportunity to recognize in a much more valid and sustained way the work done by volunteer firefighters. The members of the Bloc Québécois and I, personally, will support this motion. We hope the discussion in committee improves the situation. According to information we have received from volunteer firefighters, this measure would truly be welcome and would correspond better to the current reality in our various municipalities. We believe the initiative of the hon. member for Malpeque deserves our support.

• (1120)

[English]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the federal NDP, it gives me great pleasure to rise on this important bill. I want to thank the hon. member for Malpeque for bringing it forward.

Most of us in our ridings across the country have volunteer firefighters and they do an outstanding job. Every Tuesday in my riding is a training night for all the firefighters. They train hard and afterwards they get together in a camaraderie on what they are doing.

It takes a very special person to answer a call at three in the morning in a winter storm and go to a house fire or to deal with an issue of a medical emergency. These people do this with very little or no pay whatsoever. In fact, they do not even want a thank you. They do it because they know they are serving their community. They know it because they feel in their heart of hearts that what they are doing is just and it is right.

On Sunday on the CBC in Nova Scotia there was a half hour show talking about what is happening in rural Canada. Many communities are starting to lose their volunteer firefighters. They are not losing them because of a lack of interest, they are losing them because of the economic reality of rural Canada. I remember very well in Newfoundland and Labrador during the cod crisis of the early 1990s many communities basically lost their best and brightest. The first thing to go, besides people moving down the road, was the firefighter.

Can we imagine a community that loses its volunteer firefighters and can no longer provide any kind of fire coverage for its community? The insurance companies come along and if we do not have fire protection of some kind they are not sure if they are able to insure the particular homes or properties. That puts these communities and families at great risk.

At the end of the day, there will be volunteer firefighters across this country willing to answer the call. In many cases they know they are risking their lives for the benefit of everyone. That is why this bill is important. That is why it should be supported across all political lines and it should be done fairly expeditiously.

*Private Members' Business*

I would like to expand on a bill that I have and not just piggyback on volunteer firefighters, but we need to look at volunteers in this country as a whole. In Nova Scotia alone volunteerism generates approximately \$2 billion of economic activity. Imagine what it would be like in Ontario, Quebec and the bigger provinces.

Without volunteers we simply would not have the society that we have today. I am sure that many of my colleagues in the House of Commons and in the Senate have volunteered many hours of their time and their family's time over the years to benefit their community. That is the beauty as many of us, as busy as we are as MPs, still in some way manage to volunteer to help out in our community, be it fundraising, looking after our community or whatever it may be.

If it were possible to expand the debate, I think that all volunteers who show a certain number of hours per year, and my bill specifically says 250 hours, should be entitled to a \$1,000 tax credit.

Years ago when I represented the Eastern Shore as far as the Ecum Secum Bridge in Nova Scotia, I knew a Lions Club member that would volunteer to drive people from Sheet Harbour all the way into Halifax, which is well over an hour drive, and he did this on his own. He did not ask for remuneration or anything of that nature and that was when gas was at 75¢ a litre. Now, at \$1.18 a litre in Halifax, we can imagine how expensive it is for that person to volunteer to do that. However, he still does because he knows it is the right thing to bring people with disabilities or people with very low income into Halifax to either do major shopping or see their medical professionals.

It is people like that who we need to honour every day and not just in this House of Commons but in the Senate as well. At this time I want to send a special kudos over to our colleague from London who himself was a long term firefighter before he entered the halls of Parliament. He deserves a great round of applause for his great work as well.

My own brother-in-law was a firefighter at the Vancouver airport for over 32 years and he has just retired. He fortunately never had any major incident of any kind to affect his health or his life and he feels very blessed by that.

• (1125)

However, he knew many other firefighters who came down with various illnesses and cancers because of the chemicals they were exposed to. These were paid firefighters. Imagine the number of volunteers out there.

The volunteer firefighters in the areas of Fall River, Musquodoboit Harbour, Lake Charlotte, Chezzetcook, Eastern Passage, the whole crew, are some of the best citizens in this country. They love what they do, but the reality is they need more support.

The city I live in has only so much money to provide in terms of equipment and everything else. The government and all parliamentarians need to understand that giving them a little stipend like this may be beneficial to at least cover the costs.

I again want to thank my colleague from Malpeque for bringing this very important bill forward and I hope it will pass very soon. In

fact, it would be lovely if it was in tomorrow's budget, but we will have to wait until four o'clock to see if indeed that is the case.

Once again, a tip of the salt and pepper cap to all volunteer firefighters and especially their families. Those who volunteer also have families who worry about their return. I want to thank the families, the individual members, and all communities right across this country.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to this particular initiative.

First I want to congratulate my hon. colleague from Malpeque for bringing this forward. We have been discussing, debating and voting on this for many years, certainly within almost the last decade.

What a gift this is. Someone earlier mentioned how this would entice people to get involved in the volunteer service for emergency workers. It will go a long way, especially in our rural areas for several reasons.

First, let us take a look at the incentive. Over 100 hours of service will provide a \$1,000 tax credit and over 200 hours, which a vast majority do easily, a \$2,000 tax credit.

What I like about this is that it is a beautiful gift and finally an acknowledgement by the Government of Canada to say that it believes in what they are doing.

I said it before and I will say it again. These are people who volunteer their time. When there is a fire or a disaster, these people are the first to go into that fire. More than that, when the community needs their support to raise money and raise awareness, volunteer firefighters are the first to get out. They come out for their community and they do it voluntarily.

I do rise in support of Bill C-219, a bill that would have a tremendous effect on all of rural Canada, especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and certainly in my own riding.

A couple of weeks ago in the House I rose to present a petition signed by thousands of people from all over Newfoundland and Labrador calling upon the government to put the bill into law and make the necessary amendments to the tax code.

Why do I support Bill C-219? I will flesh out some of the more important reasons. A lot of it comes down to numbers, quite frankly. I represent over 86,000 people in my riding. Over 115 communities in my riding are protected by 52 volunteer fire departments, ranging from 15 to 20 and beyond.

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador there are 315 volunteer fire departments consisting of 6,200 volunteers, people who put their lives on the line and risk it all for the sake of safety, for the sake of their communities and for the sake of their families. There are also 27 ground search and rescue teams consisting of 872 volunteers, a phenomenal amount of volunteer time put into search and rescue.

When they leave the comfort of their homes, more often than not in harsh weather conditions, they do not know if they will return to their families. That is a fact of life that all emergency responders have to live with.

To provide an incentive of a \$2,000 tax credit is a small gift but, beyond the monetary value, this would finally acknowledge that the Government of Canada sees what they are doing and it wants to reward them for it. We want them to be recognized across the country for what it is they do and the time they spend doing it, not just for safety but again for the community.

Most of us would not want to know the feeling of having someone seriously injured or worse, someone who has perished in a vehicle crash. These people are first on the scene. Most of us have never experienced the unique smell of burning insulation, the intense heat, the roar of a burning structure or the uneasy feeling of being unable to see anything upon entering a burning building to rescue someone in peril.

What must the volunteers be thinking as they respond to an emergency call: Is this a false alarm or is it a real fire? Will I return? Will I see my family once again when this is all over? The worse possible thing that could happen: is there a child inside? Does a child's life need to be saved?

Our ground search and rescue teams are there to assist in finding lost individuals, whether it be along our coast, in the forest or someone trapped on a rock face injured or unable to move for fear of falling.

Yes, it is a life-threatening task that we ask these volunteers to do and they do it so valiantly.

• (1130)

Our emergency volunteers carry out their duties in a professional manner in the same way that our paid emergency service workers do. Often, volunteers' street clothes are damaged or destroyed because they did not have time to change into their fire protection clothes or ground search and rescue apparel. They incur expenses with their personal vehicles getting to the fire hall daily for training. They spend countless hours at the fire hall training and cleaning their equipment and emergency vehicles with little or no compensation.

The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore touched on training night. In my hometown of Bishop's Falls, Wednesday night is training night. The feeling of camaraderie between men and women firefighters is second to none. They feel so good about their community. Once in a while they even let me attend. How noble.

I must say that the little bit that we can do here today by voting for this and seeing this into law is such a small thing for us to do but such a great acknowledgement for the sacrifices that they make.

I will give two examples from my own riding where volunteer services have become crucial and essential.

Emergency service volunteers were called into action because of floods in the town of Badger several years ago. It was a state of emergency. It was one of the most devastating floods the province has ever seen. The amount of hours that volunteers put in, not just volunteer firefighters, search and rescue workers and ambulance workers, but our town councillors and our municipal politicians, many of whom are volunteers as well, but they all do it for the sake of the community and the sake of their family.

### *Private Members' Business*

I respectfully submit that we should support this as such a crucial element of us saying, yes, that these people are intertwined in our communities and are absolutely essentially.

I would like to take a moment to read something called "What is a Firefighter".

He's the [person] next door...He [she] has never gotten over the excitement of engines and sirens and danger. He's [she's] a [person] like you and me with wants and worries and unfulfilled dreams. Yet [they] stand taller than most of us.

He's [she's] a fireman.

He [she] puts it all on the line when the bell rings.... A fireman is at once the most fortunate and the least fortunate...[they are people] who save lives because [they have] seen too much death. He's [she's] a gentle [person] because he [she] has seen the awesome power of violence out of control. [They are] responsive to a child's laughter because [their] arms have held too many small bodies that will never laugh again. [They] appreciate the simple pleasures of life—hot coffee held in numb, unbending fingers—a warm bed for bone and muscle compelled beyond feeling—the camaraderie of brave men [and women]—the divine peace and selfless service of a job well done in the name of all [people].

Those are the people we have come here to talk about today. We need to acknowledge these people and the volunteer time that they put in to ensure the community comes first. It is a sacrifice that is not compensated whatsoever and it is about time the Government of Canada said yes to these people. A simple measure is all we ask: a \$1,000 tax credit up to a \$2,000 tax credit. It is absolutely essential.

I asked that this House pass it unanimously but was unsuccessful. However, despite that, I still call upon the government to include this in its budget. Maybe time is short but imagine these volunteer firefighters in the middle of a blaze, in the middle of a situation that is life or death. Now we are talking about time being short. We are talking about finally being able to thank them for all they have done and to thank their families.

I believe in our volunteer emergency people because they are the backbone of rural Newfoundland and Labrador for what it is today.

• (1135)

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity today to address the hon. members of the House on Bill C-219.

The bill, if adopted, would entitle emergency service volunteers to claim either a \$2,000 deduction if they volunteer 200 or more hours or a \$1,000 deduction if they volunteer at least 100 hours or more but less than 200 hours.

Today I would like to use this time to acknowledge the role of emergency service volunteers and others to talk about their motivation and to acknowledge the valuable contributions these Canadians make to our country.

First, I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. member for Malpeque on the principle of the bill. Emergency service volunteers deserve to be recognized for their valuable contributions to the safety, security and well-being of our communities.

*Private Members' Business*

There are numerous examples that come to mind in which emergency service volunteers have played an important role in this nation: the tornado that whipped through Edmonton in 1987 and left large numbers of Edmontonians homeless; the Manitoba and Saguenay floods; the crippling 1998 ice storm in Quebec and eastern Ontario in which my family was trapped and became victimized; the 2003 forest fires in British Columbia; Hurricane Juan, which battered the east coast in the fall of 2003; and, of course, on a day to day basis, intervening to rescue Canadians from danger and to alleviate their pain and suffering.

In all those instances, disaster relief volunteers provide crucial assistance at critical times. They aid distressed victims and help bring calm out of chaos and generosity out of calamity. They all make me feel proud to be Canadian. These fine citizens make us all proud to be Canadian.

There are many kinds of volunteers who deserve recognition and there are many different ways to recognize these contributions. This may be surprising to some members of the House but Statistics Canada estimated that there are approximately 11.8 million Canadians from all parts of this country who volunteered in 2004. As we can imagine, each one of these volunteers makes a valuable contribution to their communities in many different ways. Some volunteers help to improve the quality of life of our seniors. Some coach our children's sports teams. Some prepare, serve and deliver meals to others in need. Some provide education services and advocate on important issues. Some help to protect our environment by monitoring ecosystems and cleaning our beaches, just like in my own riding of Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale where the Hamilton Area Eco-Network does a great job of managing one of the UNESCO biosphere reserves in this country.

In 2004, volunteers freely donated over two billion hours of their time, which is an average of 168 hours per volunteer. I know it would never happen but since we are talking about 11 million Canadians and two billion hours of their time, we should think for a moment what would happen if, just for a week, all volunteers stopped doing what they had been doing and what kind of country this would be.

Imagine how overrun the regular resources of local police departments would be if the auxiliary police were not available.

At every sporting event I have ever attended I have seen the St. John Ambulance van, our historic volunteer emergency medical service, sitting over on the side ready to help anybody in a medical emergency. Imagine if it were not around.

Imagine if Roots youth drop-in centre in Dundas, Ontario were not there to help youth make the right decisions rather than get on the wrong track and end up in a lifestyle of crime.

How about Mission Services, Good Shepherd, Wesley Urban Ministries or the Olive Branch that is in downtown Hamilton that serve meals, pick people up off the street and ensures that those who are on the margins of society are helped so they can become contributing citizens.

Two weeks ago at the Ancaster food drive 70,000 pounds of food was collected. That would be consumed in three weeks alone.

Imagine if those kinds of people were not around but, fortunately, we never need to be concerned about that.

We do need to be concerned about why these volunteers give their time so generously. For context, I will take this opportunity to describe the findings of a recent Statistics Canada survey that sheds light on this question. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the survey finds that most Canadians do not appear to expect financial assistance or incentives as a reward for volunteering.

● (1140)

The Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating conducted in 2004 found that none of the principal reasons for volunteering are related to financial gain whatsoever. For example, 92% said they volunteered because they wanted to make a contribution to their community. Seventy-seven per cent volunteered because they wanted to put their skills and experience to work. Almost 60% volunteered because they had been personally affected by the cause of the organization that they support.

Canadians cited several other reasons for volunteering as well. They see volunteering as a way to explore their own strengths. They have friends who volunteer and they want to share in that experience. They want to fulfill religious obligations or beliefs. For some, volunteering is a way to demonstrate or acquire skills in order to open doors for new opportunities for themselves.

The same Statistics Canada survey asked Canadians why they did not volunteer or why they did not volunteer more. We have to search well down the list of reasons to find financial cost.

In fact, Statistics Canada found that the main barrier preventing individuals from increasing their volunteering contributions was a lack of time. Seven in ten Canadians cited time limitations, not financial considerations, as the reason for not volunteering more or not volunteering at all.

Time is not the only barrier to volunteering. Some find they are unable to make a year-round commitment to volunteering. Some might consider becoming a volunteer but have never personally been asked to do so. Perhaps they just need an invitation to get them started. Still others cite health problems.

Although recognizing this important group of volunteers is something I am sure all Canadians would agree is worthy, I do believe that it would be irresponsible to have this discussion without exploring the motivations and expectations of our volunteers.

I also think that during the course of this discussion we should explore additional methods to acknowledge and encourage efforts at volunteering because there are many ways. Sometimes it is simply raising awareness of the volunteers' cause or enhancing the experience of volunteering. For example, one way we can recognize the efforts of volunteers in Canada is through public awards and honours. There are a multitude of awards distributed each year that recognize the outstanding contributions of all volunteers. For instance, the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award is bestowed on a long service volunteer who has contributed substantially to families and groups in his or her community.

Volunteers, including emergency service volunteers, are also recognized by the Government of Canada through the Thérèse Casgrain Volunteer Award. This award was established by the Government of Canada in 2001 during the International Year of the Volunteer.

Provincially there are many examples as well. In British Columbia, the provincial emergency program recognizes volunteers annually in each of its five programs: search and rescue; emergency social services; air search; amateur radio; and road rescue.

The Ontario volunteer service award ceremony acknowledges, among other achievements, the bravery of those who serve as police officers and volunteer firefighters. In addition, many emergency service volunteers have also been awarded the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's Medal for Bravery.

In conclusion, all of us in this House support and respect the work of emergency service volunteers. On that we have unanimity. However, we have a responsibility to all Canadians to do our homework when making policy.

Once again, I want to commend the hon. member for Malpeque for bringing this legislative initiative forward and for recognizing the significant contribution emergency service workers make to our communities. That being said, there are still some questions about this initiative that I look forward to hearing the member address both here in the chamber and perhaps at committee in the future as well.

I believe we need to study this measure carefully to make sure that it is the appropriate way to acknowledge the work of emergency service volunteers to whom we are all grateful for their service.

• (1145)

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to participate in this debate and support the hon. member for Malpeque who has brought a very important issue to the House regarding the contribution that firefighters and public safety officers in general make to society.

The International Association of Fire Fighters has been the lead group to speak on behalf of public safety officers. It has dealt with a number of areas, whether it be the treatment of hazardous goods or the markings on train cars with respect to an emergency plan should there be a derailment.

There is another very interesting point which has been advocated for in this place for a number of years. It is the public safety officers compensation fund in the event that a public safety officer loses his or her life in the line of duty.

The bill that was previously before this place on behalf of firefighters and other public safety officers was to provide for the families and the survivors of police officers, firefighters and other public safety officers who had lost their lives in the line of duty. This bill has been advocated for by the IAFF because a similar fund has existed in the United States for a number of years.

In fact, the amount of money paid in the United States initially was \$100,000. It was paid by the United States government to the families of public safety officers who had lost their lives in the line of duty. After 9/11 that amount was increased because there were many firefighters and volunteers who had lost their lives during that

### *Private Members' Business*

horrific event. The government raised the amount to \$250,000 on behalf of those public safety officers. Many of those public safety officers are now suffering from serious long term illnesses as a consequence of being in an environment that contained dangerous fumes and toxic substances.

All of this leads nicely into the bill that the member for Malpeque has put before the House. Those of us from urban centres can talk about the excellent firefighting services that deal with the concentration of populations in urban centres and the economies of scale in having that kind of a service. However, in the suburban, rural and remote areas of Canada, those who are called on to serve Canadians and to put their lives on the line are not part of a major policing or firefighting authority. They are volunteers.

I was once told that only about 15% of what firefighters do actually deals with fighting fires or other fire related emergencies. Firefighters spend the rest of their time educating the public, supporting community events, raising money and being on call. Firefighters are always on call. They are the ones who go in to a burning building when everyone else is running out. That is the difference. This is the characteristic that we are trying to recognize in this bill.

Volunteer firefighters do not receive the same kind of recognition. They are there and are ready to do the same job. It is similar to military reservists who are trained to the same levels as are full time military personnel. The reservists go into theatre and put their lives at risk. It is the same with these volunteers. They have to have the same kind of training. When an emergency occurs, when property and lives are at risk, they are called on at a moment's notice to go in when others are running out.

• (1150)

I want to congratulate the member for Malpeque for bringing this bill forward. It is an important bill from the standpoint that it is a recognition by Parliament that if recognition cannot be done in terms of a public safety officers compensation fund or some other blanket support, this is one additional step to show the respect, trust and reliance that is placed on these professionals, who are prepared to risk their health, safety and lives on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Bill C-219, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (deduction for volunteer emergency service) be adopted at second reading and be referred to committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Government Orders*

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, I would seek the consent of the House to allow the member for Malpeque to have a few brief moments to thank the House with regard to his bill since he would not now have his normal right of reply.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** No.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I was going to ask for unanimous consent to see the clock for the next order of the day, but I will suspend sitting until 12:02 p.m.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:52 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:02 p.m.)

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[English]

### AFGHANISTAN

**Hon. Peter MacKay (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform)** moved:

Whereas,

the House recognizes the important contribution and sacrifice of Canadian Forces and Canadian civilian personnel as part of the UN mandated, NATO-led mission deployed in Afghanistan at the request of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan;

the House believes that Canada must remain committed to the people of Afghanistan beyond February 2009;

the House takes note that in February 2002, the government took a decision to deploy 850 troops to Kandahar to join the international coalition that went to Afghanistan to drive out the Taliban in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and that this deployment lasted for six months at which time the troops rotated out of Afghanistan and returned home;

the House takes note that in February 2003, the government took a decision that Canada would commit 2000 troops and lead for one year, starting in the summer of 2003, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul and at the end of the one-year commitment, Canada's 2000 troop commitment was reduced to a 750-person reconnaissance unit as Canada's NATO ally, Turkey, rotated into Kabul to replace Canada as the lead nation of the ISAF mission;

the House takes note that in August 2005, Canada assumed responsibility of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar province which included roughly 300 Canadian Forces personnel;

the House takes note that the government took a decision to commit a combat Battle Group of roughly 1200 troops to Kandahar for a period of one year, from February 2006 to February 2007;

the House takes note that in January 2006, the government participated in the London Conference on Afghanistan which resulted in the signing of the Afghanistan Compact which set out benchmarks and timelines until the end of 2010 for improving the security, the governance and the economic and social development of Afghanistan;

the House takes note that in May 2006, Parliament supported the government's two year extension of Canada's deployment of diplomatic, development, civilian police and military personnel in Afghanistan and the provision of funding and equipment for this extension;

the House welcomes the Report of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, chaired by the Honourable John Manley, and recognizes the important contribution its members have made;

the House takes note that it has long been a guiding principle of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan that all three components of a comprehensive government strategy—defence, diplomacy and development—must reinforce each other and that the government must strike a balance between these components to be most effective;

the House takes note that the ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans, in a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure and to create the necessary space and conditions to allow the Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict; and

the House takes note that in order to achieve that aim, it is essential to assist the people of Afghanistan to have properly trained, equipped and paid members of the four pillars of their security apparatus: the army, the police, the judicial system and the correctional system;

therefore, it is the opinion of the House,

that Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009, to July 2011, in a manner fully consistent with the UN mandate on Afghanistan, and that the military mission should consist of:

(a) training the Afghan National Security Forces so that they can expeditiously take increasing responsibility for security in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole;

(b) providing security for reconstruction and development efforts in Kandahar;

(c) the continuation of Canada's responsibility for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team;

that, consistent with this mandate, this extension of Canada's military presence in Afghanistan is approved by this House expressly on the condition that:

(a) NATO secure a battle group of approximately 1000 to rotate into Kandahar (operational no later than February 2009);

(b) to better ensure the safety and effectiveness of the Canadian contingent, the government secure medium helicopter lift capacity and high performance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance before February 2009; and

(c) the government of Canada notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, and, as of that date, the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar and their replacement by Afghan forces start as soon as possible, so that it will have been completed by December 2011;

that the government of Canada, together with our allies and the government of Afghanistan, must set firm targets and timelines for the training, equipping of the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, the members of the judicial system and the members of the correctional system

that Canada's contribution to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan should:

(a) be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

(b) focus on our traditional strengths as a nation, particularly through the development of sound judicial and correctional systems and strong political institutions on the ground in Afghanistan and the pursuit of a greater role for Canada in addressing the chronic fresh water shortages in the country;

(c) address the crippling issue of the na2istently undermines progress in Afghanistan, through the pursuit of solutions that do not further alienate the goodwill of the local population;

(d) be held to a greater level of accountability and scrutiny so that the Canadian people can be sure that our development contributions are being spent effectively in Afghanistan;

*Government Orders*

that Canada should assert a stronger and more disciplined diplomatic position regarding Afghanistan and the regional players, including support for the naming of a special envoy to the region who could both ensure greater coherence in all diplomatic initiatives in the region and also press for greater coordination amongst our partners in the UN in the pursuit of common diplomatic goals in the region; that the government should provide the public with franker and more frequent reporting on events in Afghanistan, offering more assessments of Canada's role and giving greater emphasis to the diplomatic and reconstruction efforts as well as those of the military and, for greater clarity, the government should table in Parliament detailed reports on the progress of the mission in Afghanistan on a quarterly basis;

that the House of Commons should strike a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan which would meet regularly with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and National Defence and senior officials, and that the House should authorize travel by the special committee to Afghanistan and the surrounding region so that the special committee can make frequent recommendations on the conduct and progress of our efforts in Afghanistan;

that, the special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan should review the laws and procedures governing the use of operational and national security exceptions for the withholding of information from Parliament, the Courts and the Canadian people with those responsible for administering those laws and procedures, to ensure that Canadians are being provided with ample information on the conduct and progress of the mission; and

that with respect to the transfer of Afghan detainees to Afghan authorities, the government must:

(a) commit to meeting the highest NATO and international standards with respect to protecting the rights of detainees, transferring only when it believes it can do so in keeping with Canada's international obligations;

(b) pursue a NATO-wide solution to the question of detainees through diplomatic efforts that are rooted in the core Canadian values of respect for human rights and the dignity of all people;

(c) commit to a policy of greater transparency with respect to its policy on the taking of and transferring of detainees including a commitment to report on the results of reviews or inspections of Afghan prisons undertaken by Canadian officials; and

that the government must commit to improved interdepartmental coordination to achieve greater cross-government coherence and coordination of the government's domestic management of our commitment to Afghanistan, including the creation of a full-time task force which is responsible directly to the Prime Minister to lead these efforts.

● (1210)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to participate and to address this House on such an important issue as was just outlined in the motion presented to the chamber.

I want to begin my remarks by doing something that is seldom done in this place and that is to express appreciation and respect for members opposite for taking part in this important debate. I am firmly of the belief that this sincere effort to forge consensus on this important subject augurs well for this Parliament and for the future of our country.

This is perhaps the most important debate facing our Parliament and our nation today. It has important broad implications for Canadians, Afghans and for the world.

It is also worth expressing special acknowledgement of the role of the Leader of the Opposition, the deputy leader of the opposition, and other members of the Liberal Party for bringing forward consensus at a critical time that can result in a truly Canadian position. This is rare in this often partisan-charged air of this chamber. We are seeing democracy in action, the very thing that we seek to protect and promote in Afghanistan.

By putting aside our political differences and our party lines on an issue such as this, we demonstrate to our fellow Canadians and those

who put their faith in us that we can see the bigger picture, that we can come together on a cause that others from our country are literally prepared to die for and do what is right and just.

Coming together on this motion is demonstrative and reminiscent of previous times in our country's history when soldiers were deployed, when it was patriotism over partisanship.

I am personally grateful that we appear ready to rise above the rancour and personal sniping, and put forward a message to Canadians, Afghans and those around the world who are watching this debate, including the Taliban, that we are united.

We are a substantive and serious Parliament, responsive and responsible, on issues that matter. Behind the people who we send to far-off places to promote the values that we believe in, those acts of parliamentary union elevate us, and bring credit and credibility to public office holders.

As the Prime Minister has stated, the government broadly accepts the report and recommendations of the independent committee on Canada's future role in Afghanistan.

I want to thank John Manley, Pamela Wallin, Derek Burney, Paul Tellier and Jake Epp for their extraordinary dedicated efforts and important insights into the question of Canada's future role in Afghanistan. It is a comprehensive and well written report. It will contribute much to the debate before the House.

Subject to the conditions laid out in the motion before this House, this government supports extending Canada's responsibility for security in Kandahar to the end of 2011. That date would coincide closely with the benchmarks on development outlined in the Afghanistan Compact.

The government is already moving ahead to carry out several of the key recommendations made by the independent panel. A new cabinet committee has been struck.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, the Privy Council Office established an Afghanistan task force made up of senior members of the government and the public service. Together with David Mulroney of Foreign Affairs Canada, the task force has coordinated this file over the past year.

These two groups will improve the coordination of the government's work in Afghanistan. In order to keep doing what we are doing in Afghanistan, we are pursuing discussions with our allies and partners to bring more troops into Kandahar.

We are also exploring all available avenues to ensure that our soldiers get the equipment they need.

● (1215)

[*English*]

To date Poland has come forward with two Mi-17 medium-lift helicopters to be made available for Canadian use at Kandahar airfield. We thank Poland sincerely for that contribution, and others we hope will follow suit, for we know that every little bit helps.

*Government Orders*

The government is committed to ensuring that our men and women in Afghanistan are positioned for success. With the proper equipment and support, we believe that success will come sooner.

I ask all members to weigh carefully the independent panel's report. It was comprehensive and instructive in the recommendations.

I urge all members, as well, to support this motion before us. It matters to Canadians, our soldiers and to the international community. The world is watching, including the people of Afghanistan and their oppressors. A falter or slip in support does in fact embolden and strengthen the terrorists to return and wreak havoc upon the people of Afghanistan again.

Canadians can be proud of what we are doing, proud of the role that we are playing, a leadership role in the international community's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. We have played this role before, in the first and second world wars, and in Korea.

Whenever the world rallied against an aggressor, Canada was there early and saw those victorious efforts through. Canada is there again, once again at the forefront of a struggle with grave and global consequences.

Our role within the United Nations mandate, mission to Afghanistan, has been earned through commitment, hard work and sacrifice, and we have won the respect of the Afghan people, our international allies and partners.

On the backs of our soldiers rests more than just a uniform, but the pride and the purpose of a grateful nation. Those who take on the task of military service are our best citizens.

The simple title of soldier is worthy of respect and gratitude, and Canadians, in growing numbers, are expressing these sentiments in words, cards, letters and acts of thanks. At red rallies, speaking events, airports, halls, places of work and on the street, soldiers are feeling that gratitude.

Yes, the mantle the leadership can weigh heavily. It has costs that are deeply felt by Canadians. The sacrifices of Canadian soldiers are remarkable by any standard at any time in our nation's history. Their willingness to stand against terror and tyranny, against oppression and indignity, is a credit not only to our country but to all humanity.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

All the same, there are times when we, as a country, must take a stand and assert ourselves. We have to assert ourselves by promoting our fundamental values and interests, and by being clear about what we are prepared to do to defend them. We cannot expect others to do the heavy lifting for us. If we truly believe in this mission, we must realize that actions speak louder than words.

The time for action is now. Afghanistan needs us. Stabilizing Afghanistan is a noble and critical cause. Let us consider the circumstances.

[*English*]

Here again, I ask all to consider the circumstances that led us to this point. The Afghans want us there. The people of Afghanistan

were living in the grip of fear every day under the Taliban. They were deprived of the simplest things and denied hope for a better future. That hope, as basic as the air we breathe, was choked by the Taliban.

The United Nations wants us there. NATO needs us there. The Manley panel has recommended we persevere in the mission. If not this mission, then when? When would we be better justified to play a part?

Afghanistan is a Canadian mission. It is not a Conservative or Liberal mission. We had two positions. We now have one. Yet, we know there are those in this House who will oppose this mission and this motion.

On one side we have a position held by the government and the Liberal Party, we believe, to essentially support the continued presence of Canada in Afghanistan.

This reflects our international obligations as well as our commitment to the Afghan people, whom we have said we would protect and help to further their own development and capacity building to allow them to assume full responsibility for their own national sovereignty and security within their borders. That goal can be achieved, but it will not be achieved if we bring our soldiers home.

Liberals and Conservatives agree that the mission should wrap up in 2011. Liberals and Conservatives agree that we must focus on our efforts on training, development and reconstruction.

We agree that we are in Afghanistan on a military mission and that military decisions are to be made by those on the ground who are able to assess the situation and make important operational decisions in the theatre.

This position also reflects our obligations to our fellow Canadians serving in Afghanistan: our men and women in uniform, our diplomats and our development workers. We applaud them all. They believe deeply in the mission and they must know that they have clear, unambiguous support from home for their important work.

Clearly, it needs to be pointed out again that military means alone will not assure success. The enormous contributions of CIDA, DFAIT, Canadian Border Services, RCMP, municipal police and other government agencies, in addition to what the military is doing, I believe, will prevail.

I want to applaud those heroes for all they do, including our fine Ambassador Arif Lalani, Bob Chamberlain, Karen Foss and others at the PRT, and I welcome Elissa Golberg to her new role in Afghanistan.

At the same time, we have the position of the NDP and the Bloc which is to pull Canadian troops out of Afghanistan as early as next year. Simply put, reality seems to have escaped these two parties.

We believe we should stay and finish the job. We do not want to abandon the Afghan people or turn our back on the international community. Staying in Afghanistan is not the easy thing to do, but staying there is the right thing to do.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

The world needs to understand why we are in Afghanistan. By helping the Afghan people, we are helping ourselves. We cannot ignore the conflicts going on around the world.

In a world that seems to be growing smaller by the day, no nation is immune to terrorism. We are not shielded from the horrors that touch other countries, and we ourselves have been touched. Canadians were killed in the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York.

Terrorists have also attacked other places, killing innocent people in Washington, London, Madrid and Bali.

[*English*]

Let us never forget that the worst terror attack prior to 9/11 to hit North America was the bombing of Air-India, the flight that left Vancouver and took 329 lives. As we sit in the House, the very symbol and essence of Canadian democracy, we should remember always that these attacks were an unprovoked assault on democracy and on all civilized nations on values that transcend religion and culture, an attack on reason itself.

The attacks have continued. Last week two separate and deadly explosions set off near the Arghandab Valley took the lives of over 100 Afghans and injured four Canadians. The magnitude of the pain and suffering reverberated around the globe, and reminds us of the brutality and the lack of humanity that are the Taliban. We mourn the loss of all innocent lives in Afghanistan and express our sincere sympathies to their families.

We are reminded time and time again that Afghanistan is not someone else's problem. It is our problem too. If Afghanistan were to once again become a safe haven and an incubator for terrorism, Canadians and the people we are there to serve would be in increased danger, the world would be a more dangerous place. The Afghan people want and deserve the same things that Canadians want. They want to live free from oppression. They want dignity and human life respected and protected. They want a better life for their children. They want hope. They want opportunity.

With an incubator and an exporter of the threat of terrorism represented in Afghanistan, Canadians undoubtedly would face increased danger because freedom, democracy and human rights and the rule of law, all things we embody and embrace as a nation, would be under threat. All of this would be an abomination to those who preach hate and practise murder if we were to walk away.

Make no mistake about it, our security and that of our allies is at stake in Afghanistan, along with the people of that country and region. That is why we are there. We are there with our allies, our partners in both NATO and UN. Over 60 like-minded and determined nations in various roles are contributing to the peace, security and betterment of the country.

This is why we cannot abandon the vital leadership role that we have been assuming in Afghanistan until we reach that critical tipping point, until we are able to give it the ability to assume a larger role and govern itself completely free of the shadows of Taliban terror.

### *Government Orders*

It pays to do a retrospect and from time to time to look back, not only ahead, to assess what has been accomplished. Addressing the root causes that have allowed Afghanistan to become a safe haven for terrorism is challenging. Long term stability in Afghanistan means helping the Afghans develop the tools they need to govern themselves justly, to realize their social and economic potential and to provide for their own security. These are the essential elements of the Afghanistan compact, signed in early 2006, which guides the international community and the Afghan government's efforts. Canada participated in the formation, the drafting and is a signatory of the compact.

Canada's engagement follows this international blueprint. Our mission is multifaceted, involving numerous government departments and agencies. It draws upon national strengths and combines these with those of our allies and our partners. Helping the Afghans rebuild their country after decades of conflict is a monumental task, a task made more difficult by the insurgency that ebbs and flows into Afghanistan across the Pakistan border.

We must never forget that in Kandahar province, in geographic terms, we are in the south with the largely open Pakistan border. We call upon Pakistan, even in the midst of its own internal problems, to elevate its efforts to stop recruitment from refugee camps, to provide better security at the border, known often as the Durand Line, and to crack down on insurgency within their own lands.

Let us not forget that by working with our allies and our partners, we are achieving real and substantive progress on the ground.

• (1230)

Consider the seeds of democracy that have been planted, which are now taking root within this once tumultuous country. It pays to calculate the difference today compared to a short five or six years ago in Afghanistan.

Over 10 million Afghans, including women who had previously been forbidden to participate in public life, now register and vote in national elections. Women do not just register to vote and cast ballots. They place their name on ballots and they are elected to public office. Over 25% of the Afghan parliament is made up of those brave women. The Afghan people selected their government through free and fair elections.

There is freedom of expression, freedom of expression that simply did not exist previously. Today there are seven television and forty radio stations broadcasting. Over 350 newspapers are published. There are extraordinary accomplishments and will undoubtedly lead to more.

This informal debate, this issue of national awareness both here and in Afghanistan is of critical importance as it develops its own national awareness and identity.

None of this environment for public discourse or exchange of ideas existed in Afghanistan a few years ago. There were no universal suffrage, no democratically elected government, no free press until Canada and others said yes to Afghanistan's call for help.

*Government Orders*

We did what we have done previously. We answered to call from a nation in need. The progress in other areas is equally striking. Consider Afghanistan's crippled infrastructure is being rebuilt, schools, hospitals, clinics, place of commerce. Irrigation canals are transforming the countryside. Land that once lay barren is fertile ground, allowing for alternative crops to grow instead of the scourge of poppy for heroin production and proliferation. Today in Afghanistan over 6,000 kilometres of new and refurbished roads allow farmers to bring their crops to market.

I do not have to tell politicians present the important of roads in any country. These roads make a daily difference in the lives of Afghans. This past Christmas, during a visit to the Arghandab district, we saw a bridge near Ma'sum Ghar, an impressive structure by any standard, connecting two villages across a flood plain that had previously divided them, presumably for centuries. It has transformed their way of life, their ability to do commerce with one another and their ability to exchange in normal life activities.

Make no mistake about it, the lives of ordinary Afghans have improved. Per capita incomes have doubled in the last three years. Afghans certainly feel today a hope for a better future that is reflected in polls and in the most important measure, and that is in the words, actions and deeds of the people of Afghanistan themselves.

That future, as with all countries, will depend on their youth. Great work is underway to ensure the children of Afghanistan are empowered to create the peaceful and stable future for themselves. Schools are being built. Places of learning are out of the shadows and now prominent everywhere. Thousands of teachers are being trained. Today six million children are being educated in Afghanistan, a truly transformative development. This is a spectacular rise in student employment, up from only 700,000 during the Taliban's brutal rule. Most notable, two million of the Afghan students today are girls, girls who would never have been permitted inside a classroom just a few short years ago. This is empowering and a powerful change for a generation of young Afghan females.

More than 80% of Afghans now have access to basic health care, something that was as low as 7% a few years ago. That is progress undeniably. Infant and child mortality rates have plunged, a remarkable success. Because of massive efforts of vaccinations and inoculations, diseases like polio and tuberculosis are in retreat. This is something all Canadians should rightly be proud of.

•(1235)

In a very real and positive way, international assistance is having a profound impact upon the lives of Afghan people. Millions have returned as a result of a change in conditions inside their country, and perhaps this is the clearest sign of hope revisited on those who have left their war-torn country, returning home for a future in a place they call home.

This progress has been made despite the violent efforts of the opposition, the Taliban and the insurgents, insurgents who have no use for the ballot box. Why? Because they know the only way they will return to power is through violence. Their plan is simple. What the Taliban insurgents seek to do is sow chaos, feed fear, drive the allied military forces out and reverse the progress being made on democratic and human rights inside the country.

We cannot and will not let the insurgents succeed. To this end, maintaining and improving security on the ground is essential because security enables governance, reconstruction and the development initiatives to flourish.

There cannot be democracy without security. There will be no development, no reconstruction, no prosperity and no hope for the Afghan people without security. There is an inextricable link. Afghanistan could, once again, become a breeding ground and safe haven for terrorism without security.

The way forward is clear. The way to success is clear. We must keep our resolve. All I have said thus far should not be interpreted as blind to the challenges and obstacles that still exist. Clearly we can all agree there is much left to do in Afghanistan. Yet it is essential that we continue to help the Afghan government to extend its authority throughout Kandahar province and the entire country. It must have an increased presence and visibility, particularly in the south.

I know the Prime Minister, other members of the present government and the previous government have made this point repeatedly to President Karzai and members of his administration.

The Canadian Forces will accelerate their efforts to mentor and train the Afghan security forces so they can eventually fully defend their own borders and sovereignty.

Members here should know that there have been notable improvements in the capabilities of the Afghanistan National Security Forces. I have met and spoke with President Karzai and my counterpart, General Wardak, on numerous occasions on this subject, as have others. They and the government of Afghanistan understand the urgency to accept and accelerate the pace at which they must grow their security forces.

With Canada's help, I note that 35,000 Afghans have graduated from the national army training centre in Kabul, a remarkable graduation rate. In Kandahar, our forces are mentoring six army battalions, or kandaks. The Canadian police are also monitoring and mentoring the improvements within the Afghan National Police force, another important contribution to its national security.

We are helping the Afghan National Army and police develop their own ability to plan and conduct operations. We are providing them, as well, with equipment and uniforms. Professionalizing their forces is clearly a priority.

We have seen improvement in other areas, and let me give an example of a concrete change that has occurred. During the battle of the Panjwai, the largest ground operation in NATO's history, Canadian Forces were in the vanguard. The Afghan National Army at that time did not play a decisive role in this engagement.

*Government Orders*

Now, 18 months later, the Afghan National Army is a significant force that can make its presence felt in Kandahar province. It demonstrated that very recently in an operation where it was shoulder to shoulder with Canadian Forces in liberating a village. It was celebrated with notable enthusiasm by the local people, with gratitude for the freedom that was bestowed by this exercise.

As the capabilities of the Afghan security forces in Kandahar increase, Canada will be able to hand over more responsibility to them. Until that time, Canadian Forces must continue their operations and mentoring in the field through OMLTs and POMLTs, which are operational mentoring liaison teams and a similar type of training with police.

● (1240)

As I draw my comments to a close, I note that over the past two years I have had the opportunity to visit Afghanistan a number of times, most recently at Christmas with my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, the member from Edmonton. While I was there, one of my most memorable experiences occurred, a very personal experience that I want to share with this House.

As we visited the provincial reconstruction team outside Kandahar, we met with some students to bring them school supplies that had been donated by a local Ottawa school board to the children. Some were as young as seven or eight years old. I remember how proud and overjoyed those kids were to receive these simple items: pencils, books, scribblers, pens, a special toy or two, and candy, all enclosed in colourful backpacks and prepared with love here in Canada.

One little girl I noticed was hugging her backpack so tightly and so closely that it was as if she thought it would somehow disappear if she let it out of her presence. I will not forget the look on her face and her stunning green eyes. In that face and those eyes, I could see hope for a better future for Afghan children. I could see in convincing personal terms that the work we were doing was having an impact and that our continued presence was necessary. We are having a profound effect on the lives of the children in Afghanistan.

I relate that experience to a similar one that I had just a month before on Remembrance Day, similarly at a school, in my own riding in Central Nova, and it reinforced my belief. A child almost the same age as those children, a young girl, asked me what would happen to the children of Afghanistan if the Canadian soldiers left and came home. In a moment of clarity, that little girl's question tying those two events together made perfect sense.

I have already touched upon the numerous statistics demonstrating the progress that is occurring in Afghanistan. A comprehensive and coordinated approach is undoubtedly needed, but we should never overlook or forget the human impact that we are having on the lives of children, of family members, of men and women who want nothing more than a better future.

For me, however, nothing bears more powerful testimony to the value of our efforts, above and beyond the statistics, the NATO discussions, the reports and the commentary, than the hope and caring reflected in the eyes and faces of those two little girls. It speaks to the depth of caring of children anywhere in the world. I

challenge anyone to look in the faces of these children and not say that we have more to do or to say that we would walk away.

Yes, the road ahead may be difficult, but stability in Afghanistan is achievable. We must persevere, for the consequences of abandoning Afghanistan are grave.

As members consider the future of the Afghan mission, they should bear in mind that the world is watching, friends and allies alike, and that the decision of this House will reverberate around the globe and will be far reaching in Canadian history. This debate will be recorded in the annals of this place and perhaps reviewed in other conflicts in times hence.

I hope that this debate and its final vote will be positive and instructive. The consequences of pulling Canada's military out of Afghanistan could have a far-reaching effect or a domino effect on others. Simply put, our friends would be weaker and our enemies stronger.

I would like to quote Nelofer Pazira, the author of the book *A Bed of Red Flowers*, who reflects upon some of her personal experiences in Afghanistan:

● (1245)

...Imagine one morning you wake up and get ready to go to work. But when you open the door, a group of young men, dressed in dusty and filthy clothes, push you inside the house with their rifles and say you're not allowed to leave. Imagine your younger sister wants to go to school and your mother has to go grocery shopping. Your sister is told she doesn't need any education, and your mother, though fully covered, is beaten or sent back home if she's not accompanied by a man. Imagine that your income is essential for the survival of your family, but you're told with indifference that you are not allowed to go to work. Imagine all of this happens to you only because you're a woman. What would you do if all you could do was stare at the walls inside your house as a substitute for living a normal life?

Those reflections and all that we know of Afghanistan demonstrate again that the stakes are simply too high for us to abandon Afghanistan and desert our allies at this critical juncture.

The UN Secretary-General recently said that withdrawing international forces would be "a mistake of historic proportions". The Secretary General of NATO has warned that failure in Afghanistan would increase the security threat facing the alliance.

The independent panel, from which I am sure much of this debate will be drawn, has advised that events in Afghanistan "will directly affect Canada's security, our reputation in the world, and our future ability to engage the international community in achieving objectives of peace, security and shared prosperity".

I ask all members of the House to carefully consider the consequences of rejecting the motion before us, which could lead to an abandonment of not only the Afghans and our allies but also our principles.

We do not want the Afghan campaign and the allied efforts to unravel. Other nations followed us into southern Afghanistan, and soon more will arrive, we hope, to fortify our efforts there.

[*Translation*]

What would stop them from withdrawing if we do?

*Government Orders*

Canada is respected for having pioneered the concept of the responsibility to protect. We do not want to become known for bowing out when we are most needed.

Do we want the Afghan people to take a step backward, to return to anarchy, to a time when public executions were common and human rights ignored, when it was not uncommon for women and children to be hung from posts on soccer fields? Today, children play on those very fields, some with soccer balls donated by generous Canadians like Joshua Zuidema from South Mountain, Ontario.

Do we want this fragile region to deteriorate further?

Do we want to tarnish Canada's reputation?

[*English*]

Could we ever regain the confidence of allies after deserting them at a critical moment? This is not the history of Canadian commitment to noble causes. How would history judge us if Canada walked away from Afghanistan?

In Canada today, we are a country that pays tribute to those who embarked on unbelievable acts of heroism and courage, who seized the heights of Vimy Ridge, who waded ashore at Juno Beach, and who gave their lives in the service of peace around the world in places such as Korea, Bosnia and Africa.

We honour the generations that looked tyranny in the face, did not blink and did not retreat. But what of us? I believe we are a generation that will not falter, nor we will abandon our nation's noblest traditions.

We have everyday heroes in Afghanistan today. They may not wear the uniform of an athlete, nor draw the salary of one or hear the applause, but they wear the proud clothing of a generation of Canadian soldiers just as proudly and with as much heart and guts as any who went before them.

If we do abandon these traditions, what kind of world are we leaving behind for our children?

There can be no graver decision of any government of any political stripe than sending into harm's way a generation of young men and women who so proudly wear the flag of their country on their shoulders, and the civilian members of our government committed to Canadian values and their promotion outside our borders.

As Minister of National Defence, nothing has touched me more deeply or more profoundly than the loss of Canadians in Afghanistan. Those 79 who gave their all shall be remembered, as will their families, for their enormous contributions and courage.

Some admire oratory and eloquence, others policy. I admire and prefer action, deeds not words, a motto which encapsulates our Canadian Forces. The members of the Canadian Forces enact policy and direction from Parliament. They are an instrument of our free and democratic institution and give purpose to policy.

They are delivering what we talk of and wish for others: freedom, security and a place to feel safe, to go to school, to eat well and to drink clean water. They are a credit to this nation. The uniform they

wear is a source of pride for them and an inspiration to all for their selfless actions and efforts.

My colleagues and I are convinced, I believe, that Canada must continue this mission. As the independent panel led by the Hon. John Manley noted:

After 30 years of strife—in Soviet occupation, civil war and the coercive repression of Taliban rule—Afghan men and women are building a government committed to the democratic rule of law and the full exercise of human rights.

In conclusion, helping the Afghans at this critical time is consistent with Canadian values and interests. The mission is achievable. We must stay the course.

I urge all members to support the motion and in so doing commemorate those fallen and those who forged ahead. Supporting the motion before the House is the best memorial we can build for our country and that of the people of Afghanistan.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I share the concerns of the Minister of National Defence regarding the situation in Afghanistan. I too actually visited the area and we saw that we need to do things differently. We support the Afghanistan Compact. We must focus much more on development and reconstruction. The purpose of today's debate, however, is also to seek clarification. It is important for us to take the time to debate this, but it is also important to clearly understand the issue since all Canadians are now watching this debate.

The minister said earlier that it was not a Liberal mission or a Conservative mission, but rather a Canadian mission. In fact, it is a NATO mission, in which Canada is participating. It is crucial that the wording of the motion presented reflects very clearly the government's official position on certain concepts. The official opposition believes that the mission must change.

I would like the minister to explain to us, in his own words, what he means by the word "rotation".

● (1255)

[*English*]

Does that mean to support or does it mean to replace? If we need to do that mission, we will need to ensure we are sharing the burden, which means that other countries will need to step up to the plate. Therefore, I would like a definition of "rotation" from the Minister of National Defence.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I appreciate the spirit in which he posed the question and offered his comments. I agree with many of the points he made. Clearly, it is time to try to adopt a united position in this House, a position that must be reflected in this motion, in the best interests of our country and our soldiers.

He asked me about the definition of "rotation". I could perhaps ask him the same question, since the word appears in the Manley report, and in the Liberal Party motion.

*Government Orders*

[English]

This word “rotation” or “rotates”, in my view, speaks of reinforcement, of assignment, of duty.

Currently, American forces will be rotated into southern Afghanistan as part of our effort to push back a spring offensive. We hope, through our collective efforts, upon the passage of the motion, if I could presume such, to secure more troops from other countries, like the French for example, to rotate in, to reinforce, to add ability to our current effort there.

Therefore, rotate is something that Canada did itself in deploying into southern Afghanistan. I would hope that all members and the member for Bourassa would support the efforts to add to, reinforce or buttress the current battalion that we have in Afghanistan and in southern Afghanistan in particular.

[Translation]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister painted a very idyllic picture, especially when he spoke about the hope in the young girl's eyes and said that everything is so wonderful. I would like to remind the minister that the motion before us is supposed to speak frankly to Canadians, in a transparent manner, in order to give them straightforward information about the developments.

He may have seen hope in a young girl's eyes, but I would say to him that approximately 3,000 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan this year. I do not know if he saw the terror in the eyes of young girls whose villages were bombed. I do not know if he saw the terror in the eyes of the young boys and girls shot at by Canadian soldiers because they panicked when their vehicle was bombed and they shot at anything that moved. I do not know if he saw the desperation of the young children living in refugee camps.

The picture he has painted is far too idyllic. If he is promising to speak frankly and openly to Canadians from this point forward, he should change his approach and tell us what is really happening. What is happening there is not idyllic, quite the contrary.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this member is a pessimist. I am a realist. He was not there. He did not see the young girl's face. He did not see the look in these people's eyes and their optimism for the future. However, he is right about one thing. A great deal needs to be done on the ground. That is clear. In Afghanistan, the situation is not very good. What he said is not what I conveyed to this House.

• (1300)

[English]

I am not suggesting for a minute that we have solved the problems, addressed the issues of poverty, of abject frailty and the injustices that still prevail. My attempt to present to this House some of my observations was simply an attempt to portray what I think is an improvement in the lives of children in particular. It was simply an attempt to say that we should take a moment to look at how far we have come in a relatively short time in transforming a country that was in absolute chaos. I wanted us to take a moment to reflect back on some of the things we have done right, while at the same time taking measure of what more needs to happen to see that this little girl does have a future to grow up.

Surely my friend would agree that bringing home soldiers and restricting the ability of aid workers and diplomats to continue in their efforts to build that country would be a travesty. Surely that would not lead to a better future for that little girl or any other child in Afghanistan.

My friend may be cynical and pessimistic but all I am here to say is that the progress that I have seen indicates to me that there is more progress to occur and that we have more to do, but for that child a difference was made. For others, I believe a difference will be made if we stay and continue to make these contributions and provide the basic security and necessities of life that we as Canadians enjoy and sometimes take for granted.

That is part of the debate I think that we will hear more of in the coming days.

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the minister's address today. All Canadians want to see the lives of the Afghan people improve but it is a question of how we go about that.

I also listened to his short story from the book *A Bed of Red Flowers: In Search of My Afghanistan*. I have read the book. She also tells another story in that book, a story of when the Russians came and handed out things to students in Afghanistan. She talked about how they reacted to those gifts, such as school supplies and dresses from the Russian, and how they destroyed them after they were handed to them.

Will the battle group remain in Kandahar after 2009, and will the Canadian Forces no longer be involved in any form of combat after 2009?

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, I think the motion speaks for itself as to the dates and to the intent, and that will be the will of the House.

However, I do not think the member took time to read the motion. She obviously did not read history because if she had she would know that the Russians invaded Afghanistan. They had no NATO backing and no UN mandate. They were not there at the invitation of the Afghanistan government. Surely the member is being delusional if she is trying to compare the occupation of Afghanistan by the Russians with the current effort by an international coalition with a UN mandate, NATO-led and with 60 countries there participating in development, now with a democratically elected government looking for assistance from Canada. Surely she is not suggesting, as the NDP seems to be, that sending minstrels and fruit-pickers to Afghanistan will improve that country.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the government's new motion on the future of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.

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The decision to send the men and women of the Canadian Forces into harm's way is one of the most important decisions that the government can make. It is not something to be taken lightly. It must be approached with extreme vigilance. It can never be viewed as an opportunity to take partisan advantage. Our troops should never be used as props in our domestic political landscape.

There are those who would argue that engaging in a debate such as this is potentially harmful as it may increase the danger for our troops and civilians on the ground, but in a democracy like Canada the debate on the military mission is normal and in fact unavoidable. We cannot allow our political process to be held hostage by those forces we oppose in Afghanistan who would deny ordinary Afghans the rights we hold so dear, like the right of holding a free debate.

We cannot send our troops to the other side of the world to help bring democracy and good governance to a country that has sadly lacked both for too long and then abandon those principles at home. We have a solemn duty in this House to do what we believe is best for the nation. We owe it to the men and women who serve in our military and to all the citizens of this great country to debate this issue fully, to challenge each other's position and to ensure that the government is truly making the right choice. No one should ever confuse a debate over the future of the mission with a debate over whether or not we support our troops.

Regardless of the opposition on Afghanistan, every member of the House of Commons supports our troops. For that reason, I would urge all hon. members to avoid the kind of insulting language that has too often dominated the political discourse over this issue. Those who would seek to extend the mission are not warmongers. Those who would seek to end the mission are obviously not Taliban sympathizers. We are all members of Parliament seeking to do what is right and the opinions of all parties should be vigorously scrutinized in the climate of mutual respect.

It is the conviction of the Liberal caucus that what Canada has been doing and what we continue to do in Afghanistan reflects the best traditions of our country. Canada proudly figures among the rare groups of countries, too rare, that have only ever sent their troops abroad to defend the universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the dignity of all people. This is something in which we should all take immense pride.

It is clear that the broad majority of the Afghan population wants us there not as never-ending occupying power, obviously not, but to help them get to a point where they can govern themselves effectively and provide security and freedom to their own country.

• (1305)

In order to succeed in our endeavour, we must make sure that NATO will work in this first mission outside of its traditional European base. This is why a year ago when I delivered one of my first major speeches as leader of the Liberal Party in Montreal on the topic of Afghanistan, I said that for Liberals it was critical that Canada respect its international obligations, and that we could not back away from a commitment that the Government of Canada had made, but for the NATO mission to succeed, I said that Canada could not be called upon to carry such a heavy burden for an indefinite period of time.

That is why I said that the mission could not continue in the same form after our current commitment expired in February 2009. At that time, a full year ago, we urged the government to notify NATO of this fact, so that NATO could begin the process of identifying additional troops who could rotate into Kandahar to replace the current role of the Canadian troops.

As a party, we gave the House the opportunity to support this position last April in an opposition day motion. Unfortunately, the government and the NDP rejected this proposal at that time and our motion was defeated. The government assured us that it was far too early to discuss such matters. It assured us that we did not need to debate the issue until 2008.

As a result of its mistake, a year has passed since that time and the government has done nothing to seriously engage NATO to replace our troops. So, a year later, we find ourselves no further ahead. That was last year and we now see the difficult position this delay has put us in. We must now scramble to find new troops for Kandahar.

Earlier this month the government put forward its first motion on the future of the mission post-February 2009. As I indicated at that time, I found it to be inconsistent with the position of the Liberal Party which is supported by a majority of Canadians. So, we took it upon ourselves as a party to produce an alternative motion.

In drafting our proposed motion we were guided by three simple principles that were lacking from the government's original motion. One, the mission must change. We must change the mission to one that is a mission dedicated to training, security and reconstruction. Two, the mission must end. We must have a clear end date to the mission, not a further review date that will lead us down the path of a never ending mission. Three, the mission must be about more than the military. There is no exclusively military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, so our efforts should be balanced between defence, diplomacy and reconstruction.

Working with these three principles and a belief in the fact that Canadians deserve greater transparency and accountability when it comes to Afghanistan, we produced our amended motion.

I was pleased last week to see that the government has abandoned its flawed and lacking motion and largely adopted the language that the Liberal Party put forward. There are obviously some slight differences in the two motions. I will go through these differences over the course of my remarks today.

I agree with the Prime Minister and the defence minister that what we have now is neither a Conservative motion nor a Liberal motion. It is a Canadian motion. But for now, at least, we have a Conservative government that will implement this mission on the ground in Afghanistan.

*Government Orders*

•(1310)

The government must be accountable to the spirit and the letter of the motion. No matter what happens in this House, the decision to deploy troops and conduct the mission is the responsibility of the executive branch in our political system. It is the government that will ultimately be responsible to implement what is articulated in the motion.

That is why we have placed certain emphasis on the transparency and accountability in the motion we have before us. It will be incumbent upon the government to show the House and all Canadians that it is respecting both the spirit and the letter of the motion. Allow me now to review the motion that is before us today.

•(1315)

[*Translation*]

The mission must change. This motion is consistent with that position. The mission must change in February 2009 for two reasons.

First, we have to start focusing Canada's mission on actions that will enable the Afghan people and their government to ensure security and governance themselves in their country. If we simply continue to do the work for them, the situation will never change. That is why the Liberal Party is placing such great emphasis on the need for a shift toward the training of the Afghan national security forces.

Second, the mission must change because we cannot continue to ask of our troops that they carry such a heavy responsibility indefinitely. Come February 2009, our troops will have been involved for three years in one of the most demanding, and probably also the most dangerous, missions they have participated in since the Korean war. We cannot ask them, and NATO cannot expect us, to sustain much longer operations of this scope and magnitude.

This motion clearly stipulates that, after February 2009, Canada's mission in Kandahar should consist of training Afghan national security forces, providing security for reconstruction and development projects in Kandahar, and continuing Canada's responsibility for the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team. That is a shift from what our troops in Kandahar have been doing since the beginning of 2006.

We are no longer talking about a proactive counter-insurgency mission to seek out and destroy insurgents. We will not, however, tie the hands of our troops by telling them that they cannot take military action to defend themselves or those they are there to protect.

As I said, it is up to politicians to set the focus of military missions. That is a responsibility incumbent upon elected representatives of the people. While generals must refrain from imposing policies on elected representatives, we must refrain from micro-managing our generals.

Like the Liberal motion on which it was based, the motion brought before Parliament by the government makes the continuation of a Canadian military presence in Kandahar contingent on three broad conditions: a clear end date, additional troops, and new equipment. Allow me to expand on each of these conditions.

Why is it so important to have a clear end date for the mission? If we have a clear end date, we can develop a clear plan with realistic objectives and benchmarks. It is up to the government to determine these benchmarks and objectives and to clearly communicate them to our soldiers and to all Canadians. We are expecting the government to indicate, during this debate, what the benchmarks and objectives for training and development will be.

Furthermore, a clear end date will encourage our NATO allies and the Afghan government to prepare for our departure. If we are not clear about the end date of our mission, they will never prepare for our departure.

We are happy to learn that the government's new motion respects our request to establish a clear end date for Canada's mission in Kandahar. Although we called for the mission to end in February 2011 and for all of our soldiers to be out of Kandahar by July 2011, the government chose to have the mission end in July 2011 and to have all of our troops out of Kandahar by December 2011.

I think the government should explain during this debate why it chose later dates. We chose the start of 2011 as the end date for the mission because the benchmarks and timelines established by the Afghanistan Compact must be respected by the end of 2010.

•(1320)

We want to know why the government bothered to change the date we proposed and put it back to the middle of 2011. If the government has a reasonable and logical explanation, our party will not oppose this change.

Moreover, we hope that if the House adopts this motion, the government will inform NATO immediately and formally of the firm end date of our mission in Kandahar. We do not want to find ourselves in a situation in 2011 where NATO is surprised to learn that our mission is ending. We must not make the same mistake twice.

We are concerned that the government omitted the word "immediately" from the part of the motion that asks the government to notify NATO of the date when our mission will end. Our NATO allies and the Afghan government will need this clarity and transparency when the NATO heads of state meet shortly in Bucharest. We do not have the right to conceal things from our allies. At that meeting, Canada will ask NATO for additional assistance. We must therefore be very clear about the length of our commitment.

[*English*]

Now, the issue of additional troops. The Liberal motion called for additional NATO troops to be sent to Kandahar. We did this because we believe it is important for another NATO nation to rotate into Kandahar to take over some of Canada's current responsibilities.

It is not reasonable to say that the focus of the mission will change to one of training and reconstruction if there is no one else to take over our previous offensive military responsibilities. Calling for a NATO rotation, which allows for a sharing of the burden, is appropriate and responsible.

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As a matter of fact, rotation is a concept upon which the entire ISAF mission in Afghanistan has been based since NATO assumed responsibility of the mission in 2003. NATO's overall mission in Afghanistan will only be successful if all members respect the principle of rotation and take on a relatively equal share of the burden.

The government's motion calls for a battle group of 1,000 NATO troops to rotate into Kandahar by February 2009. We call on the government to ensure that this is a true rotation, one where Canada is able to shed some of its current responsibilities so it can engage in new ones.

Obviously, the government's wording in this section is different from what we called for in our motion, and we have two very specific questions that will need answers over the course of this debate.

First, why 1,000 troops? We have all read the report of the Prime Minister's Afghanistan plan, and we know that it recommends 1,000 troops, but we on this side of the House have never understood where this number comes from. Is there a justification for this number, or is it simply a number chosen because that is all that we think we can get?

The Liberal motion called for sufficient troops. We need to understand why the government thinks 1,000 is sufficient. Even one of Canada's own senior military commanders in the region has suggested that at least 5,000 troops are needed.

The second question about the rotation process is, how long is the government prepared to wait before it determines whether or not this condition has been met? The government needs to be clear on this point.

We cannot wait until January 31, 2009 to say whether or not NATO has come through with the requisite troops. The government needs to set a date and say that if these troops are not committed by this date, Canada will not commit to a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009.

Let me speak about additional equipment. We obviously agree with the current motion's insistence on new helicopters and UAVs. The government must be forthright with the Canadian people and explain exactly how much this will cost.

In addition, the government must explain how it intends to have this equipment available before February 2009 as it called for in the motion. Again, we cannot wait until the last possible minute to confirm that we have this necessary equipment.

The mission must be about more than the military. We must all understand that there is no exclusive military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. I am reminded of what President Karzai said when he addressed Parliament in September 2006:

We will not succeed in eliminating terrorism unless we seek and fight the source of terrorism wherever it might be and dry its roots. Our strategy of fighting terrorism in Afghanistan has so far been mainly focused on addressing the symptoms of terrorism, that is, on killing terrorists who come from across our borders.

This strategy is bound to fail unless we move beyond the military operations in Afghanistan and to address terrorism's political ideological and financial basis.

●(1325)

That is why our motion placed a greater emphasis on stronger and more disciplined diplomatic efforts and a better balance with respect to reconstruction and development efforts, issues that the government's original motion virtually ignored.

I am very pleased to see that almost all of the Liberal proposals on this matter have been accepted in the government's motion.

Like the Liberal motion, upon which it is based, the new motion states:

—that Canada's contribution to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan should:

(a) be revamped and increased to strike a better balance between our military efforts and our development efforts in Afghanistan;

(b) focus on our traditional strengths as a nation, particularly through the development of sound judicial and correctional systems and strong political institutions on the ground in Afghanistan and the pursuit of a greater role for Canada in addressing the chronic fresh water shortages in the country;

(c) address the crippling issue of the narco-economy that consistently undermines progress in Afghanistan, through the pursuit of solutions that do not further alienate the goodwill of the local population;

(d) be held to a greater level of accountability and scrutiny so that the Canadian people can be sure that our development contributions are being spent effectively in Afghanistan;—

[*Translation*]

The amendments also call for a stronger, more disciplined diplomatic position on Afghanistan and the other players in the region.

The government did not consider our idea of appointing a Canadian special envoy whose dual role would be to ensure greater coherence in Canadian diplomatic initiatives in the region and press for greater coordination amongst our partners in the UN in the pursuit of common diplomatic goals in the region.

Instead, the government said it would be generally in favour of appointing a special envoy. We assume that the government is referring to the much-debated plan to appoint a UN special envoy to the region. We have nothing against this, but we would like to know why the government rejected the idea of a Canadian special envoy to the region.

Regardless of the final decision on Afghanistan, one thing is certain: the government must be much more transparent and honest about the situation and progress in the field. Canadians have the right to know this vital information. To be successful, the mission must be based on the principle of democracy, and transparency and accountability are crucial to any democratic action.

The motion we introduced called on the government to be more transparent and to report better on the conduct and status of the mission. It contained specific proposals to that end.

More specifically, the Liberal amendment recommended that quarterly reports on the mission's progress be tabled in Parliament and suggested that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Cooperation and the Minister of National Defence be asked to meet regularly with a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan. The Liberal government adopted a similar approach in the context of the NATO mission in Kosovo and I think most parliamentarians found this to be a very positive move.

We are thrilled to see that the government included these ideas in the motion, along with our proposal that challenges the abusive practice of claiming national security reasons to deprive Canadians of legitimate information.

Lastly, the motion we presented addressed the issue of transferring Afghan detainees.

The opposition parties are quite right to be concerned about this serious matter because, in our opinion, this is a fundamental issue of human rights and dignity, the very values for which Canada is fighting in Afghanistan.

In our motion, we asked that the current suspension of the transfer of Afghan detainees be maintained. In order to solve the problem, we called on the government to pursue a NATO-wide solution instead of trying to fight on its own. Moreover—and perhaps most importantly—we asked for greater openness and transparency in general on this matter.

The government articulated the last two points in wording very similar to ours, but it changed our wording on the first point. Unlike our proposal, it does not mention maintaining the suspension of the transfer of detainees. The government prefers to say that it will allow the transfer of detainees only when it is believed that such transfers will be done in accordance with Canada's international obligations.

For us, that means maintaining the suspension of transfers. At this time, there is too much evidence that Canada cannot transfer detainees without neglecting its international obligation to defend and promote human rights.

The government now has an opportunity to demonstrate that it is committed to transparency on this matter from now on. All it has to do is confirm today in the House that the suspension of transfers is being maintained and that the government will notify the House immediately of any changes to this policy.

• (1330)

[*English*]

To conclude, I applaud the government on the reasonable steps it has taken to find the common ground between our two positions. We are pleased to see that the government has accepted the fundamental principles the Liberal Party has been guided by: a change of the mission; an end to the mission; a greater commitment to development and diplomacy; and greater transparency and accountability by the government.

Today I have laid out the principles behind the motion. As we move forward, we call on the government to adhere to the new standards of transparency and accountability laid out in the motion to demonstrate that the government has respected these principles.

We will be listening attentively over the course of the debate to how the government responds to the questions that I have raised over the course of this speech. If the government provides us with reasonable responses to our questions and indicates that it is committed to the letter and spirit of the motion, then the official opposition will support the motion.

The Liberal Party has been at the forefront of this debate for the past year. We have been the party that has been putting forward

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detailed proposals about the future of the mission, first in my speech last February, then in our opposition day motion in the House last April, then in our submission to the independent panel last December, and most recently in our proposed motion earlier this month.

We have been engaged in a constructive dialogue with Canadians on this issue. This has led us to a position that we believe is supported by a majority of Canadians. We welcome the shift that the government has made to join us in this position, and we welcome all of the parties to this national debate of which we have been part for over a year.

The Liberal Party believes that the successful future for Afghanistan is in our national best interest. We believe that our efforts there have reflected the values and principles in which Canadians believe: freedom, democracy, equality, security, and the respect of fundamental human rights. The Liberal Party believes that these values are worth pursuing. We believe that our efforts in Afghanistan, supported with a clear UN mandate, can be successful.

Canadian efforts to date have come at a great cost. As a nation, we have mourned every casualty that we have suffered. We must honour those sacrifices by ensuring that we are defining the right mission going forward. Let us all pledge to be guided over the course of this debate to do what is best for Canada and what is best for Afghanistan. Let us always keep in mind the efforts and sacrifices of the men and women in the Canadian Forces, our diplomatic and development officers, and all Canadians who have been active in Afghanistan.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition and I heard him lament the fact that we have lost a year. Perhaps he could explain to me why then, in 2007, he wanted the mission in Afghanistan to end in February 2009. I clearly heard the Leader of the Opposition say that throughout 2007. I also clearly heard his national defence critic, the hon. member for Bourassa, standing on the barricades, waving the banner, “End of mission: 2009”. That is the issue before us today. We are not talking about embellishing the mission; we are talking about ending it.

I also heard the Leader of the Opposition tell us that the soldiers could continue the military operations of chasing, persecuting and killing the Taliban and that the generals will call the shots, not Parliament. It seems to me that the Leader of the Opposition is completely contradicting everything he maintained throughout 2007.

I would like the Leader of the Opposition to explain this flip flop.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, that is not at all the case. The Liberal Party, the Liberal position, demanded that the counter-insurgency mission end in February 2009, but never said that the mission had to end in February 2009. We still have responsibilities. There is a provincial reconstruction team under Canadian protection. That will not end in February 2009.

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We want the mission to change and to focus much more on security, development and training Afghan troops. We believe that there should be a firm end date of February 2011 and that the government should provide clear objectives on what can be accomplished by February 2011. Therefore, we are being consistent.

The problem is that the government did not approach NATO in 2007 to ensure that troops would be rotated and enable us to concentrate on training, reconstruction and security. It is very late in doing so. The Prime Minister is on the phone trying to obtain these troops at all costs and at the very last minute. The government is responsible for this delay, not the official opposition. The NDP is also responsible for the delay because it did not agree to vote in favour of the resolution in this House.

That is the situation we find ourselves in. We are not here just to criticize, but also to put forward proposals. We proposed a motion that the government accepted for the most part and, on this basis, we will have a debate that I hope will be as fruitful as possible for Canada, Afghanistan and NATO.

• (1340)

[English]

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the Leader of the Opposition as he gave his comments. I also heard the question from my Bloc Québécois colleague.

I would simply take issue with the Leader of the Opposition saying that the government has not asked for help in southern Afghanistan. I think the government has pleaded over and over again for assistance in southern Afghanistan. It is simply that other NATO countries are not willing and do not have the support of their people to go to the south.

I congratulate the leader of the Liberal Party on his flexibility today in turning this motion around. I want to ask him two specific questions.

My first question is, does this motion prevent a future government from adopting a new motion supporting a further extension past 2011?

My second question is, does this motion preclude combat concurrent with the position that the Leader of the Opposition was advocating only a couple of short weeks ago? I have a quote by the Leader of the Opposition who said, “the combat mission in Kandahar must end by February 2009”.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, to answer the hon. member's first question, she knows very well that Parliament is free to debate what Parliament wants. A government in the future may request new military missions for Canada anywhere in the world.

We have a motion before us which says that Canada's military presence in Kandahar will end in July 2011, and it is on this basis that the issue will be debated.

We only say that once it is accepted by Parliament, assuming that is the case, NATO and the government of Afghanistan should be notified right away. This would allow them to prepare for the rotation.

The motion that is facing us clearly says that the new mission will be about construction, security, development and training. This is clearly what we must focus on.

We will not tell our military how to implement the mission, but it is our role as representatives of the Canadian people to define the mission. This is the definition that we have advocated for over the last year. It is the one that we support.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition what he means by rotation. He is basing his argument on the fact that there is a major change in the mission. However, earlier, we heard the Minister of National Defence give us a rather convoluted definition of what he means by rotation, which seems more like a strengthening of the mission.

Will the Leader of the Opposition talk about this so that we know exactly what it means? It seems to be a pivotal aspect of his argument.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

It is very important to understand that in order for Canadian troops to concentrate on the three objectives cited in the motion, other troops must be sent to Afghanistan to look after the other aspects of the mission.

The rotation will allow Canada to concentrate on the tasks of security, development and training Afghan forces. Clear objectives, or benchmarks, must be established. That would be the role of Canadian troops. Therefore, the other troops must be responsible for other aspects of the mission, particularly counter-insurgency operations. That is what is required, that is what the motion sets out and that is what we must debate. Without these other troops, we will obviously not be able to change the mission.

The government is saying that 1,000 troops should be enough. We wonder why 1,000 and how that figure was chosen, given that other military personnel say that 5,000 troops are needed.

Those are some of the terms for our debate here in this House.

• (1345)

[English]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with intent to the hon. opposition leader's speech and I thank him for the fact that regardless of what side of view we take on the Afghan mission, every member of the House and all Canadians support their troops and their families.

The Auditor General came out with her report the other day and the surgeon general of DND said that over 27% of regular forces coming back have a mental or physical injury. One was not done for the reserve forces, so the thinking is that one-third, one out of every three troops coming back from Afghanistan, are suffering from mental or physical problems. The reality is that the previous government failed to recognize this and put programs in place to help them and their families and the current government is being woefully inadequate on it as well.

*Government Orders*

We have heard the stories of the children of Petawawa who were not getting help and it took the media and an ombudsman report to get it done. We hear the stories today in *The Hill Times* of the many veterans who are suffering PTSD concerns and trying to get help from the government and from the previous government. We all support the troops but that support when they come home seems to drop off dramatically.

What programs would the hon. member and the Liberal Party like the Conservative Party to put in place to ensure that when these troops come back the only questions they will be asked is whether they served and how can we help them? That is what Parliament should be doing for those brave men and women when they come home from Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very valid point. The government should enhance the new veterans charter programs that the previous Liberal government enacted.

It is very true that we are demanding a lot from our troops. If I am not wrong, the new contingent will be shaped by something like 25% of reservists. This is a big concern for the official opposition and, I understand, for the hon. member, which is why we are saying to the government that we cannot continue beyond February 2009 unless the mission changes and unless we receive the rotation process from NATO. We have asked the government why 1,000 troops when so many experts have said that we need many more than that.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on February 15, the minority Conservative government put forward a motion that included the Liberal Party's amendments. Despite the fact that the Prime Minister has made it a matter of confidence, the motion does not change the Bloc Québécois' position. We have said it before, and we will say it again: we are ready for an election on this issue.

This Conservative motion would extend the Canadian mission in Kandahar to December 2011. Canada has been in Kandahar since 2006. We think that by the time the mission's current deadline arrives in February 2009, Canada will have done its part. The Liberals and the Conservatives share the same basic position on this issue. Both parties want Canada to stay in Kandahar until 2011.

Considering that most Quebecers want Canada to end its mission in February 2009, it is clear that only the Bloc Québécois represents Quebecers' will and their values. The Liberal and Conservative parties are completely out of touch with Quebec's reality. The position these parties share is convoluted and rife with contradiction. Just a few weeks ago, the Liberals were fighting tooth and nail to ensure that Canada would withdraw from combat zones at the end of the current mission in February 2009, but now they are ready to extend the mission until 2011. They simply changed their minds. How inconsistent!

The government House leader claims that he wants an open and transparent debate, but we have reason to doubt that. Since coming to power, the Conservatives have maintained a culture of secrecy. Moreover, despite their claim that this motion is not a partisan matter, they have turned it into a confidence vote. The government has turned the Afghanistan issue into an ideological debate with only

two possible options: one can be either for or against the stated position.

As far as the substance of the motion is concerned, we think Canada must focus more on reconstruction and military training. That has always been the position of the Bloc Québécois, who would like to see this process begin immediately and continue until the end of the mission in February 2009.

We should add that the government has still not set a date to vote on this motion. We are calling for a clear commitment to have this vote before the NATO summit in Bucharest, which is to begin on April 2, 2008.

Let us remember that this is not the first time Parliament is debating the mission in Afghanistan and its February 2009 deadline.

Let us recap. The war in Afghanistan was authorized by the UN from the outset after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. At first, it was an operation—Operation Enduring Freedom—whereby the United States exercised its right to legitimate defence after receiving proper permission from the UN. The purpose of the operation was to push the Northern Alliance, which was fighting the Taliban regime, toward the capital. The goal was to weaken the Taliban, who had been recognized by the UN as a threat to international peace and security.

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.

Canada has been on mission in the Kandahar region since October 2005. In February 2006, it assumed command from the United States of the regional command south in Kandahar. Canada was responsible for the Enduring Freedom operations conducted by the coalition in southern Afghanistan until November 2006. At that time, Canada also committed to keeping most of its troops there until February 2007.

In May 2006, the Conservative government asked the House to support extending the Afghan mission by another two years, effective 2007.

● (1350)

The House agreed to this extension. At that point, the mission was to end in February 2009. In July 2006, NATO officially took over command in southern Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces left Operation Enduring Freedom to join the International Security Assistance Force. The situation in southern Afghanistan proved to be much tougher than originally thought. NATO troops, and particularly Canadian troops, have faced organized and ferocious resistance from the Taliban. It was at that point that the number of deaths of Quebecers and Canadians started rising at an alarming rate, going from eight deaths between 2001 and 2005, to 70 deaths between 2006 and 2008. For a country of about 30 million people, we can consider that we have done our part.

*Statements by Members*

In fact, Canada has deployed the fourth-largest number of troops in Afghanistan, and has suffered the third-highest number of deaths. Canada has paid a high human price to maintain security in Kandahar. The country has not lost so many lives since the Korean War. Add to that the financial cost of the mission. According to figures published in the report on National Defence's plans and priorities, the cost of Canadian operations in Afghanistan was over \$7.7 billion for the period from 2001 to 2008.

If it ended the combat mission in February 2009, Canada would have some financial flexibility to invest in development assistance in Afghanistan. Furthermore, if we consider that NATO's mission in Kandahar is an international mission and that 38 countries currently have a military presence in Afghanistan, we can say without shame that Canada has carried out an important and dangerous mission in Afghanistan for over three years, and that the time has come for others to take over in that region.

Even though we want Canada to withdraw from Kandahar at the end of its mission, we do not think that the entire NATO mission should end. That is why we have always advocated handing the reins over to other NATO countries to replace the Canadian contingent in Kandahar. The federal government should notify NATO member countries now that our mission will end in February 2009. Complete withdrawal from Afghanistan, as recommended by the NDP, would be irresponsible toward the Afghan people, their government and our allies, who are counting on our participation until 2009. We need to create a new balance by then. That is why for some time now, the Bloc Québécois has supported focusing on increasing development and diplomacy in Afghanistan. To avoid losing the support of the Afghan people, Canada must make development assistance a priority right away. This is urgent.

In the wake of over 20 years of war, devastation reigns in Afghanistan. There is next to no civil infrastructure or economic growth. Everything needs to be reconstructed. It is therefore not surprising that Afghanistan is considered one of the poorest countries in the world. Let us not forget that this is what brought the international community and the Afghan government together for the London Conference on Afghanistan in 2006, where participants adopted the Afghanistan compact. Participants also set a number of goals and a five-year timeline to bring about improvements in three crucial areas—one: security; two: governance, rule of law and human rights; and three: social and economic development in Afghanistan.

To achieve the London goals, we need the support of the Afghan people as we work to ensure their security and, most importantly, improve their daily living conditions.

● (1355)

Concerted action by the international community is required for successful development in Afghanistan. To convince our allies to do more, Canada must lead by example and increase aid immediately. Funding must be increased in order to provide humanitarian aid in the short term and commit to the construction of roads, wells, basic infrastructures, and so on.

Furthermore, it is well known that, generally speaking, international aid and reconstruction efforts are poorly coordinated. The secretary general of NATO stated: "We need a better international

coordination structure for Afghanistan. We must provide the security and do the reconstruction but we must also do the politics." His comments echo those of the UN secretary general.

Without stronger leadership from the Afghan government, greater donor coherence, and in particular, better cooperation among military and civil organizations from the international community in Afghanistan, as well as a strong commitment from neighbouring countries, many of the gains made since the Bonn Conference in terms of security, reinforced institutions and development could be lost or reversed.

In January 2007, inspired by what was done in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Bloc Québécois proposed the appointment of a senior UN official with real, considerable power to better coordinate all international aid in cooperation with the Afghan government. This senior representative would also act as the link between NATO and the reconstruction teams in order to direct aid to where it is needed most. We were pleased to hear the Minister of Foreign Affairs say he was in favour of such an appointment in his speech to the UN General Assembly on October 2, 2007—

● (1400)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but it is now time for statements by members. The hon. member will have eight minutes left when debate resumes.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### SIMONDS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Langley, students at Simonds Elementary School composed some lyrics and music to celebrate our beautiful community. I would like to share one of the songs about Langley, written by Ms. Rogers' and Ms. Lewis' grades 1 and 2 classes.

The Salmon, Nicomekl, and the Fraser River  
Flow through our community  
We have parks and we have playgrounds  
Where you can come and play with me.

We've got bike trails; we've got hike trails,  
We can ride our horses to.  
If you come and live in Langley  
We'll share all these things with you

These bright young students capture the welcoming spirit of Langley. I would like to congratulate Simonds Elementary School and all its students for their fine display of talent. I also invite everyone to visit beautiful Langley this year and help us celebrate the 150th birthday of British Columbia.

*Statements by Members***CURLING**

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Manitoba's curling supremacy is once more bolstered by yesterday's results at the Scottie's Tournament of Hearts held in Regina.

The Jennifer Jones foursome, which hails from the St. Vital Curling Club in my riding of Saint Boniface, demonstrated why they are the best female curlers in the world.

Joining Ms. Jones on the podium are third Cathy Overton-Clapham, second Jill Officer and lead Dawn Askin. They played brilliantly and emerged victoriously from a classic on-ice battle of wits to win their second Canadian curling championship.

[Translation]

Jennifer and her teammates will take advantage of that strong momentum when they compete in the world championship in Vernon, British Columbia, next month.

[English]

With yesterday's triumph comes not only an automatic return to the 2009 Scottie's as team Canada, but it also guarantees the foursome a much coveted berth in the Canadian Olympic trials to take place in October 2009.

I would ask all my colleagues in the House to congratulate Ms. Jones and her teammates on this extraordinary accomplishment and join me in wishing them the best of luck representing Canada in next month's world championships in Vernon, B.C.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**OLD AGE SECURITY ACT**

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on December 5, I had the honour to introduce Bill C-490, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act. This bill provides for full retroactive payment of amounts owed to thousands of seniors, a \$110 increase in the monthly guaranteed income supplement and payment of a deceased person's benefits to that person's spouse or common-law partner for six months. It also provides for automatic registration of people who are eligible for the guaranteed income supplement.

People who are or should be receiving the guaranteed income supplement are among the most vulnerable in our society. These people are living below the poverty line and quite often do not have the means to defend their rights.

I ask my colleagues in all parties to support this initiative in order to improve the lives of our seniors.

\* \* \*

**RADIO-CANADA**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Radio-Canada plays a vital role in the cultural life of francophones in northern Ontario, but it has forgotten that it is required to support local voices. Its new plan will cut service in the Timmins area. This reorganization means that only one journalist will be available to cover our large area.

We have many communities without private French-language radio stations or newspapers. Radio-Canada is the only voice they have. Service in this area must continue and expand. The people of Cochrane, Kapuskasing and Timmins have the right to listen to broadcasts on Radio-Canada. They hear a great deal about Montreal and Toronto.

I am opposed to this plan. Northern francophones deserve better service. Radio-Canada should remember that northern Ontario is part of francophone Canada.

\* \* \*

[English]

**FRUIT FARMERS**

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to highlight our government's record supporting grape growers and the tender fruit farmers in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook and across this country.

Since 2006, our government has delivered millions of dollars in relief from excise tax for grape and wine producers.

Last year, our government provided \$45 million in new funding for fruit farmers to help them eradicate the deadly plum pox virus from their orchards.

Grape and tree fruit farmers also benefit from our \$15 million federal investment in research happening at our revitalized Vineland Research Centre.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to announce, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, \$23 million to help farmers transition to new fruit varieties so they can remain competitive in the global market.

I campaigned on federal support for our local grape and tender fruit producers during the last election and I am proud to stand by our government's record on delivering results for my riding and for this country.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**ONTARIO SENIOR ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

**Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Dr. Henry Hedges, recipient of an Ontario Senior Achievement Award which recognizes seniors who have made significant contributions to their communities through voluntary or professional activities.

By any gauge, Dr. Hedges has contributed very significantly to his community. He is an accomplished author, professor, horticulturalist, environmentalist and an advocate for people with special needs.

Well before the terms became fashionable and used rather indiscriminately, Dr. Hedges was and continues to be visionary, innovative and progressive. He is a person of very considerable accomplishments but is a man of modesty, humility and obvious dignity.

*Statements by Members*

How appropriate it is that this very fine man be awarded the province's highest recognition for seniors. There is truly nobody more deserving than Hank Hedges.

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**MARIANNE VAN SILFHOUT GALLERY**

**Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week I announced, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Government of Canada, a \$100,000 contribution in support of the St. Lawrence College Brockville campus in my riding of Leeds—Grenville for the new Marianne van Silfhout Gallery.

I want to thank the college and its president, Chris Whitaker, for the excellent work in developing this gallery. I also want to congratulate the City of Brockville on its first public art gallery.

By allowing emerging, developing and professional visual artists to share their works with the public, the gallery will play an important role in the community.

For more than 35 years, the Brockville campus has offered part time fine arts programs and, just last year, the college launched its first full time fine arts program.

The gallery offers a place for the work of the region's professional artists, emerging talents and students, as well as travelling exhibitions.

A great number of people donated their time and energy to ensure the success of this wonderful initiative. I would like to thank them all for this fine addition to the community.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE**

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, throughout the world we are celebrating the United Nations Literacy Decade. In Quebec, one million people between 16 and 65, or one in five adults, has very low literacy skills.

In 2006, the Conservative government made \$5 million in cuts to literacy program funding in Quebec. Last month, the Conservatives stuck to the cuts.

Agencies committed to promoting and recruiting illiterate people are currently on life support. Ad hoc agreements do not allow for long term strategy development.

The Conservatives are insensitive to the demands of the Fondation québécoise pour l'alphabétisation. It is high time they adopted a long term vision if we are to celebrate the United Nations Literacy Decade.

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[*English*]

**HEROISM**

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on February 5, a terrible tragedy was averted in my riding of Kildonan—St. Paul due to the heroic actions of an off duty Winnipeg firefighter.

One of my constituents, 23-year-old Lisa Klassen, was driving to work when her vehicle swerved onto a buildup of ice on a highway bridge and plunged over the railing to the Red River 15 metres below.

Having witnessed this accident, Mr. Dale Kasper, who is also a constituent and a volunteer with the East St. Paul Fire Department, quickly scrambled down the riverbank and onto the ice, risking his own life as he entered the frigid water to help Ms. Klassen. After pulling her from the submerged vehicle, he performed CPR until rescue authorities arrived.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Kasper for the brave and heroic actions he took on February 5 to rescue Lisa Klassen. By risking his well-being for the life of another, I believe he truly represents the essence of courage that Canadians have become known for.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**DARFUR**

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week I was honoured to participate in a STAND event, Students Taking Action Now! Darfur, at Westmount Collegiate Institute in my riding of Thornhill where students and teachers came together to help support the people of Darfur.

The students raised money by sponsoring their favourite teacher in a dance contest and used this opportunity to raise awareness of the crisis and to help support the men, women and children affected by the genocide in Darfur.

I would like to commend, first and foremost, Kayla Simms, Adam Schwartz, the members of STAND and the teaching staff at Westmount Collegiate for organizing this important, successful event.

I have received many letters from Westmount Collegiate students who are concerned about the atrocities taking place in Darfur, urging the Government of Canada to take needed action, more action.

It is very heartening to see Thornhill youth actively reaching out, determined to help those in dire need. I hope this inspirational work will help motivate all of us to do more for the people of Darfur.

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**TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME ACT**

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the tackling violent crime act has been in the Senate for 89 days and it has still not passed. The time for filibustering, stall tactics and delay by the Liberal dominated Senate must end and end now. Shame on the Liberals.

The message is clear. It is time to pass the tackling violent crime act and to pass it now. Those who are victims of crime want it passed. Why not the Liberals? Those who want to see the age of sexual consent raised from 14 years to 16 years want it passed. Why not the Liberals? Those who want to protect their children from sexual exploitation by dangerous offenders want it passed. Indeed, Canadians want it passed, yet the Liberals walked out of the House and abandoned not only the House, but parents, young children, those abused by dangerous offenders and all Canadians.

It is not a time for sitting on one's hands or walking out on Canadians. It is time for the leader of the official opposition to show some fortitude. Enough of the stall tactics. It is time to instruct the Senate to pass Bill C-2 and to pass it now.

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#### ARTS AND CULTURE

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the big six cultural organizations in Toronto renewed their call today for the federal government to include much needed top-up funding in their budget announcement tomorrow.

Organizations like the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Royal Ontario Museum are invaluable institutions that tell Canadian stories, shape our identity as a nation and allow Canadians to share the work of our great artists and performers.

These cultural organizations have managed their limited finances well, but maintaining and improving their infrastructure is very costly. Canadian tourism is already threatened because of the dramatic rise of our Canadian dollar. Canadians overwhelmingly support their artists and have handed over hundreds of millions in donations.

It would be a tragedy for Canada's cultural industry to suffer because our finance minister could not offer up the modest funds that many Canadians have already surpassed in donations from their own pocket.

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#### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the recent Federation of Canadian Municipalities-McGill University infrastructure survey estimates a \$123.6 billion national infrastructure deficit in 2007.

Municipal leaders across my riding have flooded my office with letters that call on the federal and provincial governments to work together to develop a long term plan for tackling this very serious situation. Many towns such as Rainy River are wondering where the applications and the money are.

The Liberal Party has a plan to address this crisis. It is a plan that FCM has called "bold and visionary, with the potential to change the face of our country". It is a plan that would make the gas tax transfer permanent. It is a Liberal plan that would ensure a fairer, richer and greener Canada that respects all communities.

#### Statements by Members

[Translation]

#### DENIS LAZURE

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if we could put a face on humanism in Quebec, it would be that of Denis Lazure, who is no longer with us.

Dr. Denis Lazure passed away on Saturday at the age of 82. He was one of the architects of a real revolution in psychiatry in Quebec. But most Quebecers would know him for the very important role he played in René Lévesque's first government, in which he focused on defending the rights of the disabled. He had a long career that spanned over 50 years, during which he tenaciously fought against all kinds of social inequalities, injustices and prejudices.

Quebeckers will also remember his strong support for the sovereignty of Quebec, and the integrity, dedication and intelligence he brought to this noble struggle. Passion, compassion, action and persuasion typified this great social democrat.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to offer our sincerest condolences to his wife, Anne-Marie, his children, and to all of his friends and family.

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[English]

#### LANDMINES

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to join in the celebration and recognition of the achievements made by Canada and the global community in achieving a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines. This week marks the ninth annual Canadian Landmine Action Week.

This week is an important opportunity to reinforce the Canadian commitment to human security everywhere through events, educating communities and raising funds for this worthy cause.

Canada has made positive steps in aiding multilateral organizations such as the UN in landmine action. Canada continues to support the Mine Ban Treaty, also known as the Ottawa Convention of 1997, in which Canada was a pioneer. It is also important that the government continue to utilize the excellent smaller Canadian organizations which have a great record in demining.

Canadians must continue to show leadership to rid our globe of this terrible device that destroys so many lives.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

#### LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it appears that the leader of the Liberal Party has bought himself a new pair of glasses, and just in time because he has been making spending promise after spending promise. He is at the point where his tax and spend announcements would cost taxpayers at least \$62.5 billion and those are just the ones he has priced. He still has 33 of them that he has not priced out yet.

*Oral Questions*

He even sent his finance critic over to my riding and left everyone there shaking their heads, wondering what his plan was.

Therefore, we will see if the new glasses give the leader of the Liberals a clear view of his spending promises and his deficit budgets. Come to think of it, perhaps a new pair of glasses is not enough to take care of that massive sea of debt. What the leader of the Liberal Party really needs is a swimsuit so he can do the front crawl in his own ocean of debt and broken promises.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on the issue of Afghanistan, the Prime Minister has shown a new openness, which we would like to see extended to other issues, such as climate change, one of the worst threats to humankind. The government killed the clean air bill, Bill C-30, a comprehensive plan to combat climate change.

Could the Prime Minister not resurrect this plan and hold a debate in this House on the basis of this bill, to prove that his new openness will not be limited to the issue of Afghanistan?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last fall, in the throne speech, this government presented its very specific approach to climate change. Our reduction targets are 20% by 2020 and 70% by 2050. The House adopted these targets.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the plan put forward by the Minister of the Environment has been roundly criticized and is considered very weak, whereas Bill C-30 was widely praised for good reason. Moreover, it is based on the Liberal idea of a carbon budget. The Pembina Institute called it the best proposal any Canadian political party ever made to control industrial pollution caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

I therefore want to ask the Prime Minister this: what is preventing him from recognizing the excellent work done by Parliament and allowing a debate in this House on Bill C-30, Canada's Clean Air and Climate Change Act?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are working out the details of our plan. We are considering not only the work of the House, but also economic analyses. It is important to consider everything.

I should also mention that this government presented its targets to this Parliament in the throne speech and that, with the Liberal Party's help, Parliament adopted the throne speech.

[English]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister should make up his mind. Sometimes he says that we do not make our minds up. Then he says that we support him.

We certainly do not support this weak plan. We are disappointed by the fact that the Prime Minister comes back to his vagueness now that we are not speaking about Afghanistan. There is maybe a lack of

commitment and conviction from the Prime Minister who spoke about the so-called greenhouse gases.

Now we have the journal *Nature's* condemnation of what it has called the government's "manifest disregard for science". How does the Prime Minister explain that he is condemned by this international academic journal if—

● (1420)

**The Speaker:** The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, in the throne speech the government was absolutely clear on its targets for greenhouse gas reductions, a reduction of 20% going forward to 2020, and 60% to 70% until 2050. The government has been very clear and is now developing the details of its plan in that regard.

The Leader of the Opposition should be aware of those targets and aware of that plan because it was he who assisted the passage of the throne speech.

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### ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have tried to work with the government on Afghanistan. We have also tried to work with it to restart the Chalk River reactor, and it was not such a happy experience.

The government promised to guarantee the authority of Canada's nuclear regulator, but no sooner had we passed the legislation than the regulator was fired. Now we begin to understand why.

Will the minister admit that he fired Ms. Keen in order to pave the way for the privatization of AECL?

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. With respect to Ms. Keen, I will not comment on that. It is before the court.

Our government launched a review of AECL well before any of these events took place.

What is interesting is members opposite cannot make up their minds. One day they say that they want us to act sooner. The next day they say that we should not have acted at all. They do not know what they stand for. They change their minds from one week to the next.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government has to tell Canadians the truth about its plans for Atomic Energy of Canada. The minister must answer—and truly answer this time—a very simple question.

Will he admit that he bent the nuclear safety rules to make Atomic Energy of Canada appear more attractive to private investors?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense coming from the other side. When we were faced with a situation in early December, the government took reasonable steps, and ultimately had the support of every political party, to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians by resuming the production of medical isotopes.

The hon. member and the party opposite do not know what they stand for. One day they say that we should not have acted. The next day they say that we did not act soon enough. They say that they support Bill C-38. The following week they change their minds. They say that they are not sure if they should have done so. They do not know where they stand.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***FINANCE**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, regardless of tomorrow's budget, there is a \$10.6 billion surplus for this fiscal year. A report published by the Desjardins movement last week concluded that not all of the surplus should be put toward the debt and that some of it should be used to stimulate the economy. A few days later, the Bank of Montreal came to the same conclusion.

Does the Prime Minister realize that, although it is important to pay down the debt, it is also important to meet the needs of the people, especially during an economic slowdown?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has already done significant spending and investing in a number of areas. We have also cut taxes for businesses and individuals. Furthermore, we have targets for the national debt. It is important to maintain a balanced approach and that is what the government intends to do.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, cutting taxes for companies that are not making a profit is not balanced: this helps the oil companies and does nothing for the manufacturing and forestry industries, absolutely nothing.

With a \$10.6 billion surplus for this fiscal year, the Prime Minister has room to manoeuvre without creating a deficit, we are talking about a surplus. If this surplus is not used by March 31, the whole thing will be put toward the debt.

Would it not be better to use that money not just for the debt, but also for addressing the problem in the manufacturing and forestry industries and for helping the workers affected by this crisis?

● (1425)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc leader is absolutely wrong. In reality, this government has cut taxes for everyone, not just for certain companies, but for every company in the country, for families and for individuals.

Quebeckers supported the GST reduction and the personal income tax reductions. Exporters and manufacturers in Quebec supported the reductions offered to companies. There will be an \$8 billion cut for the manufacturers, including \$2 billion for Quebec manufacturers.

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, by talking about the deficit and a balanced approach to the surplus in the same sentence, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister are trying to hide their obsession with paying off the debt at the expense of the needs of the economy. With a \$10.6 billion surplus, it is ridiculous to even mention the deficit. Instead, the minister should listen to the CSN, the FTQ, the manufacturers and financial institutions, which are calling for real balance that will allow the debt to be repaid as well as allow improvements to the assistance plan for the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

Will the minister act responsibly and respond to the Quebec consensus?

*[English]*

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question coming from my friend across the way.

I am not one who wants to pass on to my children and grandchildren the kind of debt that the Liberals passed on to us. That is not the way this government will go forward.

We are balancing a budget. I am looking forward to tomorrow when we will once again have the finance minister table a balanced budget in this House that will act upon reducing the debt and will support communities.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the last thing we need is such a vaudeville act between the Liberals and the Conservatives. What we need is action for the economy.

Quebec has lost nearly 150,000 jobs in the manufacturing and forestry sectors in five years, half of which have been lost under this Conservative government.

Will the minister take the only responsible action he can under such circumstances, that is, concrete action to address the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors? Tomorrow is budget day and we must know as soon as possible.

*[English]*

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I might remind the hon. member that in January alone there were 7,200 new jobs created in Quebec. I know he is concerned about job losses as we all are, but 7,200 new jobs have been created. These are high value jobs.

That is because this government took steps last fall in our economic statement to provide incentive for industries to keep hiring, to grow jobs, and to grow the economy.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the representatives of the government say, if we go to cities across this country and spend time with the people who work in the economy to build it, we will find that thousands of them are being thrown out of work by the policies of the government. They have absolutely no hope.

Why? It is because the government has already picked the winners: the big banks, the oil companies. They are getting all the help. Meanwhile, manufacturing, forestry and the middle class are getting squeezed.

Why do we not see some action from the Prime Minister that would be focused on helping the people in this country who really need it, instead of those who have so much already?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Industry and others have admitted to the House, there certainly have been job losses in some sectors in some regions. At the same time, the creation of jobs across the country has far outstripped any job losses.

We do talk to people who work in the real economy in this country. We believe they are saying to maintain the balanced approach.

They are saying, yes, spend where the government needs to spend, make the investments the government needs to make to help people and help communities, but at the same time keep getting those taxes down and keep getting that debt down. That is what this government is doing.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister should start using the real numbers: a third of a million good jobs lost. Those families are suffering right now.

I have been travelling across the country and when I met with medical students in Halifax they said that they were being crushed by student debt.

We were in Sault Ste. Marie where the emergency room is having to close. That is a crisis being faced across the country in terms of health care, along with prescription drugs that people cannot afford for their families. There are millions of Canadians with no doctors.

The Prime Minister said he would do something about health. Why will he not?

• (1430)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has made important investments in health care, including launching important projects on wait times and getting wait time guarantees in place in this country.

In terms of employment, the numbers are clear. Yes, there have been job losses. We are dealing with those. There have been job increases that far outstrip those job losses.

The problem the opposition has is that it is not all doom and gloom out there. Where there are problems, this government is acting, but this government is making sure that we do not simply blow the spending in this country but that we keep this economy growing.

**MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

**Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last year in the finance minister's infamous \$122,000 budget speech, he falsely claimed that "a long, tiring, unproductive era of bickering between the provincial and federal governments is over". Yet, he spent all of last week insulting the Premier of Ontario, the very man who had to clean up the \$5 billion mess that the minister left behind in that province.

Why will he not partner with the Premier of Ontario and provide real help to the manufacturing sector instead of unprovoked attacks and bickering?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in terms of working together with industry, it is very clear that we are working together with the province of Ontario to finalize the community trust agreement but we are also working together with all of the industries. The auto sector in particular comes to mind.

It is based on a sound fiscal framework. Public finances, that are the envy of the G-7, are attributable to this government. We create a sound framework. We work with industry. We will create jobs.

**Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, economists across the country agree that it is the strong Canadian dollar and the faltering U.S. economy that have hit Ontario's economy hard. These are clear areas of federal jurisdiction.

Why does the federal finance minister continue petty attacks against the Ontario premier and thumb his nose at the hardships faced by hard-working Ontario families?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member is in such a poor mood. Actually, last week I was in her riding, in London. There is a very successful company in that riding.

Diamond Aircraft Industries Inc. is doing remarkable things. It is one of the most remarkable companies in the Canadian aerospace industry. It is creating hundreds of jobs and is working together with the government to do so.

What the member really wants to do is to spend the country into a deficit. We will not let that happen. That is what the Liberals are up to.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since the aerospace industry receives subsidies around the world, I have no problem with government support for that industry. My problem is with the government's selective application of laissez-faire principles.

Why is direct support for aerospace okay while direct support for the auto industry in Ontario is not okay? Why is it dollars for aerospace and laissez-faire, do not care, for Ontario?

How can the government possibly justify this blatant unfairness to the people of Ontario?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, is it not classic that the Liberal Party and the hon. member would try to pit Canadian against Canadian and region against region. That is something the government will not do. That is something we do not do in building the country.

We are working with the aerospace industry. We are having success. We will continue to do so. I encourage the member to be patient. We will get the job done with the auto industry as well because it trusts us.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, he does not get it. I have nothing against subsidizing aerospace. I say do it in a consistent way. If the government is going to subsidize one industry, subsidize another industry. Why is that point not understood?

It is about consistency and fairness to the people of Ontario. Why does the minister insist on policies that are flagrantly unfair to the people of Ontario?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is pretty clear from the member opposite and from his party that what they call consistency is that they would subsidize everyone. They would subsidize the public purse into a deficit.

There are nothing but promises from the Liberals amounting to \$98 billion over the course of the next four years. There are no answers about where that is going to come from. All they would do is subsidize and subsidize, and put the country into a deficit.

\* \* \*

•(1435)

[*Translation*]

**OLDER WORKERS**

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors is affecting a lot of people, including many workers over 55 who, in many cases, do not have basic education. The Conservatives have told these crisis victims to get training and find new jobs, to move to Alberta, or to live in poverty while waiting for their pensions.

What is stopping the Minister of Finance from funding a program that would really help older workers who, unfortunately, do not have the option of retraining?

[*English*]

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously, we have great sympathy for people who are taken out of their jobs because of sectoral change, like in the forestry industry and manufacturing, but we do not accept the doom and gloom from the Bloc.

The fact is that older workers overwhelmingly have been more successful than the rest of the population in terms of finding jobs. We are supporting them and helping make those changes by providing big investments in training.

I really have to say to the member from the Bloc that he should have a little bit more faith in the people of Quebec. Ultimately, the people of Quebec should have a lot less faith in the Bloc who cannot do anything to help the people sitting on that side.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is totally irresponsible. I would like to see him tell that to the workers in person. I would like to see him say that to the Donnacona workers and all of the other crisis victims.

All it would take to help workers over 55 is \$60 million. We have a \$10.6 billion surplus.

The government should help these victims by funding an income support program out of that surplus. Does the government realize that such a program would cost barely one-half of 1% of its surplus?

[*English*]

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there the Bloc goes again, reaching back to the 1980s for some ideas.

The fact is this government is helping workers today. Whenever there is a layoff, Service Canada provides information so that people know where the new jobs are, what training initiatives there are and, of course, what kind of income support is available. We provide new training arrangements.

But, most important, the finance minister and the Prime Minister are providing the hottest labour market in Canadian history, so that the people of Quebec can step into those jobs. We are helping them do that.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**KOSOVO**

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, now that Kosovo has declared its independence, the Government of Canada should follow the lead of several European countries and the United States and support the nation's decision to take control of its own destiny.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us whether Canada intends to recognize Kosovo's independence?

[*English*]

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we note that the parliament of Kosovo has adopted a declaration of independence. We are assessing the situation. Canada has consistently supported UN efforts to broker a peaceful solution and we encourage all sides to remain calm.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

## TV5

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, France has just unilaterally decided to take complete control of TV5 by affiliating it with its holding France-Monde. Quebec, Belgium, and Switzerland are questioning this decision, which threatens the future of an important voice for the Francophonie.

What does the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages have to say about the deafening silence of the Canadian government on this matter?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary for Canadian Heritage, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the meeting that was held this weekend between representatives of the partnering governments on TV5 was a perfect occasion to highlight that TV5 is an important tool in promoting the culture and values of international Francophonie, and that it must remain a Francophonie project.

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## FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has broken its promise on the Atlantic accord. It made claims of spying on the cabinet of Newfoundland and Labrador and now lashed out at Ontario in its time of need.

Last week Premier Williams defended Premier McGuinty, calling the Conservative government out on its blame game, and divide and conquer tactics. Remember, it was only last year the Minister of Finance famously announced to all Canadians that there was an end to the years of federal and provincial bickering.

Why does the Minister of Finance not measure up to his own incompetence and admit he is truly the small man of Confederation?

● (1440)

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we can always expect some interesting comments out of that hon. member in the form of a question.

However, I remind the hon. member that it was this Conservative government that finally brought a peaceful settlement to the fiscal imbalance that the Liberals would never even admit to, \$39 billion.

We have signed the accord with the Atlantic provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. We are happy to have those onside.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** I thank him for his confidence, Mr. Speaker. That was very kind of him.

Shall we continue the list? Conservatives have claimed that Premier McGuinty is the small man of Confederation for upholding democracy and now blame Ontario for the rising dollar and faltering U.S. economy.

Perhaps the finance minister is following the lead of another person in the House, when this person looked at Danny Williams and said that in the next election he did not need Newfoundland. Who said that? The Prime Minister.

When will the Conservatives stop bickering and smearing the reputations of our premiers?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. I said absolutely no such thing in that meeting or at any time.

I will say that I was delighted to see Newfoundland and Labrador opt into the new equalization formula that this government created, that the Nova Scotia government also opted into.

Far from not needing Newfoundland and Labrador, the contributions made by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and his colleagues have been indispensable for this government.

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## KOSOVO

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, over a weak ago Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. Since then a number of countries have formally recognized Kosovo's independence; others have not.

A few minutes ago the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs announced a non-position.

Can the Prime Minister tell us what his government's position is?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously the hon. member is not quick enough on his feet to come up with a different question, so I will give him the same answer.

We are assessing the situation. We have consistently supported the UN efforts to broker a peaceful solution and we are encouraging all sides to remain calm.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a non-position is hardly a position. It may be for the government but it clearly will not satisfy Canadians.

Can the government clearly tell us when it plans to come to a position, how does it plan to get there, and when will it announce its conclusion to members of the House of Commons?

**Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. member might consider listening to his former colleague, former prime minister Chrétien, because he did advise that we should remain cautious.

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## FINANCE

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the fall economic statement our government acted early to deliver tax relief for Canadians.

Tomorrow afternoon the Minister of Finance will bring forward our government's third budget.

*Oral Questions*

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please inform the House if the government will accept opposition amendments to budget 2008?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, indeed tomorrow the finance minister will stand in his place and deliver the third consecutive Conservative balanced budget.

Unlike the Liberals in previous years who amended their budget after it had been tabled, we will not accept any amendments that the Liberals would like to propose that would drive us into a deficit.

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●(1445)

**PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government continues to roll out one patronage appointment after another. We have the failed Conservative candidate, Mark Patrone, parachuted into the CRTC. We have the guy who gave money to the finance minister's leadership bid who gets the cushy gig at the mint. We have old Elwin Hermanson dumped off at the Canadian Grain Commission.

The government promised it was going to change how business was done in Ottawa. Instead, it just stole the old pork-barrel playbook from the Liberals.

If we had a public appointments commission, the Conservatives would not get away with such brazen activity. Why have they broken this key pledge on accountability to the Canadian people?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know that the problem in the House of Commons is that we have people like the NDP members who just will not stop attacking people in the media.

Mark Patrone is a first rate Canadian with long experience in broadcasting. He is an example of the capable members that we keep appointing, people who serve their communities as well and who are eminently qualified for the positions they take on. We should be proud of their willingness to commit to help Canadians in that fashion.

As for the NDP members, if they wanted that appointments commission in place, they did not have to work so hard to keep it from happening.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have never heard such a tear-jerking defence of pork-barrelling.

Let us go back to what Justice Gomery said. He slammed the government for its excuses on killing the public appointments commission. He said that this key aspect of accountability has fallen into a black hole of Conservative indifference.

If we are going to have responsible government in this country, we have to drain the swamps of cronyism. Instead, the government is using taxpayers' dollars to give out untendered contracts to party pals. It is using the public appointments process as a massive job creation program for failed Tories.

Why has the government broken this key promise to the Canadian people that it would end cronyism?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on that theme that I was developing a bit earlier, I know it is important for us to look to those folks in the media for whom the NDP have a low regard but we in some cases have a high regard, and I go to no more than Tim Naumetz of the *Ottawa Citizen*, who, in looking at our appointments, said the following: "...many, perhaps more, are going to eminently qualified Canadians. Better than ever, you are getting appointments of top-notch people that are going to serve Canada well. No more of the pork-barrel patronage that we saw in the past".

That is what our government is delivering: first rate, qualified appointments, regardless of their background.

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**STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government keeps trying to defend cutting women's advocacy groups, and Canadian women are noticing. Yet the Conference of Defence Associations, the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, receives \$500,000 in funding from the government.

Why is it that defence advocacy groups that get government contracts receive so much attention when women's advocacy groups fighting for women's rights get the door slammed in their faces?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government spends \$20 million every year on projects that have a direct impact on women and young girls, a record for Status of Women Canada.

Furthermore, several Canadian government programs are directly related to women, such as the official languages minority communities program, the aboriginal peoples program, particularly the national women's organizations component, and the women's multiculturalism program.

[English]

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member did not answer the question.

We have no issue with the CDA receiving funding. We have a problem with the hypocrisy of the government, however.

The government cut the court challenges program, telling Canadians it did not make sense to fund an organization that challenged the federal government. However, it has no problem giving money to organizations that agree with everything the Conservative government says.

When will the Conservatives come clean and admit that they have a double standard?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be quite aware that that very particular issue is now before the courts. I think all members of the House of Commons would agree it would be inappropriate to make any comments on it at this time.

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[Translation]

**CIGARETTE SMUGGLING**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again, cigarette smuggling is in the news. This sort of problem has reared its head before. In the early 1990s, smugglers cost various levels of government billions of dollars in lost tax revenue. The authorities sometimes make successful busts, but that is only the tip of the iceberg.

How does this government plan to fight tobacco smuggling?

• (1450)

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. friend. That is why we have provided the RCMP and other authorities with additional resources to reduce the problem she mentioned.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, additional resources are not enough. We need exact figures. Cigarette smuggling is not a problem just because it costs the government revenue. Smugglers also undermine all the anti-smoking programs created to maintain public health. Moreover, cigarette smugglers contribute to the rise of organized crime.

What exactly is the government doing to make sure the illicit tobacco trade does not affect public health or the welfare of aboriginal communities?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have exact figures. I can send them to my colleague. For example, between December 2 and 4 of last year, the RCMP seized nearly one million illegal cigarettes, and it is continuing to do its job.

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this problem is so serious that it deserves four questions. Cigarette smuggling is flourishing and is now out of control. Federal and provincial governments are currently losing millions of dollars in tax revenues. Over the past few years, consumption of illegal cigarettes has doubled in Quebec, and things are getting worse.

Is the Minister of Public Safety ready to ask the RCMP to take this matter firmly in hand and put an end to cigarette smuggling?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, the RCMP will continue to work toward its goal of overcoming the problems my colleague mentioned. That is why we reversed cuts to funding and resources. In the past, when the Liberal government was in power, resources were cut and crime rates increased. We want to increase resources and cut crime.

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last November, I asked the same question and received pretty much the same answer. However, smuggling has been shown to be on the rise. To fight this scourge, several organizations and departments must work together. If that happens, one minister must take the lead on concerted action, and the most logical person for the job is the Minister of Public Safety.

Why is he so weak and missing in action? Why does he not assume leadership of such an operation? Can he tell us about the measures he plans to take?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have already dedicated more resources and people to the problem. We have also equipped our integrated border teams with more resources to tackle the problem.

That is something the Bloc members cannot do. They cannot do anything to help the people of Quebec with this problem, but we can.

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the heartless Conservative government sent Dunia Rivera-Mora, and consequently the son she was breastfeeding, back to Costa Rica. Her spouse is a Canadian and their child was born in Canada. I wrote two letters asking that the removal be postponed, and I made a number of calls, but to this day I have received no response. Ms. Rivera-Mora has apparently now filed a sponsorship application.

Will the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration show more compassion than her colleague from Public Safety? When will she allow this family to be reunified in Canada?

[English]

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, each case is evaluated on its own unique merits and circumstances and based on all of the facts. We are happy to look at the situation on that basis.

\* \* \*

• (1455)

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over recent months, various regions of the country have seen a proliferation of blue-green algae in their lakes and rivers. This is a very important issue for many regions in Canada, including Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec.

Can the Minister of the Environment explain here in the House what action will be taken to solve the problem?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, all the questions I have received have come from the government caucus.

Last week, the government issued a notice of its intention to regulate phosphates. Our measures will reduce their concentration to 0.5%. We are working very hard and in close cooperation with my colleague in Quebec, Ms. Beauchamp, as well as the minister in Manitoba, Christine Melnick.

This is another good example of the open federalism practised by this government. We are working in partnership with the provinces and achieving real results for our environment.

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[English]

#### AFGHANISTAN

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian and U.S. military officials have confirmed it is impossible to have forces deployed in southern Afghanistan and not be engaged in active combat. Most recently, Admiral Fallon of the U.S. Central Command confirmed the impossibility to distinguish between a so-called defensive operation and the current operations ongoing in Kandahar.

Does the Minister of National Defence agree with the admiral when he stated unequivocally that they cannot be in Kandahar and not engaged in combat, or does he agree with his new coalition partners, the Liberals, who say that they can?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a new dawn is breaking out of the black.

I absolutely do agree with my colleague from Bourassa who said something very similar, that we cannot have soldiers participating in this mission without the possibility of combat. Clearly what we are seeing in Afghanistan today with the operational mentoring and liaison training that is going on with the Afghan forces is that they are building capacity each and every day. The clear goal and what is envisioned in the motion is to continue to raise that capacity where Afghan soldiers will eventually be able to provide their own security.

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#### CANADIAN FORCES

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what we really need is a new dawn or a new start in Afghanistan.

All hon. members of this House support our brave women and men in the armed forces. That support must be more than words. Already the Auditor General reports that 27% of returning soldiers suffer from mental or physical injuries. However, current resources are simply inadequate, even for the current mission.

Will the minister support increased resources for those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or acquired brain injury? Or does he agree with his parliamentary secretary who said that MPs should not meet with the families of those suffering from—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

**Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is the NDP members at their hypocritical best, because as they well know, we doubled the amount of OSI clinics in this country in our last budget, and they stood in the House and voted against that budget. They never stand up for our men and women in uniform, including our veterans. Their record is deplorable.

#### Oral Questions

I ask every member in the House to check the record when it comes to defending our men and women in uniform and our veterans.

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#### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a year ago this month, the government announced it would fund the Manitoba floodway specifically under the Canadian strategic infrastructure fund. A month later, the province was informed the funding would be taken instead from Manitoba's share of a different infrastructure program, short-changing the province by \$170 million.

Why is this meanspirited government playing a shell game with Manitoba? Why will it not honour its original commitment? Why will it not give Manitoba its full fair share of infrastructure funding?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when our government got to the cupboard, the cupboard was bare. All that was there were commitments by the prior government, with no money in place.

My colleague, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and the Prime Minister said that we would come up with that money. The hon. member should check the record. Manitoba got its money. The floodway is progressing as it should. That member should be ashamed. She did nothing for Manitoba.

\* \* \*

● (1500)

#### HUMAN RESOURCES

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate in my province of Ontario dropped again last month. More than 13,000 new jobs were created last month alone, including more than 10,000 new full time jobs. Despite the fact that the Ontario economy is growing and performing exceptionally well, the government of Ontario is criticizing this government's support for Ontario workers.

Can the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development please tell the House and the people of Ontario what this government has done to support the workers of my province, particularly those in the vulnerable industries?

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, some people just cannot stand good news.

According to Statistics Canada, 75% of people in Ontario who contribute to EI are eligible for benefits. Ontario receives more in income support than any province, but the real good news is that jobs are being created. There were 95,000 new jobs in Ontario over the last year. We are helping those people retrain who do not have jobs and leading sectors that are restructuring. We made a major announcement last week of \$1.2 billion to help the people of Ontario step into those jobs in the hottest labour market in our history.

*Points of Order*

[Translation]

**GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT**

**Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, statistics often do not tell the whole story. According to observers, although the poverty rate among seniors has declined, some are living in increasingly alarming conditions. What kind of society do we have when our seniors are forced to turn to food banks, as is the case more and more?

The Conservative government could make a commitment right now to improve living conditions for seniors by raising the guaranteed income supplement above the poverty line.

Will the Minister of Finance include concrete measures to that end in the budget?

[English]

**Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my friend that I think all right-thinking people are concerned about seniors who are struggling to make ends meet. That is why we have introduced a number of different measures to lift the burden, including raising the guaranteed income supplement two years in a row over and above the inflation rate and of course reducing taxes so that many seniors no longer have to pay income tax. We have reduced the GST.

Most of all, seniors today have a voice at the cabinet table to make sure their concerns are heard, something that is unique to this government in recent history.

\* \* \*

**ATOMIC ENERGY OF CANADA LIMITED**

**Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the plot thickens in the AECL affair. We know that the Conservatives want to privatize AECL and they are removing, step by step, the blockages to a foreign sale of AECL.

The regulator gave AECL a pre-approval for its Candu ACR-100 for Ontario, but Linda Keen cancelled it in 2006 because the CNSC did not have the resources to do the job. Less than a month after Ms. Keen was fired, AECL has the Candu ACR-100 pre-approval back.

Is this why Ms. Keen was fired as Canada's top nuclear safety officer? So that AECL could be sold off to the highest foreign bidder?

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course with respect to Ms. Keen I cannot comment on that matter as it is before the courts.

Decisions made by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission are completely within its authority and completely at arm's length from this government. I can say that in November our government announced a review of AECL. We are collecting all the information. We want the best advice before us before we make any decision on its future. We are looking forward to coming back and reporting that information to the House in the coming months.

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## RESPONSE TO ORAL QUESTION

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during question period the Minister of Justice referred to my question as having been referred to the courts. With all due respect, I was not referring to the court challenges program although it was mentioned. My question had to do with the fact that not only have the advocacy programs for women been cut, but we continue not to have them. The answer was totally inappropriate.

**The Speaker:** I think the hon. member for Beaches—East York, with her long experience in the House, is aware that Speakers do not rule on whether answers have anything to do with questions. I have no views in respect to that matter.

The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre is rising on another point of order.

• (1505)

## COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS TO BILL C-21

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the point of order raised on Thursday, February 14, by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians concerning two amendments to Bill C-21 adopted by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to take up too much of the House's time. However, I do feel that it is important to have a couple of items on record before you give your ruling. The parliamentary secretary shared that in his opinion two amendments adopted in the standing committee should be ruled out of order because he felt they went beyond the scope of the bill.

First, I would like to quote from the sixth edition of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*. At page 205 it states in article 689 (2):

The committee may so change the provisions of the bill...other than that which was referred. A committee may negative every clause and substitute new clauses, if relevant to the bill as read a second time.

Article 694 on page 206 states:

Amendments may be made in every part of a bill, whether in the title, preamble, clauses or schedules; clauses may be omitted; new clauses and schedules may be added.

Beauchesne's sixth edition also states on page 205 that:

The objects (also referred to as the principle or scope) of a bill are stated in its long title, which should cover everything contained in the bill as it was introduced.

The long title of Bill C-21, as listed on the bill's cover page under the number assigned to the bill, is "An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act". Therefore, the principle and/or scope are defined in this title, that is, to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The two amendments in question that are contested by the parliamentary secretary are essentially the addition of new clauses: an interpretive clause, clause 1.2, and a non-derogation clause, clause 1.1. The reason for a non-derogation clause is of much importance, as legislation must be consistent with the constitutional obligations of the Crown.

The clause is important to first nations as it is an affirmation of their rights that are set out in the Constitution and ensures that those rights are respected with respect to any new legislation. A non-derogation clause protects established and asserted aboriginal treaty rights recognized in section 35 of the Constitution. The amendment dealing with this non-derogation clause was accepted by the committee chair.

With respect to the interpretive clause, a review of the minutes of the relevant meeting reveals that the chair admitted that he had received mixed advice from “legislative people” as to its admissibility.

These two additional amendments in no way alter the principle or the “scope” of the bill as stated in the long title, that is, to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act. Furthermore, the parliamentary secretary admitted himself that the said bill contained three specific items: first, it repealed section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act; second, it provided for a parliamentary review of the repeal within five years; third, it included a transitional provision concerning the implementation of the repeal of section 67.

Again, the two amendments in no way alter these three items as presented by the parliamentary secretary. The bill, as amended, still proposes to repeal section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. It still proposes a review and a transitional period for the said repeal. Therefore, I cannot see how the scope or the principle has been affected.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully request that you rule these amendments to be in order and allow the House as a whole to express itself when the bill is called for debate at report stage.

**Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will respond very briefly to the point of order raised by the member for Winnipeg South Centre as I have already made a submission to you on this matter and, of course, we look forward to your ruling.

I will speak to one important element. The bill is very narrow in its scope. Its scope was simply to repeal section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. The member for Nunavut, in response to my submission, stated that she thought it was necessary to go beyond the scope of the bill. She actually admitted that the Liberals were going beyond the scope of the bill with the amendments they brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, should the ruling keep these amendments in place, we will see a precedent being set in the House of Commons that I do not think is appropriate for future bills that will be brought before the House. I look forward to your ruling to maintain the consistency of parliamentary procedure.

### *Routine Proceedings*

●(1510)

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary and the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre for their comments on this matter and I will take them under advisement before I render a decision.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with leave of the House, and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I would like to table, in both official languages, two treaties, entitled “International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage (2001)” and “The Supplementary Fund Protocol of 2003 to the 1992 International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund”. Each treaty includes an explanatory note.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s response to 24 petitions.

\* \* \*

### AGRICULTURAL MARKETING PROGRAMS ACT

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There has been some considerable anticipation about the bill that was just tabled and now that it is in the public domain and members will have an opportunity to examine the provisions of the bill in detail, I wonder if the government would be prepared to consider, later this afternoon, the opportunity to gather unanimous consent in the House to expedite the passage of the legislation, assuming that what is in the bill measures up to how it was described in principle in advance.

I think there may be a disposition to move quickly on the legislation, perhaps even by the procedure of using the committee of the whole and expedite the provisions that are in the bill.

**The Speaker:** I am not sure this is a point of order but I will hear from the government House leader in case he thinks it is.

*Routine Proceedings*

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, as my friend is aware, we are making efforts to discuss with the other parties ways of dealing with the bill that the government has introduced on agricultural support and to have it dealt with as quickly as possible by the House, potentially by extending hours this evening, as well as extending hours with the objective of allowing the Afghanistan debate to continue. Those discussions I hope to be able to get back to the House on later this afternoon.

**The Speaker:** I am sure we all look forward to hearing from the House leaders on this matter.

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## STATUS OF WOMEN

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth and fifth reports of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to aboriginal women and aboriginal women's shelters.

Aboriginal communities and aboriginal women in particular face discrimination and a disproportionate amount of violence. Therefore, the committee requests that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development increase the current core funding for aboriginal women's shelters and put a stop to the delays in evaluating these shelters.

As well, the committee requests that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages reinstate the former criteria for women's programs as the removal of advocacy penalizes disproportionately aboriginal women's groups.

● (1515)

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present in the House today, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: fourth report, chapter 1, Expenditure Management System at the Government Centre, and chapter 2, Expenditure Management System in Departments of the November 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada; the fifth report, chapter 11, Protection of Public Assets — Office of the Correctional Investigator of the November 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada; the sixth report on the departmental answers to questions about government responses; the seventh report, chapter 3, Large Information Technology Projects of the November 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada; and the eighth report of the committee on departmental performance report.

\* \* \*

**CRIMINAL CODE**

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-511, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (means of communication for child luring).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this private member's bill to strengthen the laws that protect our children.

Children are special and vulnerable and deserve protection against those who would try to exploit or to abuse them.

Luring or grooming is the start of this abuse. Currently, luring a child is a crime only if it is carried out by computer but we know that luring does not always take place in this way. My bill would expand the definition of luring to include grooming by all means, including by cellphone or by mail.

It is time to modernize our child protection laws to ensure that we do protect the safety of our children.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

\* \* \*

**CRIMINAL CODE**

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-512, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (luring a child outside Canada).

She said: Mr. Speaker, to combat child sex tourism, Canada has laws that prosecute Canadians who travel overseas to abuse children. We must be constantly vigilant and it is now time to strengthen and update these laws.

We know that child abuse often starts with luring and my bill would include luring in the list of offences committed abroad.

If my bill were to pass, Canadians would no longer be able to lure children who are living overseas in order to abuse them.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT**

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-513, An Act to amend the National Defence Act (foreign military mission).

She said: Mr. Speaker, the bill I am introducing today at first reading would amend the National Defence Act so that when a foreign military mission includes or might include an offensive facet, the minister in question must table a motion for ratification of the declaration of intention to place the Canadian Forces on active service before the House of Commons.

This essentially means that when any government decides to undertake a mission involving a military component, it must table a motion in the House.

*Routine Proceedings*

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

\* \* \*

● (1520)

[English]

### PETITIONS

#### MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today with petitioners who are calling for a better Canadian manufacturing strategy.

The headlines are troublesome. They include massive job cuts, company closures and hard-working families losing their main source of incomes. Those are only some of the by-products of Canada's current manufacturing crisis. It is a problem that is affecting millions of Canadians who work directly or indirectly in the sector.

We, as members, must put forward a plan to help these families and to help secure Canada's future economic prosperity.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to develop and implement a plan of action to protect Canadian manufacturing jobs in consultation with all stakeholder, including the labour and business communities.

A better strategy is urgently needed to protect Canadian workers and protect Canada's economic future.

#### SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

**Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to present a petition from almost 200 people in my riding. The 250 people who attended a seminar on the Security and Prosperity Partnership were concerned that the implementation of the SPP will further advance NAFTA's goal of continental economic integration and push Canada closer to deep integration with the U.S.

The petitioners are also concerned about the hearings proceeding further away from public scrutiny, with no democratic mandate. They call upon Parliament to have a full legislative review, including the work, recommendations and reports of all the SPP working groups, and a full debate and vote in Parliament.

[Translation]

#### DANGEROUS OFFENDERS

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present two petitions today.

The first petition follows another petition previously presented that called for increased monitoring of dangerous offenders. That petition contains approximately 5,000 signatures, to which I am adding more. The petition calls for an amendment to section 810 of the Criminal Code, in order to protect children from sexual predators.

#### SECULARISM OF INSTITUTIONS

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the other petition has also been signed by citizens in my riding in an effort to ensure the secularism of institutions. Essentially, they are asking that

the Charter of Rights and Freedoms be amended to include secularism as one of the primary principles.

#### AGE OF SEXUAL CONSENT

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions today.

[English]

One petition is presented on behalf of thousands of constituents who call upon the Liberal Senate to stop delaying the tackling violent crime act in order to raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16 years old. They believe this is important in protecting children, especially in this new age of online child predators.

#### INTERNATIONAL AID

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from constituents congratulating the government for cutting off aid to the Hamas government in the territories and urging the government to resist pressure from the Liberal opposition to restore that funding to Hamas.

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my pleasure and privilege to present a petition signed by several thousand Canadians in the greater Toronto area on the issue of abducted Israeli soldiers in the summer of 2006.

As we know, three soldiers, Gilad Schalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, were abducted by Hamas and Hezbollah. We are all familiar with the events of 2006.

The petitioners call upon Parliament, through the government, to use all reasonable means, including economic sanctions and breaking of ties with those organizations responsible for the abductions and the governments that support them, in order to bring about a safe and swift return of these young men to their families.

While I am on my feet, I have an additional 1,070 signatures on a similar petition from the great citizens of Eglinton—Lawrence who also call upon the government to use all the means available to it to ensure that those same three young men, Gilad Schalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, abducted by Hamas and Hezbollah, be returned to their families and that Parliament employ whatever means available to it, whether it be economic sanctions, breaking of ties with those organizations responsible for the abductions—we know that they have already been declared to be terrorist organizations—and the governments that support them.

All those petitioners rely on Parliament to ensure that these soldiers, who represent the great democratic values around the world, be returned safely and swiftly to their families.

*Government Orders*

•(1525)

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

**Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a large petition with 2,054 signatures from across the country, from Newfoundland and Labrador all the way to British Columbia. The petitioners request that Parliament enact legislation to protect unborn victims of crime.

I thank Mr. Aydin Cocelli, the brother-in-law of murdered Aysun Sesen who lost her life and the life of her unborn child. He was the instigator of this. He has taken great initiative to provide support for my bill. He is collecting literally thousands of names on petitions across the country on that behalf.

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition that is part of a response from thousands of Canadians to the Security and Prosperity Partnership.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to stop further implementation of the SPP with the United States and Mexico until there is a democratic mandate from the people of Canada and parliamentary oversight and consideration of the profound consequences the SPP will have on Canada's sovereignty and our ability to adopt autonomous and sustainable economic, social and environmental policies.

The petitioners also urge the Government of Canada to conduct a transparent and accountable public debate of the SPP process, with meaningful public consultations with civil society, a full legislative review, including the work, recommendations and reports of all the SPP working groups, and a full debate and vote in Parliament.

\* \* \*

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of Motion.

**The Speaker:** Before members' statements and oral question period, the hon. member for Papineau had the floor. She now has eight minutes left to finish her remarks.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will simply continue my speech where I left off. Speaking of aid in Afghanistan, Canada and its allies must also channel their aid as much as possible through multilateral organizations, and in particular United Nations agencies, since this will eliminate duplication and avoid working at cross purposes.

As well, the issue of poppy cultivation is key to the economic development of Afghanistan. The illegal opium trade feeds corruption in the Afghan government and is also used to finance the Taliban insurgents. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that the poppy crop that is the source of opium is still a lucrative means of subsistence for some Afghan growers. We must recognize that since 2002, poppy production has risen steadily. It has increased from 70,000 hectares under cultivation in 2002 to 165,000 hectares in 2006.

We therefore have to try to square the circle: how do we put an end to a crop that is the source of over 90% of the heroin in the world while at the same time making it possible for Afghans to work and earn a living? So far, the strategies used to combat this scourge have been synonymous with failure.

We believe that we must now give serious thought to a three-stage strategy. First, continue and intensify enforcement efforts against drug traffickers. Second, fund and implement programs to encourage alternative crops, while building the infrastructure needed for marketing them. And third, for a transitional period, buy the poppy harvest directly from the small farmers, for medical use.

I would also like to talk about the role Canada should play in the diplomatic realm.

One of the major problems facing the international forces in southern Afghanistan is that the Taliban have a safe haven in Pakistan. That border can be described kindly as extremely porous, and Afghanistan has never recognized the border it shares with Pakistan. Some Pashtuns who have been blithely crossing from one country to the other for millennia even want to see a "Pashtunistan" created on that border.

The government of Canada must bring more diplomatic pressure to bear on the Pakistani government to solve this problem. Pakistan is the linchpin for the consistent stability and development of Afghanistan.

At present, Pakistan is experiencing widespread political instability. Since the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the country has been on the brink of a civil war, with democrats, the military and religious groups engaged in a struggle for power. Canada should use diplomacy, as far as possible, to create the conditions that are needed for stabilizing the country. If Pakistan were to descend into chaos, the impact on Afghanistan would be far-reaching.

In addition to Pakistan, we must also intensify diplomatic efforts in dealing with other actors in the region of Afghanistan, including Iran, India and China. Those countries will have to be involved in resolving the conflict and, as far as possible, in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

And last, the Afghan government, the international community and Canada must be open to negotiations with the Taliban, again, as far as possible, in order to achieve a lasting peace. Negotiations have already been held between the Afghan government and the Taliban, in September 2007. The Taliban demanded that the foreign forces leave the country in exchange for surrendering their weapons. The Afghan government refused. We must still recognize, however, that this was the first time since 2001 that the government and the Taliban had engaged in negotiations.

*Government Orders*

I want to mention a final point. Whether in Afghanistan or elsewhere, the Bloc Québécois has always supported the principle that Canada must treat prisoners humanely and in accordance with the Geneva Convention and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This has hardly been the case of the detainees transferred to the Afghan authorities. Having heard about major problems and the torture of detainees, we asked repeatedly for changes to the relevant agreement between Canada and the Afghan defence department.

As a result of all the pressure exerted by the Bloc Québécois and civil society, Canada signed a second agreement with Afghanistan on the treatment of detainees on May 3, 2007.

• (1530)

It was an improvement on the 2005 agreement, but to be effective, it had to be vigorously enforced.

Problems persisted however, and the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, eventually admitted in November 2007 that there were still cases of torture in Afghan prisons. He said his government's record was a thousand times better than what it had been, but there were still times when people were threatened or even tortured.

The Prime Minister cannot continue to insist, therefore, that the allegations of torture are just Taliban propaganda. Canada has a duty to take action to ensure that the safety and dignity of detainees are not compromised when they are transferred to Afghan authorities.

In the Bloc's view, there should be a framework agreement between NATO and the Afghan government on detainee transfers. It would ensure greater uniformity in the treatment of detainees and more control over what goes on in Afghan prisons.

The Bloc Québécois feels as well that, in proposing to extend this mission until December 2011 instead of ending it in February 2009 as originally intended, the Conservative government is completely disregarding the desires of the people of Quebec, who are vehemently opposed.

Our soldiers have done their part by fighting for several years in the most dangerous area in Afghanistan. Other troops should take over now, and we should turn our talents toward helping the people of Afghanistan through the training of Afghan forces, reconstruction, development and diplomacy. That is what we know how to do best.

• (1535)

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Papineau on her fine speech, which was very clear and incisive.

Parliamentarians are facing a black hole they will not acknowledge and, at all costs, want to avoid talking about the cultivation of poppies. I thought my colleague was very clear on this point. Maybe she could just finish up, though, by telling us how poppies could be used in the health sector to the benefit of the people of Afghanistan.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Poppy production is clearly a scourge in Afghanistan. However, if the international powers agreed on a use for poppies at the international level, especially for medical purposes, that could help

solve part of the problem. But since the Afghans use poppies to earn money to meet their needs, poppy cultivation should not be eradicated completely. Other uses for poppies must be found.

Repression will not solve this problem. Other ways must be found to help the Afghan people and help them gradually stop growing poppies, as much as possible.

[*English*]

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments of the member opposite on the motion to extend the war in Afghanistan. How does she feel about the statements, which even the President of Afghanistan, Mr. Karzai, has made, that negotiations are needed with elements of the insurgency? Does she agree with that? Further, does she see the omission of a path for negotiations in the motion as a glaring omission?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very good question.

There is nothing really new in the motion before us. Postponing the end of the mission to 2011 does not meet any new condition. It is just the same as if we ended the mission in 2009.

We therefore fail to see the merits of this measure. To us, it is just more of the same. Nothing in what we have seen so far could persuade us to look at this issue differently and refuse to vote for the motion.

**Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, I must have missed something.

In view of her concerns about poppy production and given everything the Afghan people need to rebuild, recover and live in security, does my colleague not think it would be dangerous and irresponsible to leave Afghanistan?

What will happen if we send a message to NATO members now that we can join them, but at some point in the future, we are no longer happy with the mission and want to leave Afghanistan on a few months' notice?

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. What we are saying is that Canadian troops have done enough. That is the crux of the matter.

In our opinion, leaving the combat zone of Kandahar does not mean the end of the mission. There are 38 countries directly involved. It seems to us that after three years and considerable loss of life, Canada should be able to go elsewhere and do what it does best, that is work in humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development.

That is in keeping with what Quebecers want. They do not want us to abandon the Afghan people. They want us to do the work for which, over the years, we have gained an enviable reputation that is now being tarnished because we are fighting a war that we will never win.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech and some of her answers. She talked about the values of Quebec and the values of Quebecers. I believe that Quebecers, like all Canadians, share the same values about human rights, women's rights and children's rights. Could she confirm that for me?

Does she not think that Quebecers might be a little concerned if we left early, before the job was done, before those rights were firmly established, before the Afghan forces and the Afghan government were able to maintain those rights for women and children in Afghanistan? Would she not agree that that is what they deserve, much as the people in Quebec deserve them, much as everybody deserves them?

● (1540)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, when talking about the values of Quebecers we are not making any assumptions about the values of others or whether they are shared. We are not comparing the values of Quebecers to those of others. We know that, in general, 70% of Canadians are in favour of withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. That does not change the issue.

It is important to understand that we, as Quebecers or Canadians, must withdraw from the Afghanistan war zones where we have been fighting for three years. For most of this conflict, we have been front and centre in the most dangerous area—it bears repeating—whereas other countries have been coming in and doing what they are good at.

Historically, we have been recognized for our achievements in human rights and for our values of reconciliation and diplomacy. We should now be able to play this role fully and let others fight in the most dangerous areas. I will repeat, we have done that, we have fulfilled our obligation. We have been in Kandahar for three years and I believe that our soldiers should be elsewhere.

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what effective work does the hon. member believe we could do in the area of human rights if we were not to be there? If the international community were not to be in Afghanistan, there would be a great backlash from the Taliban regarding any activity, any meetings, any conversations, any kind of promotion of human rights in Afghanistan. How does she think that human rights will be promoted in Afghanistan without the protection of Canada in the southern province?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, the minister would have me believe that Canada is the only country concerned about human rights. Indeed, we must continue to defend and promote human rights. However, we do not want to be in the war zone. It is as simple as that. It is not a matter of jeopardizing the mission, but Canada has done its share and has played this role during most of the conflict.

Would it be possible to direct us more toward human rights, toward reconstruction, development and diplomacy? The mission

has several chapters. From what we have heard, the war has received much more attention than the other chapters justifying Canada's presence.

For now we are asking for a rotation and for attention to other issues that have been sorely neglected since we first arrived in Afghanistan.

[English]

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Speaker, as members know, Canada participates in humanitarian development work all around the world. We are doing that work in other conflict areas. We have situations where the conflict is so extreme that we have to depend on international partners to get basic human needs met there. I wonder if the member is suggesting that Canada only go to those countries where there is no threat or possibility of conflict.

Does she believe that Canada should only be present in Sudan as humanitarians, but should we then be participating in other countries?

As we have been told, many areas of the world need Canada's help and we are going to have to try to meet those needs in the best way possible.

Does she believe that we should only go to countries where it is safe and there is no danger? That is not necessarily where the greatest need is.

● (1545)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot:** Mr. Speaker, that question is a crude attempt at evading the issue.

The minister mentioned Sudan. Are we currently there? No, because all our resources are in Afghanistan making war. That is what I am talking about. We are not doing what we do best.

I will say again, we have engaged in war and we are still engaging in war in Afghanistan.

Let us not evade the issue by talking about every possible conflict imaginable to suggest that what I am saying is that Canada should only provide humanitarian aid. That is not what I am saying at all.

I am saying that in Afghanistan, we have focused enough on war. Now we should be working on other aspects of the mission that we have neglected so far.

[English]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

I rise today to speak on behalf of the millions of Canadians who are opposed to three more years of combat for our brave armed forces, three more years of war, three more years of counter-insurgency that many recognize will not bring stability or security to that region.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

Right here in Canada, some people think that debating our participation in this war is a sign of weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We cannot encourage debate in Parliament and allow people freedom of expression only when they share our position. On the contrary, debating and listening to the opinions of others is what it means to live in a democratic society, the kind of society that we want for the people of Afghanistan and others around the world.

Holding such a debate does not mean we are weak; it means we are strong.

[English]

We owe it to the men and women in uniform serving in Afghanistan to take a long and hard look at this mission and decide whether it is working and whether it is the right thing to do.

There are two paths that Canada can follow in Afghanistan: the old path toward further war and the new path toward peace. This motion by the old parties would take us further down that well-worn path toward war. The Conservative-Liberal recommendation would see Canada help to carry forward George Bush's foreign policy long after he is gone. It is the wrong path.

Last year when the Liberals proposed to extend the mission until February 2009, New Democrats said that two more years of this war was two years too long. Now the Liberals and Conservatives are working together and they want to extend the mission until 2011, another three long years.

Canadian troops have been in Afghanistan now for six years, yet NATO is no closer to a military victory today than it was when it started.

[Translation]

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has not improved. On the contrary, it is deteriorating. There is even less security. The average Afghan citizen continues to live in extreme poverty. Violence against women is reaching epidemic proportions. In a recent report, 87% of the women interviewed said they had been abused. Corruption, crime and opium production are all on the rise.

We are far from having achieved our objectives. We are far from protecting the rights that we claim to defend. Furthermore, our soldiers who have courageously served in Afghanistan are not receiving the support they need to treat their injuries and post-traumatic stress when they return to Canada.

[English]

It is clear that the path the Liberals and Conservatives have chosen, the path to war, is the wrong one. It is time to embrace the right one. It is time to build the path toward peace. The path to peace requires a political, not a military, approach. To carry out this vision, the key international body to be involved must be the United Nations, not NATO.

Unlike NATO, the UN's explicit mandate is to preserve and promote international peace and security. UN agencies, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, the

United Nations Development Programme and the Peacebuilding Commission, tasked with carrying out this mandate have a vital role to play in meeting the challenges of Afghanistan.

I believe that Canada should be leading the way on that path to peace. I believe we should be using the considerable skills and expertise of Canadians to bring the various actors in Afghanistan to the table. We should be working to put in place an effective disarmament program. We should be supporting women's rights groups, human rights organizations and emerging civil society groups that can help rebuild that country, which is exhausted from three decades of war. We should bring the various regional actors to the table because regional cooperation is essential to any successful peace strategy in Afghanistan.

We cannot trust the Conservatives and the Liberals to get off the path to war even in 2011. In May 2006 the Prime Minister said that if Parliament did not vote to extend the mission for two years and beyond, his government would "proceed with another year and if we need further efforts or a further mandate to go ahead, we will go so alone". We cannot have confidence that the Prime Minister will bring home our troops in 2011, despite the wording of this motion.

In a debate last April the Leader of the Opposition said, "Canadians expect our mission in Kandahar to end in February 2009". His party even moved a motion to make that the end date. But now the Liberals are teaming up with the Conservatives to extend the mission for another three years. They cannot be trusted to stick to the deadlines that they set, or their pledge to end counter-insurgency for that matter. In a press conference two weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition said, and I am quoting, "military leaders should be left to make the decisions about what is combat and when it can happen".

Despite what the Conservatives and Liberals say, this motion does nothing to end the counter-insurgency. Make no mistake about it, this is a motion to continue a war.

The experience of the last six years of engagement of NATO troops in Afghanistan has shown that a military approach will not lead to victory. Afghanistan could be a proud foreign policy achievement, but to make it so, we have to show leadership by choosing a path to peace and by using Canadian capacities internationally to urge other world leaders to join us in this new approach at the United Nations.

Afghanistan could become a lasting legacy of Canada's commitment to peace and reconstruction rather than a war with ever-changing timelines and no end in sight.

*Government Orders*

•(1550)

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and intent to the comments of the leader of the New Democratic Party. It would appear obvious to me and to others listening that he would advocate a position that promotes women's rights, protection, development and all of the good things that are currently happening in Afghanistan, but that this continue without the security perimeter that allows for the very work he espouses and allows for the expansion into areas of Afghanistan where people's lives are still at risk from attack from the Taliban should they come back.

What I am most troubled with this contradictory position is, does the leader of the NDP ever believe that the military have a role to protect and expand the type of development to which he and his party seem to cling so fervently? Does he ever believe that the military thus are enablers to allow for this to happen?

I would point to one historically significant fact and it is one that resonates far and wide, particularly here in Canada. It is the mission in Rwanda, where we know that half a million, and some estimates go as high as a million, people died because a UN commander at the time, General Dallaire, was prevented from doing what he felt was appropriate.

In reading the general's book and hearing him speak so passionately about this issue, he was in a position where it is almost on all fours with what the leader of the New Democratic Party is espousing, and that is having the military present but restricted from doing the very work which enables the type of development that he so passionately believes in. There is a disconnect of significant proportions in what the NDP leader has said and what he would actually hope to achieve in his position.

•(1555)

**Hon. Jack Layton:** Mr. Speaker, far from there being a disconnect, what we are bringing to the House is the following proposition: that after six years of counter-insurgency warfare, which is the approach that has been taken by this government and by the previous government in Afghanistan and by NATO, we are facing conditions that are worsening on virtually every front and by virtually every measure.

That is not this particular member speaking. That actually emerges from any review of the facts, including the Manley report which came to exactly the same conclusions with regard to the facts.

Of course, there are circumstances where military intervention would be required, but we are saying here is that after six years and with the clear evidence before us that this approach is not working, it is time to set out on a course toward the achievement of peace and to use the institution built by the global community for exactly that purpose.

The NATO mandate is to be a regional defensive organization led by the generals of NATO, so the concept of peace-building, political solutions, negotiations, the fostering of aid and reconstruction, all of those complex tasks that have to be coordinated together, is not something that NATO has a mandate or a capability to do.

This is why we built the UN. Instead of having our Prime Minister on bended knee trying to convince NATO countries to contribute additional troops to the effort which is not working, he should be calling on global leaders to take a leadership role at the United Nations with Canada to set forth a plan that would engage the UN in all of its capacities toward the resolution of the crisis in Afghanistan because the current approach is simply not working by any measure.

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, since the last election we have had a number of debates in the House on Afghanistan, debates about the dramatic increase in the production of opium, increase in corruption, increase in suicide attacks, increase in IEDs, about the torture of detainees, and about the billions of dollars that Canadian taxpayers have been spending on this war. And above all, about the hundreds of brave Canadian soldiers who have lost their lives or been grievously injured.

Oxfam, the UN, and the Red Cross among others, all state that the situation in Afghanistan is getting much worse. In fact, the Afghanistan NGO safety office says that 2007 marked the beginning of the war, not the end of the war.

I made my first speech on Afghanistan on April 10, 2006, during the take note debate on the war. At that time, I expressed my sense of loss of the 11 Canadians who had lost their lives thus far. Today, less than two years later, the total number of soldiers lost is 78, as well as one Canadian diplomat. Hundreds more have suffered, suffered permanent disabling injuries and even more have been psychologically damaged.

Then there are the costs to their families, the mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, the girlfriends and boyfriends and above all, the children, who see the people they hold so dear return, if not in coffins, often with shattered bodies, minds and souls.

Today, as we debate this motion, it is of absolute importance that we remember the human costs of extending this mission. How many more young Canadians will die as a result of the political ideology of the Conservative Party and the political cowardice of the Liberals? How many more bereaved mothers, fathers, wives and husbands will be created? How many more children will grow up without their fathers?

If this motion is adopted, four more rotations of soldiers will serve combat duty in Kandahar. The government has not volunteered who exactly will be sent into harm's way and why would it because to do so would be to make plain exactly who will pay the price with their lives, with their bodies and with their minds based on the motion that we are debating today.

However, I have the information concerning the deployments that are planned for the months and years ahead. The Royal Canadian Regiment, made up mostly of soldiers from London and Petawawa, Ontario and Gagetown, New Brunswick, will leave for Kandahar this August.

The 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group based in Petawawa was sent to Fort Bliss, Texas last month as part of their training and will join the Royal Canadian Regiment in Kandahar. If we were to defeat the motion today, they would be the last Canadian soldiers to face death and injury in southern Afghanistan.

We are debating today rotations four, five and six into Afghanistan, those that will be approved by the Liberals and Conservatives when we vote on this motion. Those soldiers will begin training shortly and they will be in Kandahar starting February 2009. Starting February 2009, the Royal 22e Régiment, the Van Doos of Quebec, will go back into the Kandahar battle group.

From February to August 2009, more brave Quebecers will be wounded or killed. More families will be devastated. After that, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, made up of thousands of soldiers from western Canada, will be redeployed in August 2009. More brave soldiers from Edmonton and Winnipeg may be killed or injured. More western Canadian families may be destined to care for broken bodies and broken minds.

In February 2010 the Royal Canadian Regiment will be sent back to Kandahar yet again to continue fighting and perhaps to continue dying. How many more? How many more?

Then in July 2010 the Van Doos will be sent to Kandahar for their third rotation. That is correct, today we are debating whether to send Quebec troops into combat not once more, but twice more.

• (1600)

How, I wonder, will the mothers, fathers, wives and husbands of these soldiers react to this devastating news? And what, again, of the children? We are in fact debating their future today.

I urge both the Conservative and Liberal members to listen. We are contemplating sending soldiers on multiple tours barely 12 months apart. We are asking their families, friends and communities to carry the heaviest of burdens and to do so again, and again, and again. Because of a narrow Conservative viewpoint and Liberal political cowardice, the House will be voting to ask all of these brave, noble, hard-working Canadians to go through hell for three more years.

On April 19 of last year, I asked the House, "How many more casualties must we suffer before the government comes to its senses?" At that time, I was a bit optimistic, because of growing public alarm and the minority government situation, that we would not be debating the continuation of war much longer.

A majority of Liberals, including their leader, voted to end the combat mission by February 2009. However now, to avoid an election, the Liberals are endorsing this war for another three years. We have indeed seen a regression in the House.

Some members have not paid attention to what is happening to those who return from combat. We have all seen the coffins. I have seen the broken bodies and psychological costs paid by those lucky enough to return alive. I have met and cried with mothers. As a mother of three sons, two of whom are police officers, I have some small appreciation of the hell those mothers go through, even if their sons and daughters escape injury.

No one has explained to me why it is necessary to continue combat until 2011 against a foe that we can neither identify nor eliminate. No one in the House can explain to me why Canada's overwhelming role in Afghanistan must be that of combat and war, when every political figure in the region says negotiation is necessary.

### *Government Orders*

No one can explain to me why, despite the claims of the government, every other indication suggests that the security situation in Kandahar is growing worse, that the mission is failing, that we are sending our young women and men on a folly: a futile mission that will achieve nothing but more broken lives.

The only answer is more of the same. By the end of 2011 Canada will have suffered death and injuries in Afghanistan for nearly 10 years.

I implore all members present not to be scared by the threats made by the Prime Minister. We can find a way to help the people of Afghanistan that goes beyond combat, beyond search and destroy. Canada must be part of a political solution to Afghanistan's problems. We must seek the path of peace, not the path of never-ending war.

Those here who vote in favour of this motion will have to explain why they have opted for more war, when peace and negotiation was an option to follow. I would ask them to do as I have: to go to the funerals of soldiers who have died and meet with those who have survived.

I am asking every member of Parliament to talk to Canadians about this war. Millions of ordinary Canadians are opposed to this counter-insurgency mission. The majority of Canadians know instinctively it is wrong and it is simply not working.

I do not trust the government to conduct this war and I do not trust the Prime Minister to find peace. I am not ready to commit thousands more Canadian soldiers and their families to the horrors of a war without end.

The heaviest responsibility of any federal politician is when she or he votes on whether to send soldiers into harm's way. That is why, with a heavy heart, I will be voting no.

• (1605)

Therefore, I move the following amendment to the motion:

That the motion be amended by

A: Deleting all the words from "Whereas" to "goals in the region", and replace them with:

That this House calls upon the government to begin preparations for the safe withdrawal of Canadian soldiers from the combat mission in Afghanistan with no further mission extensions,

That in the opinion of this House, the government should engage in a robust, diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution, under explicit UN direction and authority, engaging both regional and local stakeholders, and ensuring the full respect for international human rights and humanitarian law,

That in the opinion of this House, the government should maintain the current suspension on the transfer of Afghan detainees to Afghan authorities until substantial reforms of the prison system are undertaken,

That in the opinion of this House, the government should provide effective and transparent development assistance under civilian direction consistent with the Afghanistan Compact.

And B:

By deleting all of the words following: "to ensure that Canadians are being provided with ample information on the conduct and the progress of the mission".

**The Deputy Speaker:** The Chair was in possession of an advanced copy of the motion and the motion is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

*Government Orders*

• (1610)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech.

Members of her party constantly go on about taking NATO out and putting the UN in. Who the heck do they think ISAP, the 39 allies there and the 60 members who signed the Afghanistan Compact, is if not representatives of the United Nations? Have they forgotten we are there under a United Nations mandate? Have they forgotten we are there at the express request of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan?

I have a quote from Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in which they put such great stock, and it is a body in which we should be able to put stock. He said:

Our collective success depends on the continuing presence of the International Security Assistance Force, commanded by NATO and helping local governments in nearly every province to maintain security and carry out reconstruction projects.

Does she disagree with the Secretary-General of the United Nations?

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Mr. Speaker, the whole situation in Afghanistan is incredibly complex. I thought the parliamentary secretary understood that. Maybe I am not correct on that.

The fact is many parts to the United Nations are perfectly suited to work in Afghanistan. The UN High Commission on Human Rights is not involved in a major way. UNICEF, which works with children, is not involved in a major way now. The UN development program should be involved. Most of all, the UN has a Peacebuilding Commission, headed by a Canadian, the newest body in the United Nations, that is perfectly suited to foster the kinds of negotiations that would lead Afghanistan into a secure and peaceful future for the people.

All the reports, the UN report, have said IEDs are up, poppy production is up, corruption is up, security is down. Sarah Chayes was interviewed on television this past week. She has been working in Afghanistan in Kandahar since the fall of the Taliban. She said that when the Taliban first fell, she could drive her car from Kandahar to Kabul in safety, albeit along a dirt road. Now that road is paved from Kandahar to Kabul, she cannot drive on it because that part of the country is too unsafe to allow her to do so.

We have not progressed there. It is time we took a different tack and looked at ways to effectively help the people of southern Afghanistan.

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I too have been listening carefully. The member is right. It is a very complex situation. I think one of the complexities is to understand that the tactics used by the insurgents and the Taliban are evolving. They are more sophisticated. They are using other means, in fact to the extreme of using disabled children to carry those bombs.

I also heard about an incident that occurred shortly after the Taliban were ousted. There was a school for girls and the insurgents waited until dismissal time, when the girls left building. As soon as they were outside, the Taliban machine-gunned those girls down. Since we have taken security forces into Afghanistan, this kind of

thing has been prevented more and more. Is the member suggesting that we pull the Canadian soldiers out of Kandahar so this kind of action can resume?

Does the member know IEDs are being laid at night? Our Canadian soldiers know about those IEDs. They know about the Taliban gathering around villages. Should our forces not do anything about it and wait until the development workers, the aid workers, the Afghan women and children are on their way to school or to the market and let them be blown up? Should our Canadian soldiers, who are willing to do this and who are very courageously in Afghanistan, go in there to remove those IEDs and put their lives at risk?

Canadians know why we are there. We are there for the right reasons. We are there to do a job. Is she suggesting that we allow this violence to continue?

• (1615)

**Ms. Dawn Black:** Mr. Speaker, the very sad and tragic fact is all these things continue right now, while Canadian soldiers have lost their lives, or have been terribly injured or have come home with post traumatic stress disorder and with acquired brain injury.

IEDs are up. The poppy production is up. It is the highest in the world. It supplies most of the world's opium and illegal heroin. Suicide attacks are up. All of that is growing.

No one likes to see people hurt in Afghanistan. No one wants to see women or children injured in Afghanistan. That is a given. All of us deplore those kinds of actions. I am not talking about that.

I am talking about finding an effective and meaningful way to stop that kind of action. What we are doing right now is not stopping it. It is growing and getting worse. Every independent analyst that comes out, the UN, the Red Cross, Oxfam, indicate that women are less secure now in Afghanistan than they were after the fall of the Taliban.

That is a tragedy. It is very sad. This is not the fault of the men and women of the Canadian Forces. It is the fault of a misguided mission that has very little chance of success. This is what we are talking about today.

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, few topics are higher on the public agenda today than Canada's role in Afghanistan and our government welcomes all debate on Canada's mission. As my colleague, the Minister of National Defence, has pointed out, Canada's mission means working alongside our NATO allies and Afghan security and military forces.

*Government Orders*

Canada is in Afghanistan to stabilize a country after years of chaos, oppression and violence. Today insurgents are terrorizing the people with horrendous acts that have no bounds or limitations. As part of the United Nations international effort, on the invitation of a democratically elected government, Canada's military, development and aid workers are working to bring hope and a brighter future to this ravaged country.

Therefore, today I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the motion before the House, but the debate should also include the development and humanitarian aspects of the mission. It is the development side of the mission that will bring hope and confidence back to the Afghan people.

It means being able to return to one's homeland and not having to flee as refugees into a neighbouring country. It means protection for all under the law. It means being able to feed their families and protect their children from exploitation. It means learning to read and write. It means health and access to medical services. It means spending an afternoon going to the stadium to see a soccer game, not witnessing executions. It means celebrating and preserving a rich culture and history that spans thousands of years. That is what bringing humanitarian aid and development means to the Afghan people.

[*Translation*]

I would like to focus today on the development part of the mission. We should have an informed debate. It should be based on facts and not on disinformation. It should take into account the difficult environment in Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar.

[*English*]

This is not a typical Canadian aid mission. The Afghan people have seen conflict and turmoil for over three decades. They have seen their schools and universities closed, hospitals destroyed, houses bombed and families in crisis. They have seen their property and businesses taken away. They have seen their family members seized, beaten and killed outside of any legal system, and they have lived under a rule where human life has little value.

Canada is in Afghanistan helping to rebuild one of the most impoverished countries in the world, a country that only a few years ago was controlled by one of the most oppressive regimes of modern times. We are there to restore freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We are there to help rebuild institutions, relieve suffering and hardship and reduce poverty.

Conditions for delivering assistance are far from ideal but this is no reason for us to abandon the Afghan people. In fact, it is more reason why Canada's presence is needed and will be needed for many years to come.

Laying the foundations for lasting peace and stability takes great effort and commitment. Despite the challenges we face in Afghanistan, it is important not to lose sight of the real and measurable difference being made in the lives of millions of Afghans. Experience has taught us that sustainable results are best achieved when local populations take the lead and are part of the process and assume ownership. As such, our work, led by the Afghan government, is focused on initiatives that promote community ownership and accountability.

The national solidarity program is Afghanistan's flagship program for community development. To date, with Canada's support, remarkable results have been achieved, with more than 16,500 completed community projects, including the construction of wells, roads, bridges and irrigation canals, projects that make a difference.

Canada is also the principal donor to the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, or MISFA. It provides small loans and financial services to more than 400,000 clients, over two-thirds of them women. That is nearly half a million people now able to increase their incomes, rebuild their lives and support their families. We know that it is making a difference.

Working with the Afghan government, through the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund, CIDA contributes to salary payments for civil servants, including teachers. Let me assure members that this fund is structured with the necessary checks and balances to ensure that the money goes to those it is intended to go to.

I am proud that Canada is the leading contributor to the education quality improvement project, Afghanistan's largest education initiative. This project is building schools, enhancing school management capacity and training teachers, with an emphasis on promoting increased opportunities for girls. Today, an unprecedented number of boys and girls are attending school, a difference I was heartened to witness firsthand when I visited the country.

Through one project, 4,000 schools are being established and 9,000 teachers are being trained.

Another project, with the Aga Khan Foundation, will focus on early childhood education, improve teacher training for women, provide distance education and improve school facilities. This project alone will benefit more than 100,000 girls and 4,600 teachers in close to 360 Afghan schools.

• (1620)

With projects and results like those, Canada is truly making a difference. It is an undisputed fact that increasing access to education for young Afghan children is crucial for the future of that country.

Another area of focus has been in the health care sector. Only with healthy minds and bodies will Afghanistan be able to rebuild its communities and its country. Today, more than 80% of the population now has access to basic medical services, compared to less than 10% in 2002.

There is a substantial drop in infant mortality. There are fewer infants dying in Afghanistan every year. More than seven million children will be immunized against polio, a crippling disease no longer seen in Canada. We can actually see a future when polio can also be eradicated in Afghanistan.

Those are real results, results that are making a difference today and will mean a stronger future tomorrow.

### *Government Orders*

During my trip to Afghanistan, I also saw that Canada was working, not only with the Afghan government, but also with 60 other allied nations and committed international and Canadian partners. These partners are among the most highly experienced, reputable and accountable organizations in the world. For example, our support to the world food program helped deliver food aid to more than six million Afghans last year, including more than 400,000 in Kandahar province. I recently announced additional support to help feed up to 2.5 million more people now facing food shortages as a result of rising food prices.

It is with UNICEF and the World Health Organization that the children are being vaccinated against polio and, of those seven million, there are approximately 350,000 in Kandahar province. Our support for measles and tetanus vaccinations has reached more than 200,000 children and 175,000 women of child bearing age in the south.

CIDA also supports women's centres that provide basic services, such as literacy training, health and legal aid services and a refuge where they can feel safe and supported. We recognize that our efforts to improve the lives of Afghan women is critical. Literacy training for women means improved nutrition and health care for their children and families.

Access to human rights and a justice system will reverse a regime under which women had no rights, a regime that meant no legal protection, no human rights, no freedom of mobility outside of the home, no access to education, no right to vote or participate in a democratic process and no rights to property or employment.

However, as the lives of the Afghan people in meeting their basic needs improve, our most important work is our support in building their institutions. We are helping to rebuild and strengthen the institutions of government. For example, supported by CIDA, the International Development Law Organization has trained more than 70 prosecutors in financial and juvenile crime, and more than 200 judges in civil, criminal and commercial law.

We are supporting the strengthening of human rights, including the new Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which promotes human rights and monitors and investigates violations.

As we move forward, we are mindful that it is good governance that holds the key to the long term viability of Afghanistan but there is still a long way to go.

•(1625)

As Afghan President Karzai has said, "A democratic nation is not built overnight". The years ahead will mark the heavy lifting period. It will be the period in which sustainable Afghan institutions and its public sector must develop the capacity to deliver services to all of its citizens and take full ownership of their country.

Canada is working closely, not only with the government of Afghanistan, but also with other allied nations and experienced development partners. However, whether CIDA's assistance flows through national programs or through NGOs, this government must ensure that our Canadian dollars are being spent effectively and accountability.

In Afghanistan, CIDA strives for results with an approach that responds to the very real risks of working in a fragile state and in an area of conflict. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation are applied at three levels: first, at the country level through a joint coordination and monitoring board, the board assesses development progress against concrete benchmarks in the Afghanistan compact; second, at the program level, detailed monitoring and assessment of progress being made measures that collectively we are achieving the intended results; and finally, at the project level, CIDA employs feasibility and risk assessments, contractual agreements that include established reporting requirements, site monitoring visits and audits. In addition, CIDA approves annual work plans from its partners and received progress and financial reports.

Working with trusted partners, such as the World Bank and UNICEF, CIDA is also able to leverage the accountability and oversight mechanisms of these well-established organizations.

However, there have been those who have criticized our development activity in Afghanistan and we take those criticisms seriously. To be sure, Afghanistan is a challenging environment so we are constantly working to improve and achieve better coordination and to focus on maximizing results. To this end, we introduced the Kandahar local initiative program, a quick impact program that means we can respond swiftly to fluctuating needs on the ground.

To achieve greater flexibility and responsiveness, we have doubled CIDA's presence in the field in the past year and will continue increasing our numbers in Afghanistan. We have moved decisions on staff movement within Afghanistan to the field. I will increase the level of project responsibility and authority in the field and we have a new Canadian envoy in Afghanistan to coordinate our Canadian efforts.

Taken together, those steps are examples of how we continuously strive to meet the unique challenges faced in Afghanistan.

There are other recommendations regarding CIDA's work in Afghanistan that will also be improved. We will ensure regular reports are available to Canadians of the progress being made. We will seek opportunities to enhance recognition of Canada's presence in its development work and we will continue to work toward increasing donor coordination among our partner countries, aid agencies and NGOs to achieve better effectiveness.

However, let us not forget the results we have already achieved: some six million children in school, access to basic health care for more than 83% of Afghans, cut tuberculosis deaths in half, reduced child mortality rates by almost a quarter and a 55% decline in the number of landmine victims with over 520,000 mines destroyed and more than a billion square metres of land cleared.

*Government Orders*

•(1630)

We are achieving results. We are making a difference. As our work proceeds, we must ensure that the Afghan people can strengthen their belief in themselves and their government to deliver good governance, the rule of law, and basic human rights. They must see a brighter future for their families and communities.

For these results to be sustainable, we must stay the course.

That being said, nobody is denying that we face tremendous obstacles. As has been noted, there can be no development without security. There will be no development and aid workers in the field without security. To quote the Manley report, “security is an essential condition of good governance and lasting development”.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

The environment in which we are operating is one of the most volatile and demanding our Canadian aid and development workers have ever had to face. As responsible members of the international community, we cannot simply turn our backs on the people of Afghanistan. I therefore encourage all members of Parliament to support the government motion.

[*English*]

I remind the House that when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and when it is the right thing to do, Canadians are tough. Historically they have shown that they do not run. They stay to face the battle.

I know that the members of the military we honoured in the past year at Vimy Ridge and Dieppe did not enter the battles, put on their uniforms and go out to fight that day knowing that it was going to be easy, yet they went. That is why our aid and development workers are in Afghanistan. That is why our military is there: to ensure protection and security so that we can improve the lives of all Afghans today for tomorrow.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her contribution to this debate, which all in the House are taking very seriously today. It is my hope, in fact, that all points of view will be respected and that the tendency to heckle and shout down those opposed to the government's position will end.

I want to begin by saying to the minister that I certainly share the best wishes of our caucus for all of the troops who have gone or are going to Afghanistan. In fact, I want to pay special tribute to some 800 Manitoba soldiers who are leaving or have left for Afghanistan, and I want to say that all of us are thinking about their safety, wishing them well and praying for their safe return. That is why, for example, the NDP supports the yellow ribbon campaign in Manitoba, which is a symbol of the thoughts and the prayers of Manitoba folks that go with these soldiers on their journey.

I want to say, then, that no one in the House has a monopoly on human compassion. No one in the House has a monopoly over what it means to be tough. We have very strong positions on this issue. I am proud of the position taken by my leader and my caucus.

I want to seek assurances from the minister that she understands that this debate may take different turns and twists in terms of positions around the combat role—or not—in Afghanistan. I would like to hear from her and all of her colleagues that no one on their side questions the compassion of any one of us, even if we stand and assert that there should not be a combat role in Afghanistan on the part of Canadian troops. That is one question.

Let me also raise one more issue that has to do with the motion before us, which the Liberals appear to be supporting. I have heard no one in the debate to date give any assurances that in fact this motion is ironclad in any sense of the word. What is to prevent anyone in the future from opening up this agreement and supporting a further extension past 2011? We have been through these deadlines too many times. I think it is time to be straightforward, clear and up front with the people of Canada.

•(1640)

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments. Certainly I believe that not one of us would be in this House if we did not have compassion, if we did not believe in human rights, and if we did not believe that we all share a quality of life in Canada that more people in this world should be so privileged to have.

No one has a monopoly, and I do not dispute that, but what I say is that when we are in government we must understand what our principles and values are but we also must assess the reality. The reality is that the circumstances in Afghanistan are circumstances never before faced in this world on the global front. We have a degree of insurgency. We have tactics being used. We have open victimization of civilians, of children, of schoolchildren.

This is why we believe that we have to base our assessment of the situation on reality. We have to assess it through those who are working day after day on the ground, those who can assess the security available for development to happen. More importantly, we have to base it on those who can assess the safety with which children can continue to go to school and women can continue to go to market on their own and continue to take jobs. We have to assess on the ground the safety and security by which supplies will go along roads to build those schools and to take the food aid to those villages that require food aid.

That is why we work together with the Canadian military, our development workers, the international partners, and the UNICEFs, the agencies of the United Nations who are there working with us in Kandahar. They are dependent on the assessment, the protection and the security that our military is providing right now.

As far as the motion is concerned, we have a motion before this House and, as I said, we welcome all debate and all viewpoints. But as I said in my conclusion, I urge all members to vote in favour of the motion before them now.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions and a comment for the hon. member.

*Government Orders*

We have heard that the Auditor General of Canada issued a report of public accounts which indicated that 27% of regular forces members coming back from Afghanistan are either physically or mentally injured and that the government is woefully ill-prepared to handle their needs and the needs of their families. It did not address the topic of re-service, so the estimate from the Surgeon General herself was in fact that it could be as high as one out of every three who are coming back with a physical or mental disability. Again, we are not prepared to handle them. Although we are doing our best at this time, I guess it is woefully inadequate in terms of assisting them.

My question is for the minister. We know that soldiers are coming back with challenges and difficulties for them and their families. I can only assume that foreign aid workers who come back must have some of the same challenges through either physical or mental anxieties. What is the government doing to assist those civilian workers who are coming back to Canada after what they witnessed in Afghanistan? What is the government doing to assist them and their families in reintegrating into Canadian society?

● (1645)

**Hon. Bev Oda:** Mr. Speaker, let me say I am almost breathless that this member would be asking these questions. He is asking what kind of support we give to our military, yet the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who has a base in his riding, has done nothing to provide service and support to the Canadian military. In fact, at every opportunity he voted against increased support and services, those very services that he is now asking for. He voted against providing the resources so that those services could be provided to the military, to those people who are serving on that base right within his riding. Shame.

We provide the resources needed for the Canadian civilian workers who are returning and I can say that when the services are needed they are provided. The returning civilians with whom I have spoken feel very rewarded under the circumstances they faced when they were in Afghanistan, and I must also say that the civilians in Afghanistan are equal to our military in their heroism and their commitment to serving.

When they come back, they say that they want to go back because they can see the difference in the eyes of the children. They can see the difference in the gratitude of the mothers who say that their babies are better. They can see the difference when the mother can come back to the family with a few more dollars in her hands to feed her family.

We make sure that we provide the resources. We vote so that those resources will be made available. I ask that member to tell us what he has done to support the military.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Richmond Hill.

I would like to begin by making a few brief remarks, if it is possible, about the NDP amendment that was offered in debate this afternoon.

I have two questions to ask the members of the NDP about their amendment. The first clause calls for “the safe withdrawal of

Canadian soldiers from the combat mission”. The second clause calls for engaging the UN “in a robust diplomatic process”.

I am curious to know what members of the NDP would actually say to the Afghans. How would they explain the withdrawal of the Canadian Forces who are protecting them? What would they say to the Afghan women who depend on the Canadian Forces for security? How can the NDP go to the UN and pretend that the UN can initiate a diplomatic initiative in the absence of all security?

I make these points simply to point out that there are times when a party makes proposals in the House of Commons which render them unfit to govern. This, in my judgment, was one such occasion.

On Friday, the Chief of the Defence Staff challenged everyone in this House to provide clarity on the purpose of the mission in Afghanistan after 2009. It is a challenge that I am happy to accept.

[*Translation*]

It is up to parliamentarians to decide the objective of our mission, and it is up to our military to decide how to do it. Our party does not try to tell military commanders how to do their job.

[*English*]

Our party accepts that politicians should not tie the hands of our troops in the field, but we insist that elected leaders define the strategic goal that our country should pursue and seek to attain in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Our party’s position is very clear. Three principles are set forth in our motion: the mission must change; the mission must end in 2011; and the mission must be accountable to Parliament and Canadians.

[*English*]

As for each of these points in turn, the government has now accepted our position that the mission must end in 2011. I welcome this sign of progress from the other side.

I think the government members agree, as we do, that there is a very clear and important reason for a deadline. Until the Afghan authorities clearly understand that there are fixed limits to Canada’s engagement, the Afghans will lack clear incentives to step up their commitment to their own security.

Canada must maintain its solidarity with the Afghan people. Our party believes that profoundly, but solidarity is not a blank cheque. Solidarity is a relationship. That relationship should change over time. We gradually stand back and we help them to stand up. That, it seems to me in a nutshell, is what we want to achieve between 2009 and 2011.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

If we concentrate on training the Afghan army and police forces, we will be able to withdraw in 2011. We will be able by then to end the military mission and undertake a new mission to help the Afghans rebuild their country.

*Government Orders*

[English]

Therefore, after 2011, we can envisage continuing engagement with Afghanistan but not in a military role.

[Translation]

The government also agreed to the second point, which was that the management of the mission must become more transparent and accountable. It agreed to create a special parliamentary committee on Afghanistan. It agreed to revise its information policy, especially in regard to the transfer and handling of detainees. We will hold the government to these promises.

[English]

I come now to the crux of the matter. There does remain a crucial ambiguity in the government's position on the fundamental question, which is: What is the overall purpose of the mission after 2009?

The government's resolution, which closely mirrors the language of the Liberal amendment, says that the military mission in Kandahar will consist of: (a) training the Afghan national security forces; (b) providing security for reconstruction and development in Kandahar; and (c) continuation of the Kandahar PRT.

Let us drill down here and get a little more clear. Canada is already training Afghan forces. It is already training and providing security for reconstruction and development, and it is already sustaining the PRT.

[Translation]

Our party believes that these three points should be the sole purpose of our efforts in Kandahar over the remaining years of the mission. Other aspects of our current mission should be assigned to another NATO battle contingent, which will rotate in by February 2009.

Our party agrees that there is a military participation component to the training of Afghan forces. However, these joint military operations must be related to a comprehensive strategy for reconstruction and development so that real progress can be made in regard to the security and quality of life of the people of Afghanistan. After all, they are the ones we are there to protect.

[English]

We understand that the training of the Afghan forces does require combined military operations in the OMLT formation and other formations but we believe profoundly that must be related to a comprehensive strategy of development and reconstruction. We believe the mission must focus on training.

The point is that we cannot be there forever. It is not our country. It is their country and our job is to help them train and develop the capacity to defend themselves. We must focus our efforts to get them ready for 2011. There is work to do but we can achieve it if we focus on this goal.

I want to emphasize the notion of focus. With the troops at our disposal, we cannot do everything. The Liberal suggestion, at its heart, is to focus on training to get the Afghan army and police ready for the job of defending their own country. That should be the focus of the mission.

On my recent visit to Afghanistan, I visited Afghan security forces who were training side by side with Canadians in forward operating bases in the Zare and Panjwai areas. The Afghan officers with whom I spoke were clear that they were ready to fight and defend their own country but that they needed two more years of training. We should provide this but on a strict timetable that would leave the Afghans in no doubt that the time was coming when they would need to have exclusive responsibility for their own defence.

The question of questions in this debate is whether the government understands its revised motion in the same letter and spirit that we proposed most of the wording for. The question is whether it understands the words in the same sense that we do. If we do not have this understanding, the Canadian consensus that both sides seek will be elusive.

We envisage a changed mission focusing on training and reconstruction. If the government accepts that the mission must take on this new focus, a Canadian consensus on Afghanistan is possible. The clarity, to return to where I began, that our generals are rightly seeking and that our citizens want, will issue forth in the united will of this Parliament.

If the government does not accept a clear focus on training and reconstruction, if it believes it can sneak past Parliament a motion that continues the existing mission and continues the status quo, I am afraid it will have difficulty securing the Canadian consensus that this party is seeking.

• (1655)

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention something and maybe the hon. member could respond.

On my way back to Ottawa this past weekend, I visited with my son who was in Afghanistan for over a year. I told him I was coming here back to this debate and asked him what he thought. He said, "Dad, just remind them that Afghans deserve freedom, freedom that we've taken for granted they deserve to have for the first time in their lives and that we all have a role to play in getting that done".

We have our troops over there and we all support them. I am not talking about a difference of opinion, whether the troops should be brought home, as the NDP would indicate. We talk about reconstruction and building but is it not true that part of the big mission is to do what we can to provide freedom in that far away land? If we establish freedom in more and more lands as we go along over the years, we will, sooner or later, get closer and closer to achieving peace. Sometimes it is very costly.

I come from the United States. I immigrated here 40 years ago. The one thing I learned all through school was the cost of the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World War I and World War II to maintain the freedoms in other countries so that we could continue to enjoy the freedom we have in our own. We must maintain and do everything we can so that every community, church, school and activity in the country has a commitment to work toward freedom and to maintain it. One of the best ways to do that, of course, is to be fully behind our troops in everything that they do.

*Government Orders*

I do not quite understand why the NDP and the Bloc are objecting to this because they have the freedom to come here and pursue their wishes. The Bloc wants to separate, and it has the freedom to do that, but where else could that be done? I also recognize that the NDP has the freedom to express its views today, and I will never condemn them for that, but I do not agree with them one bit.

Freedom does not come cheap but does the member not believe that freedom is one of the main objectives of this mission, yes or no?

• (1700)

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Wild Rose is one of the members whose departure from the House I shall regret. I thank him for his contribution to the public service of his province and country. I also want to say very directly that I thank his son for his service to his country in Afghanistan.

I take his point about freedom and I would accept it entirely. We are there to enable young women to have the freedom to go to school and to provide the security that makes freedom possible. The only thing I would add to the remarks of the member for Wild Rose is that with freedom comes responsibility. I think the burden of what we in Canada have to do is to ensure that responsibility for security is shared with the Afghan authorities and police. We need to train them so they can exercise the responsibility for defending their own freedom.

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his participation and his significant contributions to this debate.

However, he should and would know that the mission began under a previous government, of which, granted, he was not a member. Therefore, when he speaks of matters being snuck by Parliament, I would remind him that the previous mission began without this type of substantive debate, without a mandate from Parliament, so to speak.

He spoke of the need for clarity of words and of purpose, of which I certainly agree. That direct line must be communicated to our soldiers. Their very existence depends on it and on the actions they take in the field.

However, would the member not agree that the important signal that is sent from Parliament is in fact contained in the motion? We can quibble about words and talk about interpretations but I think the substantive message is clear, that soldiers, and I heard him say it, and their leadership must use that discretion in the field, which sometimes, and I know he will agree, does include the use of lethal force. That is contained as part of this mission. Does he agree with that interpretation?

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of National Defence and I share a common objective of clarity. I acknowledge and recognize the fact that the government has brought this to the floor of the House of Commons for a serious debate.

It is infinitely superior, if I may say so, to very truncated debate we had in 2006. I think we have made progress. I salute him for that.

I also acknowledge, as I said very clearly in my statement, that combined military operations by the Afghan army and police with

Canadian Forces will involve the use of lethal force. I also made it clear that we understand that the last thing a responsible member of Parliament wants to do is to direct soldiers as to the use of lethal force.

However, I want to come back finally to the point that it is about focus. It is about where we put the focus of our effort between 2009 and 2011 and we are saying make the focus on training.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased to participate in this debate. As the son of a World War II veteran, I learned very early the importance of the military and the sacrifices that our men and women make on the battlefield.

I am also pleased to see the Minister of National Defence here because I had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan with him when he was Minister of Foreign Affairs in April 2006. We saw firsthand the training of our soldiers, the people doing reconstruction, the need for medium lift helicopters, and the fact that we had to be transported by American Chinooks from place to place. That certainly had a great impact on me.

I thanked the minister at that time because we had the opportunity to see what a lot of Canadians did not see: men and women on the front line prepared to put their lives on the line for this country, for freedom, and to ensure the Afghan people had the benefits they did not have that Canadians took for granted. That was very important.

Not long after our return, the motion came from the government to extend the mission until February 2009. That was the government motion. I am now pleased to see that the government, in responding to the official opposition's proposal, has come a long way in embracing what we have said.

It is important to emphasize that we have said the mission must change. It must end and it must be more than military. There is no question that rotation is now being spoken about by the government. That is critical because when Canadian troops went to Kandahar originally in 2002, they rotated out after six months. When they went to Kabul, they rotated out and the Turks came in. Why? Because this is a NATO-led mission.

This is not an issue that some have described in the past about cutting and running. This is a NATO-led mission. Over 35 countries are involved. Many have covenants on their participation, but Canada has always stepped up to the plate. However, this is not solely a Canadian mission. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect that Canadians should be going back for third and fourth tours of duty.

Obviously, in the proposal to respond to the government, Liberals wanted to have a number of things clearly spelled out. One, of course, was an end date. I will be looking forward to hearing from the government as to why it chose the end of 2011.

The Liberals had said our troops should be completely out by July 2011. It is too bad that this debate had not occurred over a year ago because this side of the House has been pushing for over a year to in fact find out when the government would notify NATO. We are pleased that it has finally said it will notify NATO and that our mission will end in 2011.

*Government Orders*

We are pleased that the government has also embraced the Liberal position with regard to training, which is currently being done. However, more training is necessary not only for the Afghan military but for the police because once an area is cleared, it is the Afghan police, which are woefully undertrained and underpaid at the moment, who need the reinforcement. Canadians can do the job but the heavy lifting part we talk about needs to be done in terms of rotation by others.

The government has said it wants 1,000 more troops. I would like to find where in the Manley report or the government report dealing with Afghanistan it is 1,000. Why is it not 2,000 or 5,000 in terms of this mission to support our troops and also the medium lift helicopters which I spoke of before? It is absolutely critical.

When I visited in April 2006, the troops told me that Canadians were the best equipped army on the ground, that the previous government had supplied them with the best equipment possible, except that they needed helicopters. That is something which the government at this date is trying to find. If we do not get those two key elements, obviously we cannot support them.

The mission must change in terms not being just military. We have on this side of the House argued for a long time that ultimately a military solution is not going to be possible in Afghanistan.

• (1705)

We know that because the defence department, in a 3D mission evaluating Soviet participation in Afghanistan in the 1980s, said in one of its conclusions that ultimately it must be an issue of reconciliation, that a military solution was not possible and therefore diplomatic efforts must be undertaken. This party has argued for diplomacy for a long time with allies in the region and obviously a special envoy.

Again, it is too bad that the government has waited so long to respond to this, but the reality is we have been arguing this and our leader spoke of this in February 2007. Had some members paid attention at that time, we certainly had articulated that, but again, sometimes it is better late than never.

It is too bad, when we are dealing with this situation, that the government did not respond much sooner. A diplomatic solution is absolutely key, and obviously reconciliation.

We talk about the issues of detainees, and one of the things that we believe and are trying to support is a better judicial and prison system over there. Again, is that not about Canadian values?

We are talking to the government. We do not want it to be like the Taliban. We want to make sure that we have a process dealing with law, to make sure the people are fairly tried, that the conditions which they are in are not overcrowded, and that they are certainly not in a situation that we could not tolerate. We have asked for NATO-wide standards. We see that in the resolution and again we appreciate the fact that the government has embraced that.

It does not matter what side of the issue one is on, we all support our men and women in the field. Again, we have heard sometimes language in this House which really is not appropriate. We want to say, whether it is the New Democratic Party or the Bloc or the government, that we all support our troops. We may come at it from

different positions from time to time, but nobody has a monopoly on it.

Clearly, I see the need for coordination and transparency. We have argued for a long time that Canadians need to know the facts. The trouble, unfortunately, with a lot of issues in the federal government is that we are dealing with silos. People are not talking to each other, the military with foreign affairs and foreign affairs with CIDA. Therefore cross-departmental discussions need to take place. They are absolutely critical.

There is a need for clarity and therefore, having a special committee to get updates regularly from the government, from all of those departments involved, is absolutely critical. Parliamentarians ultimately have to make decisions and they have to be based on available facts. Again, we have argued this for a long time.

I know I may get a question from the other side, saying that we had our chance to have the Manley people come and talk about this before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and the Standing Committee on National Defence. That was after the fact.

I raised the point, in the foreign affairs committee, that we should have them beforehand, before they wrote their report, so we could give parliamentary input into what they were saying. However, the government probably did not want to do that because it was not sure what it was going to say.

After the fact, when the Conservatives embraced it, they said that we needed to have them come. We had already read the Manley report. We want to have a genuine discussion, and again it is too bad that the government has waited until the eleventh hour to do this.

It is not practical at this point to suggest that we want to change the mission in a way which recognizes rotation, which recognizes that training is absolutely critical, and that others must step up to the plate.

If in fact we have not been able to get the necessary requirements to this date, I am not sure what the government is doing to ensure that by the time it goes to Bucharest, if in fact this resolution passes, that it will in fact have the ability. When is it going to make a firm decision? Is it going to make the decision on January 31, 2009, or is it going to say, when it goes to Bucharest and no one has stepped up to the plate, that we cannot continue?

The mission cannot be business as usual. If anyone out there thinks that this party supports business as usual, the answer is no. Obviously, the government does not support business as usual or it would not embrace what is basically 95% of the language of what we put together.

It is nice that the Conservatives have finally come on board, but again, in seeking all party support, it would be helpful if they would listen for a change. Often they are very good at catcalls, but they are not very good at listening. In this business, listening is sometimes better.

• (1710)

*Business of the House*

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest, as I always do, to my hon. colleague across the way. He said something that has been perpetuated about this government of wanting a never-ending mission. No one in the government has ever used that language or intended this to be a never-ending mission. This phrase is an invention of the Liberal Party. I point that out for the hon. member.

If he listened to the last throne speech, we talked about the need for training. Training is what we have been doing on the ground, not just the past year but from the start of the mission. Did my hon. colleague listen to the throne speech? Does he understand that the emphasis on training has been going on in the mission for a very long time and that we are continuing and accelerating that?

• (1715)

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Mr. Speaker, first, I point out for the hon. member that it was only a few weeks ago in the House that the government used the language “around 2011” to end the mission. That is not very precise. Maybe for the Conservatives that is precise, but “around” does not give an end date. We are pleased that now they support our position of 2011. Again, I want to know this from the government. Why the end of 2011?

On the issue of training, absolutely we agree with training. We heard that in the Speech from the Throne. The problem is the government was not prepared to put that on the front burner. It said that it would continue the combat role and at some point down the road it would shift to training.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** If the hon. member wants to hear the answer, heckling is probably not a good idea. If one asks the question, one would assume one would listen to the answer. The answer is quite clear. The Conservatives mentioned training, but they did not put that on the front burner. Maybe they should have come to this conclusion a lot sooner than now. Then we would have had better answers.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record that the member for Durham and the member for New Brunswick Southwest have consistently said that the NDP have not done anything for veterans. I want to remind the House that the Conservatives, when they were in opposition, promised the extension of VIP services for widows and veterans. The former defence minister said that the system file would be removed. The Conservatives voted against the veterans first motions, which would have benefited a tremendous number of people. Also, the Auditor General of Canada cited the short-sightedness of the government when it came to assisting returning troops.

The date the Liberals and Conservatives have agreed to seems to be 2011. Does he honestly believe, as Mr. Hillier has said, that this mission could have been 10 or even more years a couple of years ago? Does he honestly believe the situation in Afghanistan could be cured with 1,000 more troops and be ended by 2011?

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert:** Mr. Speaker, I said very clearly in my speech that the issue of national reconciliation ultimately would be

the path, which is why we need diplomacy and why we need to encourage those kind of ongoing discussions.

Militarily, by 2011, if the emphasis is on training, at least we sincerely hope the Afghans will be able to be better prepared to defend themselves.

My colleague may be having a hard time hearing the answer to his question because of the catcalls from government members. Again, I do not understand this. We are trying to come up with a consensus in the House. The member asks if we will have a military solution by 2011. The answer is no.

The Conservatives can shout all they like, but the reality is they are late in coming to the table on this. We have pushed for reconciliation, diplomacy and development issues. We know that all three together will advance the issue, but not just one.

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting this very important debate on important issues on which I know there is great common ground, at least between the two major parties in the House. However, there have been considerable discussions among all House leaders in all the parties and I believe we have common ground on a number of other matters. I would like to put the following motion for the unanimous consent of the House. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of this House, the House shall sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment today; after 6:30 p.m. the Chair shall not receive any quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent; when no member rises to speak to Government Motion No. 5, or at 10 p.m., whichever is earlier, the debate shall adjourn without the question being put; after the debate on Government Motion No. 5 is adjourned, the House shall consider the second reading motion of Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act; a member from each recognized party may speak for not more than 20 minutes on the second reading motion of Bill C-44, after which, Bill C-44 shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed; after Bill C-44 is read a third time and passed, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

• (1720)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** I would like to inform the House that I have seen the motion and I find it to be in order, but I will go through the usual process nonetheless. Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** 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)

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### AFGHANISTAN

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I wish to share my time with the parliamentary secretary, the member for Edmonton Centre.

Last night, I was at the Quebec City airport to welcome some one hundred soldiers returning to Valcartier from a dangerous and demanding mission in Afghanistan. Accompanied by General Barabé, commander of Land Forces Quebec Area, I personally greeted each soldier as they returned to Canadian soil. Their faces showed signs of fatigue, but they also reflected a sense of duty done and, above all, feverish excitement at being reunited with their families after so much time apart.

I am thinking of them now as I take part in this debate on the motion concerning the future of the mission in Afghanistan. Canadian soldiers are there at the request of the Afghan people and their president, Hamid Karzai—who has visited us here in the House of Commons—and with the support of the United Nations, working alongside many other nations, including France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and our neighbours to the south.

[*English*]

First, I would like to stress that Afghanistan is not a Conservative nor a Liberal mission. It is a Canadian mission.

[*Translation*]

For several months now, reservists and soldiers from Chaudière-Appalaches, Charlevoix, Quebec City, the Gaspé and elsewhere in Quebec have been deployed in Kandahar and the surrounding area to spread and protect the universal values of democracy, peace and freedom. These Quebeckers went willingly to secure a better future for the Afghan people, who have been shaken by decades of terror and violence.

Today, I would like to salute these men and women from Quebec. I want to salute the courage, tenacity and loyalty they have shown during difficult times and under dangerous and exhausting conditions.

I would also like to honour those who were left behind: the spouses, friends and family members of our soldiers and reservists who remained here in Canada with the children and who have been waiting and hoping, wondering and worrying, for their loved ones to return. It is a great relief for them to have their loved ones back, safe and sound.

I am thinking, for example, of the secretary treasurer of Sainte-Justine, in Les Etchemins, whose son is working as a nurse at the military hospital in Kandahar and helps every day to save human

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lives, Afghan and Canadian alike. I am anxious to see them reunited back home.

I would also like to recognize the people who have, tragically, lost a family member who has made the ultimate sacrifice, who fell in combat for his or her country, and whose courage I salute today. I would like to pay my greatest respect to those who have experienced such losses.

I will soon have an opportunity to acknowledge all the sacrifices made in my riding and to be with our troops and reservists to express my recognition and admiration for them, on behalf of myself and the entire population of Lévis, Bellechasse and Les Etchemins.

For now we must act as responsible parliamentarians, and engage in an informed debate about the future of this mission, because it is essential that our women and men in uniform, whom we send on missions abroad, be given the support of the Parliament of Canada. It is also crucial that we, as parliamentarians, provide our troops with our unwavering support, based on our values, the values of both Canada and Quebec.

For the first time in the history of our young country, we can hold, and we are holding, a second debate in the House about the future of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan—freely, democratically, and with the opportunity to exchange our various views.

In fact, this is a commitment that our troops in the Canadian Forces are carrying out enthusiastically. They have demonstrated, and they demonstrate every day, that they have the skills, the experience and the desire that they need to pursue their mission until it succeeds, and the Afghans take charge of their own destiny. And it is the role of our government to ensure that they have the equipment and support they need to do their job.

They have the support not only of parliamentarians, but also of many Canadians.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Our country is currently engaged in a debate over Canada's future role in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister, in an effort to help communicate and inform this debate, asked a panel of eminent Canadians to advise Parliament on options for the Afghanistan mission, once its mandate ends in one year. We welcome the recommendations made by Mr. Manley and his esteemed panel.

Unfortunately, while our government was seeking for an open debate at the defence and foreign affairs committee, the opposition refused to hold a debate and rejected that motion. It is something I can hardly understand while there is so much at stake.

Our government believes this mission should be extended. However, we also believe in the parliamentary process and the voices of the people of Canada. The people of Canada are saying that Canada is doing its fair share in Afghanistan.

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Recently we gave notice of a motion to extend Canada's commitment to the United Nations mandated mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011. The two predicated conditions are: one, that Canada can secure an ally that will provide a battle group of 1,000 troops to join us in the south; and two, that we secure unmanned aerial vehicles and medium-lift helicopters.

It is my hope that Canadians across the country will engage in this debate. It is not a debate for Parliament alone.

[*Translation*]

All Canadians who follow the debate about Canada's mission in Afghanistan know the demanding work our troops are doing there. I have witnessed it myself, along with members of all parties on the Standing Committee on National Defence, which travelled to Afghanistan for a week and lived with the troops, slept in barracks, shared their meals and visited their facilities. They were able to see the remarkable work being done by our troops in Afghanistan.

These Canadians support our work in Afghanistan and want to stay informed about this mission. Certainly they listen to the news and they see our troops, as we all do, providing aid to the Afghan people and engaging in reconstruction efforts. They listen to the radio and they hear about the role our troops are playing in clearing roads so that people can move about in safety, so that farmers can do their work and the economy can take its course in Afghanistan.

These Canadians know that our 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan are there with NATO on a mission under the aegis of the United Nations. We saw them off last summer. I was with my colleagues from Beauport—Limoilou and Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière. The Premier of Quebec was also there to bid our troops farewell. The Lieutenant-Governor was there too, as well as Mayor Boucher, the patron of the Royal 22e Régiment, who addressed the troops with much affection, calling them her nieces and nephews and opening her heart to them.

Unfortunately, the warm, and vibrant voice of Mayor Boucher has now fallen silent. Who would have thought that she would not be there for the troops' return to Quebec City? I know that she would have been very proud of their accomplishments and that they honour her memory.

It is obvious that there can be no development without security, and that is why the mission must proceed in a balanced way and in accordance with the three aspects. Many Canadians have devoted time and resources and made sacrifices for the benefit of our operations in Afghanistan. As a country, we have made an enormous investment. The Canadian Forces are doing a great job and have shown they can succeed with flying colours in helping the people of Afghanistan along the road to emancipation.

I encourage all my colleagues to forego these sterile, partisan debates and examine with all requisite seriousness this motion to enable our Canadian troops and our country of Canada to carry on alongside the great democracies of the world and under UN auspices to complete the reconstruction job undertaken in Afghanistan in an environment of diplomacy, development and security.

• (1730)

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very well thought out speech today in discussing the future of our troops in Afghanistan.

I have one question for him. He said he had the opportunity and honour to welcome 100 returning troops at his local airport. It is an outstanding thing for him to do, to welcome troops when they come back.

I am just wondering if he has any inside knowledge about the concerns of those troops. A fair number of them will come back with either physical or mental concerns, and they and their families require much more assistance than the government is providing now. This is what the Auditor General and the Surgeon General of DND have both indicated.

I am hoping that the member is able to encourage his government to ensure that a great deal more resources, human and financial, are put in place so that the brave men and women coming back to Canada will have the services they need immediately and not down the road.

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I actually sit on the defence committee with the member's colleague from Vancouver, the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam. The defence committee is studying the issue of our military returning from their mission.

[*Translation*]

Our troops returning from Afghanistan have clearly had some out of the ordinary experiences. They should be given all the help and support they need to maintain good mental health. As I just said, the committee is currently studying, for example, possible post-traumatic stress syndrome.

According to all we know so far, it is normal for soldiers to have reactions after returning from a mission. The army is there, though, and very familiar with these reactions. There is a solid health services structure in place. If the committee's work turns up any recommendations that should be made, we will pass them along to the government. For the time being, though, everything seems to indicate that our soldiers are getting the help they need.

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from the Standing Committee on National Defence. I am wondering whether he shares some of my concerns.

Canada's foreign affairs policy in the last 50 years has focused on peace missions. Everyone agrees that the current mission is not a peace mission. So we are in the process of undermining the policy Canada has had for the last 50 years, which has focused on peace missions and through which Canada became an international mediator, with beneficial results. But the current mission we have gotten ourselves into is the complete opposite.

The Americans are very happy about our mission, but the rest of the international community must now do without a mediator that once played a role between the United States and the rest of this international community.

*Government Orders*

I would like to know whether he also thinks we are undermining Canada's foreign affairs policy.

• (1735)

**Mr. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Speaker, I sit on the same committee with my hon. friend opposite, and I have to say that I do not share his point of view in the least.

On the contrary, the mission must be adapted to the context. It is clear that the context in which the mission in Afghanistan is taking place is completely different from the context of previous missions. As well, the Canadian approach has sometimes not produced the expected results. We have only to think of the tragedy in Rwanda, for example. God knows we do not want to go through that again.

As my colleague knows, I also have a problem with the position taken by him and his party, which strikes me as irresponsible and inconsistent in many respects and which also reeks of improvisation. In June 2006, my friend said, "I believe that if we leave, the Taliban will come back and the people will be in a bad way". I really believe that, contrary to what my colleague says, the Canadian mission is adapted to the needs on the ground. Depending on how the situation evolves, we will be able to put more effort into development and diplomacy.

[*English*]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to add my voice to this most important debate in my two short years in Parliament.

Our nation has a long and honourable tradition of contributing to international peace and security. It is a heritage that was born in the fields of Flanders, the hedgerows of northwest Europe, and the hills of Korea. It is a heritage of Canadians serving for the greater good.

Canadians take pride in our past role on the world stage and they can take pride in our role in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not a Conservative mission nor a Liberal mission. It is a Canadian mission, and the most important one we have undertaken in over 50 years.

Liberals and Conservatives agree that the mission should wrap up in 2011. Both parties agree that we must focus our efforts on training, reconstruction and development. As the Manley panel report states:

We like to talk about Canada's role in the world. Well, we have a meaningful one in Afghanistan. As our report states, it should not be faint-hearted nor should it be open-ended. Above all, we must not abandon it prematurely.

Like all of our military missions, it is being conducted with allies who share our support of and commitment to liberal democracy and the values that it represents.

Canadians are being asked to form an opinion about the mission, but most are only getting part of the story.

[*Translation*]

Frankly, what I find hugely annoying is the crowd of critics who automatically interpret any bad news as gospel and start making generalizations about the mission as a whole. When we announce some good news, we are accused of looking at the world through rose-coloured glasses. Anyone who says no progress has been made

has not been to Afghanistan, is not listening to the people who have been there or has an axe to grind.

Of course there are major challenges to be met in Afghanistan. That is why we are there, with 38 allies, on a UN-mandated, NATO-led mission, at the express request of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan.

There are a number of things we have to improve, and that is why we made the commitment in question, knowing that it will not be easy, that it will be a short-term commitment and there will be sacrifices to be made.

[*English*]

If we had quit on South Korea, it would be a communist country today instead of one of the strongest economies in the world. Croatia is one of the 39 allies within the International Security Assistance Force. It was not long ago that Croatia was failing and the alliance stepped in to help. Maybe if we get this right, Afghanistan could be part of an alliance helping out someone else in the future.

In 1938 a British member of Parliament, Leo Amery, said of the situation at the time, "The issue has become very simple. Are we to surrender to ruthless brutality a free people whose cause we have espoused, but are now to throw to the wolves to save our own skins; or are we still able to stand up to a bully? It is not Czechoslovakia but our own soul that is at stake".

I suggest that the basic principle at play is not much different. This mission is about three things.

It is about national interest. It is clearly in Canada's national interest to not let Afghanistan become a breeding ground for terrorism once again. We have seen what happened to our markets and economy after 9/11. We have seen what happened to our ability to move freely across borders and for commerce to move freely. What happens to our allies, such as the United States, has a direct impact on our security, our prosperity and our quality of life.

It is also about values. It is about the values of liberal democracies that we all share—freedom, human rights and rule of law—and which Afghans deserve a taste of.

It is about trust. We have told Afghanistan to trust us.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

We will be there to help them until they are able to provide for their own security.

If we leave too early, the people who trusted us and worked with us will not be treated well by the people who replace us.

The next time we ask someone to trust us, they will be quite right to say: "No, thank you. Even if things are difficult for us, at least we know what to expect."

[*English*]

We cannot let that happen.

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[Translation]

I would like to share a few memories of my visits to Afghanistan over the Christmas holidays.

On Christmas Eve 2006, at Mas'um Ghar, I was with General Hillier. We were talking about war and peace, listening to the bombs explode some distance away, and contemplating a blackened landscape.

When I found myself in the same place on Christmas Eve this past year, together with the Minister of National Defence, the landscape had been completely transformed. You would have thought you were on the Canadian Prairies, with the lights of several villages twinkling on the horizon.

[English]

After decades of darkness the lights are back on, because after decades of darkness the Canadian forces are equipped to do the job and because Canada is there.

There are many measures of the success we are achieving. I met a little girl about six years old on Christmas Day. She was wearing nail polish. She would have had her fingers cut off by the Taliban for that crime. Today she is allowed to go to one of the 4,000 schools that Canada has helped build and be taught by some of the 9,000 teachers that Canada has helped train. She will be able to grow up and get a job. She may be one of hundreds of thousands of women who start small businesses with micro loans from Canada.

[Translation]

She will be able to leave home wearing what she wants, without being escorted by a male member of her immediate family.

Violation of any of those rules would have resulted in a public hanging under the Taliban.

She might be elected to public office in Afghanistan, where there are more women in that role now than in Canada. She may be one of the 40,000 Afghan babies who no longer die at birth every year in Afghanistan.

None of this progress would have been possible under the Taliban, and we cannot allow the Taliban to take that country backward again.

Who would have thought that there would one day be the equivalent of a Terry Fox run in Kandahar, with thousands of participants dressed in white tee-shirts and pants? And yet it happened last year.

[English]

Some people invoke the memory of Lester Pearson as justification for adopting what they see as a blue beret approach to resolution of the situation in Afghanistan. I suggest they go back and reread their history.

Lester Pearson was not Mahatma Gandhi and he was not Pollyanna. Mr. Pearson had a clear understanding of the requirement for a robust military that was properly funded and equipped. He was a key part of a Liberal government that raised defence spending to 7% of GDP. Lester Pearson's government did not stare down our enemies through the power of love and isolationism. It stared them

down through a combination of strength and national resolve in cooperation with like-minded allies.

As compelling as the image of the power of the blue beret may be, it is simply dangerously unrealistic to believe that this will strike fear into the hearts of the Taliban and bring stability to Afghanistan.

These same people would say that we should withdraw NATO and bring in the UN. Brilliant. In fact, it was so brilliant that it was done years ago. Who the heck do they think the 39 allies in ISAF are, if not representative of the United Nations?

Let me quote from a recent article in the *Globe and Mail* written by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon:

Afghanistan is a potent symbol of the costs inherent in abandoning nations to the lawless forces of anarchy. That alone justifies international efforts to help rebuild the country....

Our collective success depends on the continuing presence of the International Security Assistance Force, commanded by NATO and helping local governments in nearly every province to maintain security and carry out reconstruction projects....

The Afghan government has far to go before it regains control of its own destiny. But that day will come. It is hard work. There is little glory. It requires sacrifices. And that is why we are there.

Others say we should simply stop combat operations and concentrate on training and development. I would suggest to them that the purpose of the mission from day one has been to work toward that goal and that is exactly what we have been doing.

Regrettably, there is someone else who gets a vote on how fast we can progress in that area, and that is the Taliban. As General Hillier and John Manley have rightly pointed out, we cannot train the Afghan national army and the Afghan national police force without exposing ourselves to combat.

It is also unrealistic to suggest that we simply move to another part of Afghanistan. The previous Liberal government chose Kandahar, with our support, and it is too late to turn back the clock. In the south alone, we have benefited from close partnerships and cooperation with Great Britain, the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands, Australia, Romania and Estonia.

Together with our allies and partners, we have almost 19,000 troops in the south of Afghanistan and others are joining us. We are in talks with our allies and partners to get more troops on the ground in Kandahar. Across Afghanistan, the international community is pulling together to support the mission.

The Prime Minister established the Manley panel last fall with the express intention of bringing a bipartisan consensus to this important mission. The Manley panel notes:

To make a difference in Afghanistan—to contribute to a more stable and peaceful, better governed and developing Afghanistan—Canadians will require sustained resolve and determined realism about what can be achieved.

“Freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law” cannot be simply fine words. They have to be backed up by strength and resolve. It is up to all of us to work together, remembering our proud history of doing the right thing internationally on Canadian missions under Conservative and Liberal governments for the past 140 years.

We owe it to our allies. We owe it to those who depend on us for help. We owe it to Canadians.

*Government Orders*

• (1745)

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's words. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the background that he brings to the House and this debate.

A number of reservists and full members have gone from my riding to Afghanistan. Without question, there is tremendous support in Tobique—Mactaquac for the troops. I have not had the opportunity to be in Afghanistan and I have a question for the parliamentary secretary.

He commented about the training and development that needs to be done for the Afghan troops so they can secure their own country. Could the member comment about what he saw over there in the job that our Canadian troops are doing in mentoring these troops? Does he see success growing in that area?

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, in my two visits to Afghanistan, which were a year apart, I saw significant progress. I talked to literally hundreds and hundreds of soldiers, some of whom had been there more than once. As I said in my comments, anybody who suggests that there has been no progress has not been there, has not listened to those who have, or has another agenda.

In fact, we have made tremendous progress in training the Afghan national army. We visited with some of the army when we were there with the Minister of National Defence this past Christmas. I think we have six kandaks in training right now. Some of them are online. More and more, they are taking the lead in missions. They are doing the planning, with Canadian assistance and supervision, but the Afghan national army is taking the lead on those missions more and more.

That is what this is about. It is about giving them back their own country, which they can manage themselves with the training and capacity that we have instilled in them. We are doing a great job of that.

A lot more needs to be done. There is no question about that. There are a lot of challenges, but we are getting the job done, thanks to the brave Canadian men and women.

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Markham—Unionville indicated in his comments that the position taken by the opposition was that maybe there should be an update with respect to progress made in the area of reconstruction and institutional revitalization and also with respect to the military initiatives.

The suggestion was put forward that a special committee should be set up to receive those periodic reports. I have my own views and I have heard other members of the opposition give different views on that, but I would be interested to hear the member's response to this suggestion that is being put forward.

• (1750)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question because it gives me an opportunity to point out that we have taken this very seriously. In fact, the last two ministers of national defence have been before committees 17 times in the last two years, which is more often than the last four Liberal defence ministers combined.

There have been 11 technical briefings since 2001. Ten of those were by this government and one was by the previous government. We take communicating with Parliament and with Canadians very seriously. We have demonstrated that and we are going to continue to do that.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Don Valley East should know that there is a minute left for both the question and the answer.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I would like to ask the hon. member a question based on the statistics he was giving about the 4,000 schools that have been created with the funding. In my riding, I have a very large Afghan community centre and the Afghan Women's Organization. They are decrying the lack of funds and cannot see results, so my question is whether the member can give me specific locations where the schools are located so I can give the right answers to those people.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, it would take too long for me to list all 4,000 locations in less than 30 seconds, and I do not have them at my fingertips, but I can get the information for the hon. member and get back to her.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with your permission, it would be a good idea to review the policy positions that the Bloc Québécois has adopted throughout all the discussion on Afghanistan. It is important that those who are listening to us know that, at the start, the Bloc Québécois gave its support to the mission in Afghanistan. We did that on October 8, 2001, just a few weeks after the attacks on New York and Washington.

We also agreed with United Nations resolutions 1368 and 1373, which gave the United States permission to react because they had been attacked and were in a legitimate defence position. There were a number of countries that fell in behind the Americans. At the time, we were in agreement with recognition of the legitimate right of the Americans to defend themselves and we supported intervention by the international community. As I have said, that was in October 2001.

We also have to look back to that period and admit that the Bloc Québécois became more and more demanding in its policy positions. I think back to January 28, 2002. That was the second policy position when we were asked to agree to send troops to Afghanistan. Once again, the Bloc Québécois said "Yes" but with certain conditions. Among other things, we wanted to protect civilians. We were also against antipersonnel mines and cluster bombs. We believed it was important that prisoners be treated in accordance with international law and, in particular, we did not want prisoners to wind up in Guantanamo.

It was at that point that the two governments—Liberal as much as Conservative—began to be secretive. They told us there were no problems. I recall a photo that appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, showing JTF 2, Joint Task Force Two, leading three prisoners to the Americans. In our opinion, that is where it started—I will not say to come apart. We asked serious questions and we had serious doubts about the mission itself.

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On November 15, 2005, we were again in favour of redeployment from Kabul to Kandahar. Once more, we attached many conditions because the way things were proceeding was not satisfactory. We obtained our news from the media, on television and radio, but the Liberal government of the day never told us exactly what was happening on the ground. So we returned to the charge. We supported sending the troops to Kandahar but prisoners' rights were still very important to us. We also called for a peace-building strategy. It was from that point that the Bloc began to ask whether there was a possibility for building peace, perhaps through discussions with the less-militant elements of the Taliban. Back in 2005, we were putting forward that timetable.

We also called for a reconstruction strategy. Reports on television and in the media described aggressive missions: we heard how many Taliban were killed and how many Canadians lost their lives. We never heard about construction of schools, irrigation systems or clinics. That was when we began to have doubts.

On May 16, 2006, the Bloc Québécois introduced a motion before the Standing Committee on National Defence saying that henceforth we wanted much tighter, firmer parameters. Among other things, we were wondering about the length of the mission. We could not go on forever like this, not knowing how long the mission would last.

There was also the matter of the condition of our troops and their equipment. Did they have what they needed out there? As changes occurred in the theatre of operations, various kinds of equipment were purchased. It was Canadian taxpayers who footed the bill for providing our troops with effective equipment suited to the terrain. Our troops simply had to have what was needed. This was done without calls for tenders and completely over our heads in the House of Commons. There is equipment out there about which people have no idea. They would have to go to find out. So we asked how it could be that there was a certain contract we had never heard of.

We had other conditions as well and insisted on reconstruction and diplomacy.

• (1755)

We already had the three Ds at the time. We also wanted evaluation criteria and an exit strategy. How were we going to get out of this? We had to talk about it. That is what we were doing on May 16.

The next day, the Prime Minister introduced the motion in the House to extend the mission. That was when we said he probably wanted to avoid answering these questions. I can talk about the extension of the mission. I was not here. I was in Afghanistan as a matter of fact—I will return to this a little later—with German troops in the north. It was a NATO delegation. Brussels had asked me to accompany five or six other parliamentarians and I went to see for myself what was happening in northern Afghanistan. The cardinal points are very important in Afghanistan. I will return to this later.

On May 17, therefore, we faced a government motion for an extension until February 2009. In view of the fact that the government simply would not answer our questions or respond to what the Bloc had proposed the previous day in committee, we said we did not agree with the mission. We were being asked to sign a

blank cheque and the Bloc Québécois did not want to do it. That was the point where the Bloc stayed true to itself and broke with the government. We would not follow it anywhere at all.

And then on April 19, 2007, there was another important political position taken. We talked about the end of the operation, in a motion presented by the Liberal Party. The Bloc joined with the Liberals in saying that the combat mission did have to end in 2009. That is where we are now. We are now facing a second extension.

First, I want to clarify something before continuing my argument. The Parliament of Canada is completely entitled to decide what the mission is, to say that the mission starts on this date and ends on that date. The opposition parties are tired of being told that they do not support the troops on the ground. I have gone to see those troops on two occasions. I will say, loud and clear, that they are doing an excellent job there. In fact, the Prime Minister agrees. He also says that it is up to the generals to decide the parameters for what the troops will do, because we are not on the scene every day. However, as parliamentarians, we have a responsibility, and that is to decide when it starts, when it finishes, and often, the terms on which we want it to happen. After that, when it comes to the day to day operations on the ground, we know that it is the military commanders who will decide, over there, how things will be done.

We are a bit tired of being told that the reason we do not agree with the mission is that we are against the troops who are there. That is absolutely false. It is a bad argument and we do not agree with it.

Parliament also makes decisions. It seems to me that the government is letting things slide a lot. When we talk about the prisoners—I will say more about that later—I find it incredible that what is being said is: “Do what you want with the prisoners. We will not tell you how to do things. It is up to you to decide.” We are responsible people. We are the people’s elected representatives. We have to decide the big questions. It seems to me that the government is only too happy to avoid dealing with those big questions.

Another argument is being made, and this is something else I would like to clarify: that the Taliban are listening to us. The Taliban are probably going to put a price on the head of some ministers here because they are against them, and we are going to be told that we are for the Taliban because we are not for continuing the mission. Be serious! There are limits. I understand that they follow the debates, but then to say that they are listening every moment to what I am saying, there is a limit. I find this extreme. We will not be controlled, and we will not be shut down, by telling us that the Taliban are monitoring us as we speak and that we have to be careful what we say. We in the Bloc Québécois will say it loud and clear. We do not agree with extending the mission, and we are going to put forward arguments to support that position.

The three D policy is important here. When I went to Afghanistan the first time I saw the German troops and I said to them, “It is only 8 p.m. Why do you have to go back to the base?” The fact is there were what were called caveats, or exceptions imposed by their parliament, which sometimes goes much further. For our Canadian soldiers in the south, there were no caveats. I then realized that there may be some nations that were not doing as much as we were.

*Government Orders*

• (1800)

Let me say again that the cardinal points are important in Afghanistan. It is much more dangerous in the south and the east than it is in the north and the west. Traditionally that is not where the problems lie. The Taliban stronghold is in Kandahar. That is an important cardinal point.

The second time I went to Afghanistan with the Standing Committee on National Defence—my colleague was there as well—we were given briefings. I asked whether the mission was balanced. I specifically asked how many people were taking care of defence, the first of the three Ds. I was told roughly 2,500. That is about the size of the Royal 22e Régiment currently in Afghanistan. Then I asked how many CIDA employees were working on development. I was told there were six there to assess the projects in the entire Kandahar province. I noticed there was certainly an imbalance.

I was hoping to get assurance about the other D: diplomacy. I asked how many diplomats were meeting with the governors, holding village meetings, coming into direct contact with Kabul, the capital, and working together to come up with a plan of action that was a little more comprehensive. It was the same number as for development, in other words there were just six diplomats in Afghanistan in the Kandahar area. As you can see this mission is completely unbalanced.

Earlier I asked my colleague a question. The Bloc Québécois is concerned about Canadian foreign policy. It has always been based on mediation. It all started with Lester B. Pearson's peacekeeping forces and peace missions. At present, everyone agrees that this is not a peace mission. Who is pleased with this? George W. Bush. Canada, the former dove that served as mediator between two major powers, has now become an eagle perched on the same branch as the Americans. In my opinion, this has very negative consequences for Canada.

I have some accusations to make. I accused the Conservatives of having hijacked the mission. They stand accused. They have hijacked the current mission in Afghanistan and are focusing only on the military aspect with the result that almost no development work is being carried out.

I can hardly wait to see the 4,000 schools. I went to Kandahar and, when we asked to see the schools, we were told that it was dangerous, that we could not leave the camp and that the helicopters had no fuel because there had been an explosion in a fuel convoy headed to Kandahar. There was no more fuel for the helicopters and it was impossible to leave the camp and to go beyond the barbed wire surrounding it. I asked them where the schools were located and if they had photos of them, where were the clinics, the drinking water wells and the irrigation systems. We did not see any of that.

Earlier there was talk of briefings. We have the Bloc Québécois to thank for these, because the minister at the time did not want to brief the members of the Standing Committee on National Defence. Since then, there have been briefings, but they are completely meaningless. They show photos of the new C-17s that will be landing in Kandahar. It is all unclassified information. They show us the cargo bay and how the C-17 is unloaded. Where are the schools? If the schools existed, the government would be happy to show them. We

are not talking about dozens or hundreds of schools. The parliamentary secretary is talking about thousands of schools. I think that is an exaggeration. There are not thousands of schools, and that is a problem. The Conservatives have hijacked the mission.

The Liberal Party is no better. I asked the Leader of the Opposition earlier today. For a year, the Liberals were saying that the combat missions would end in 2009. The member for Bourassa, critic on this file, went on and on about 2009. I had to laugh last week when I heard him saying that the Liberals were responsible for this wonderful resolution, and that they had moved the debate forward.

The real issue is the end of the mission. The Liberals said that the mission would end in 2009. Now, it is 2011. That is not acceptable. It is a serious contradiction.

• (1805)

I hope that my colleague from Bourassa will ask me that question later on, and I hope that he will be able to respond to what I am saying now.

They have flip-flopped. I do not know what the Leader of the Opposition negotiated in the Prime Minister's Office, but they cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. The Liberal Party has surrendered to the Conservative Party. It has laid down its arms, to use a military expression. They are trying to tell us that this is a great victory for them, but I do not think it is.

Only the Bloc Québécois is holding the line; even the NDP capitulated. When my colleague from Bourassa put forward his motion to end combat operations in 2009, the NDP joined the Conservative Party in voting against it. Everything would have been a done deal by now, and we would not be having this debate. We would have informed our NATO friends and allies that Parliament had decided that combat operations would end in 2009.

Right now, they all stand accused. The Bloc Québécois alone has stood firm. I have seen the polls: the Conservatives and the Liberals are acting against the will of Quebeckers. This is not what Quebeckers want. They do not want this mission to go on. They want it to end in 2009. We are steering a steady course, and we have a clear conscience. I look forward to going up against them in the election campaign.

To use a slogan that has appeared in the papers, they will find us in their path in Quebec telling Quebeckers exactly what makes these parties tick. One party hijacked the mission, and the other went to bed with it after claiming to be a virgin, playing innocent, and insisting that it would never lie down with the Conservative Party on the issue of ending the mission. But that is not what happened, because here they are in the same bed, and Quebeckers will not forget that.

I have been talking about the cardinal points. We do not want to leave and let everything fall apart. For many years, when I attend NATO meetings, I myself have been asking whether there is some way to do a rotation; or have others take our place so that it is not always the same ones in combat, the Canadians, the Americans or the British. I named them all earlier.

*Government Orders*

At present, the ones who are paying the biggest price are the Canadians. The number of 78 killed in a contingent of about 2,500 soldiers in rotation, is enormous. We are paying the highest cost in terms of loss of life, and that cost is even higher.

I have ridden comfortably in the air-conditioned G-Wagons with the German troops in the north of Afghanistan, but it is not like that in the south because that is a dangerous field of operation. It is now costing Canadian taxpayers \$3 million per day to carry out operations in Afghanistan. It does not cost that much in the north or the west, but that is what it costs in the south of Afghanistan.

I could say a great deal more about CIDA, from whom there has been no accounting. For example, if an Afghan person comes to CIDA because he wants to build a well in his village. They ask him how much will it cost. He answers \$15,000 and they sign a cheque. No one goes to see if the well is built and we find out later that it costs \$2,000 to build a well in Afghanistan. The same thing applies to the stones that are used to pave the roads. They sell the stones at 10 times the cost price because they are paid for with Canadian dollars and there is no accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I see you are signalling that my time is nearly up. I will conclude by saying that I am glad to belong to the Bloc Québécois. I am glad we have maintained our position and that we are the only ones who have not contradicted ourselves in this debate. In my opinion, the people of Quebec will recognize that in the next election. They will recognize that we have not betrayed them, we have not let them down and we have been honest with them. That proves once again that the message of the Bloc Québécois is well fixed in the minds of Quebecers: we defend their interests and their values. Our colleagues in this House will find us in their path in Quebec in the next federal election.

• (1810)

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

[*English*]

That was 20 minutes of some of the worst and most misleading bovine psychology I have heard in this place.

The intent of the mission was never ever peacekeeping. That is completely misleading. I have a quote that I would like to read for my colleague and then ask him a short question. The quote is from John Stuart Mill. It says:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse...A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

I ask my hon. colleague, is there anything that the Bloc Québécois is willing to fight for?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether my colleague listened to what I said earlier. I explained that the Bloc Québécois had supported this mission. We agreed with it. Until 2005, we agreed with sending troops, but then we began to be much more critical. I should also say that we are happy with the work the

military are doing. I do not want to fall into the trap where others say that we do not care about our soldiers or that we are against them. That is not the case. Moreover, I consider the soldiers of the Royal 22nd Regiment to be the best in the world, not just the best in Canada.

I think we were right. It is up to us to decide whether we want a change of direction for this mission. It is up to Parliament to decide, and that does not mean we want to slip away. We want others to take our place. It should not always be up to the same countries to pay the monetary and human price. We are not saying we want to leave tomorrow, but we want the mission to end. We have been talking about a 2009 end date for a long time, while many members of this House have changed their minds about the end date.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to speak in sound bites with an eye to an upcoming election campaign. We need to be above all that. When we are talking about Canada's role in the world, we need to be bigger than that. I therefore do not want to say that we will be on Quebec's side, see what the polls say, and all that.

I do know one thing: the Liberal Party of Canada said that the mission had to change and focus on reconstruction. We even talked about rotation. I was one of those who talked about it.

I have a question for the member for Saint-Jean. I have often heard him say that he would agree to a rotation, but that Canada would have to go into other regions of Afghanistan. Am I to understand now that the Bloc has reversed its position? Does the member want the troops not only to leave Kandahar but to withdraw from Afghanistan completely? Or has he changed his mind, too?

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois' position is clear. We want the mission to end in 2009. We want Canada to be replaced in Kandahar by another country or other countries. My hon. colleague from Bourassa has said repeatedly that it should not always be the same people who pay the price and bear the burden.

We agree. We are at the stage where this is happening. We want the mission to end in 2009, not in 2011. So far, 78 soldiers have died and this is costing us \$3 million a day. Between now and 2011, we can be sure that it will cost the lives of dozens of more soldiers and will continue to be very costly for the public purse.

Thus, our position is not contradictory. For us, the end of the mission has always been 2009. That is still the case today and will be the case tomorrow.

• (1815)

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, I am a previous member of the defence committee and we have a grave concern for the soldiers who come back and their families.

Inside today's *The Hill Times* there is a big headline, "Disposable soldiers". In a previous edition of *The Hill Times*, a gentleman by the name of Stephen White from Nova Scotia slammed Veterans Affairs for its care of the troops. Another one from Joyce Carter, a widow of a veteran, slammed the government for its broken promises.

*Government Orders*

Whether the troops come back today or in 2011, the reality is we have been told by the Auditor General and by the Surgeon General of DND that approximately one-third of the returning troops will have psychological or physical problems. The Auditor General said that there are not enough financial or human resources to care for them and their families.

The reality is we saw the headlines in Petawawa about children of those soldiers who died in Afghanistan who could not get the care they needed. It took headlines in an ombudsman report to get them the care.

We also know about the Dinning family whose son bravely lost his life in Afghanistan. It took an eight hour drive for them to come here to force the government to look after the funeral expenses.

The reality is the government promised so much more for veterans and returning soldiers and it completely let them down.

I would like my hon. colleague from the Bloc to explain why the government says it supports the troops but when the troops come back, that support seems to fall off rather rapidly.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, I must agree with my hon. colleague. In my opinion, what is even more alarming is that the Bloc Québécois has often asked the Canadian Forces how many injured soldiers there have been in Afghanistan. There have been 78 deaths so far, and we had to wait months to see a list. After questioning the generals before the Standing Committee on National Defence, we finally saw a list of the number of injured soldiers.

A study was undertaken because we were very concerned about whether soldiers were receiving proper care. I had even heard that soldiers were given pills to treat post-traumatic stress and they were then sent back into the field.

We would like to get to the bottom of this. I am pleased that my hon. colleague has raised the issue and I hope that the members of the other parties on the Standing Committee on National Defence will make it their mission to get to the bottom of this matter. These people must be treated humanely. They have left part of themselves, or their physical or psychological integrity, on the battlefield. They must receive the care that is worthy of the sacrifice they have made.

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's convoluted attempt at explaining the Bloc Québécois about-faces these past six years. I find it deplorable that their position changes according to which way the wind is blowing or what the polls indicate. I have all kinds of examples of contradictory statements made by Bloc members. The leader himself said on several occasions that he supported extending the mission and then he backtracked. He said things that were not true.

We have to consider all that has been accomplished in Afghanistan. For example, the gross domestic product has doubled and micro-financing is taking hold in Afghanistan. Almost 418,000 small loans have been made. All experts in international development, particularly in poor countries, acknowledge the power of micro-financing in rebuilding economies. In addition, these loans are being made to women and 90% of the loans have been repaid. We are talking about 418,000 loans. In 2004, 9% of Afghans were

receiving basic health care and now 83% are entitled to such services.

Canada is supporting 4,000 schools. The member only needs to go to the Galeries de la Capitale shopping centre to see a travelling exhibit that has toured the country. He does not have to go to Afghanistan. We did not go to all those places in Afghanistan because of security, but that does not prevent the work from being carried out in the field. Six million children have gone back to school. The infant mortality rate has decreased. Five million refugees have returned to Afghanistan since the arrival of UN troops.

There sits a party that wants to break up Canada and that, one day, would like to have a say in this matter as a nation. The leader of that party even said, in January 2007, that a sovereign Quebec would have participated in international intervention in Afghanistan. The member himself said, in February 2006, that he was in favour of extending the Canadian Forces' mission.

My question is simple. After all these about-faces, how can the members of the Bloc Québécois present one coherent position on the Afghanistan mission? More importantly, how can reconstruction take place in Afghanistan without security?

• (1820)

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member is being quite convoluted himself. The GDP has increased so quickly because opium production is doubling, even tripling the growth rate. That is what is happening, but no one ever says much about that. Often the government will say that the opium fields have to be destroyed, but if that happens, the peasants will turn against us. We prefer to go down other avenues.

The Senlis Council, among others—it will make people smile to hear me talk about the Senlis Council—has a rather good suggestion that this product be supplied to pharmaceutical companies. The product could even be refined in the villages. That is a good approach.

There is also the idea of alternative crops. There were supposed to be discussions between NATO and the European Union to find new markets in Europe. If cucumbers are planted instead of poppies, then there needs to be a market for cucumbers. There could be discussions about that with the European Union.

I could go on—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Crowfoot.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak on behalf of my constituents, the people of Crowfoot, Alberta, to the motion on the future of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

*Government Orders*

Last week during the break, members were in their constituencies and attended different events. I was at schools in Drumheller, Strathmore and others to talk about Canada's mission in Afghanistan. It is an issue in which all Canadians, but especially those in my riding, are very engaged. My constituents are 100% in support of the brave Canadian men and women in the Canadian armed forces. Many Canadian veterans live in my riding and they continue to be very proud of our Canadian military.

We are a peaceful nation. Canadians have served as peacekeepers over the last number of decades in many parts of the world. World War II veterans in my riding remain vocal and are always prepared to speak to the younger generation about the strength of our nation's resolve, its strong capabilities when it comes to the military and the legacy of past efforts made on behalf of our country.

The revised motion we are debating today builds on the original motion which our government brought forward and wrote from the recommendations that came out of the Manley report. The revised motion incorporates large elements of the motion that was proposed by the Liberal Party, the official opposition in the House. In this minority Parliament we are focusing our efforts to achieve a bipartisan consensus in the House on the future of the mission. We want to work together.

The revised motion acknowledges what is required in order for Canada's and NATO's mission to succeed. I am certain that today Canadians are encouraged knowing that there is some fundamental common ground between the government and the official opposition when it comes to the very difficult work our country is doing on behalf of the people of Afghanistan.

Our parties agree that the mission should continue until 2011 and that operational decisions should be left to the Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan who are aware of the circumstances they face. While we in this House make big decisions on a political level, we also believe we have to allow our military commanders on the ground the freedom to make those decisions that will lead to the success of this mission.

Our two parties, the two parties with the most seats or votes in the House, believe that with the motion we are debating today we have a reasonable compromise that addresses the important questions Canadians have about the future mission in Afghanistan. This motion does not reflect, as we have already heard today, a Conservative position or a Liberal position. It is a Canadian position that can be supported by a majority of the elected representatives of the Canadian people.

Where I come from, people feel that this is first and foremost a duty that we owe to our troops. Every day our troops are putting their lives on the line. Parliament has asked them to do this. This House should be very clear with our troops about the missions they are tasked to accomplish on behalf of our country. Today's motion provides that clarity.

Our government has decided to set aside stable and predictable funding for the plan laid out in this motion. We are increasing the automatic annual increase in defence spending from 1.5% to 2% beginning in 2011-12. This funding, together with new and upgraded

equipment, will improve the general effectiveness and safety of Canadian troops.

In addition, I know the Prime Minister is making a concerted effort to reach out to our allies and to secure another 1,000 troops to help Canadian troops in the field get the job done. I am optimistic that our Prime Minister will get the job done. We have heard from our defence minister today and the parliamentary secretary from Edmonton. I know all of them are involved in meeting with other countries and securing the support that is needed.

● (1825)

I do not believe for one moment that NATO will let us down. I think members of both the government and the official opposition can join together as one voice in asking NATO to live up to its collective obligations and come through. I am confident that this will happen.

As I said, my constituents are glad that our federal government is truly providing our men and women in the Canadian Forces with what they need to get the job done.

We welcome the greater clarity in the Liberal position on the mission in Afghanistan. Canada should remain with the military mission in Afghanistan through to 2011.

Our government established the Manley panel last fall with the expressed intention of bringing a non-partisan consensus to this particular mission, and the motion we are debating here this afternoon shows the progress that we have made here in Parliament.

Why is Canada in Afghanistan? The motion is in line with our commitment to Afghanistan. Canada is part of the international effort requested, not by other major super powers, but by the democratically elected government of Afghanistan.

As part of the United Nations mandated and NATO led mission, Canada, alongside its international partners, has committed to help the people of Afghanistan build a stable, democratic and self-sufficient country. Our goal is to create a safer environment where development and reconstruction can take place and to help Afghans build the foundations they will need for that same stability and for that lasting peace.

The work of Canada and the international community is guided by the January 2006 Afghanistan Compact, a framework for coordinating the work and resources of the Afghan government and its international partners in three priority areas, which are not in any specific order: security, development and good governance.

Canada has been upholding a key role in this NATO led, UN sanctioned, International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. We are doing our part along with 37 other nations. We are proudly doing our part and we are a model for other countries, as we are in the Kandahar region.

The goal is to help establish a safe and stable environment so that roads, hospitals and schools can be built, so local government can be strengthened and so other development work can take place. In the Kandahar area, if we were to take the Canadian troops away none of these projects would ever work their way through to fruition.

*Government Orders*

Various NATO countries are also responsible for 25 provincial reconstruction teams working throughout Afghanistan.

In the 39th Parliament, I have had the privilege of serving as the chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Our committee has been studying Canada's mission in Afghanistan. We have held 31 meetings concerning the situation and the mission in Afghanistan. We have heard from over 50 witnesses. We presented a preliminary report to this House and our study is ongoing.

From the chair of our committee, I must say that we have heard overwhelming testimony about the good work Canadians are doing in Afghanistan. We have heard about mistakes, successes, accomplishments and heart-wrenching accounts of how tough life is and has been in that country.

Along with former deputy prime minister, John Manley, I am very disappointed that so many and so much of the testimony by the witnesses before our committee has not reached Canadians. I encourage all Canadians to go to [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca), find the foreign affairs committee home page and read the testimony.

Our mission has experienced challenges. In any war Canada has fought, the battle was not easy but this nation has never forsaken its responsibilities. I am proud that today will not change that history. Today in Afghanistan, the Taliban has chosen the cowardly way by setting traps in the shadows to kill.

• (1830)

Canada remains in Afghanistan and we remain strong.

It has been a pleasure to bring forward some of the information we have from the committee. I look forward to a couple of questions so I can finish some of my comments.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the comments from my good neighbour in Crowfoot. The good constituents who I represent in Wetaskiwin would like to hear the hon. member finish some of the comments he had to make.

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** Mr. Speaker, through our committee work, it has become very obvious that in this conflict the people of Afghanistan support us. Not only are they telling the Canadian soldiers to please stay and fight their battles, but they also share our sorrow every time we lose a Canadian in Afghanistan.

Afghans wish Canadians did not have to pay such a high price in terms of personal injury or death. Afghan citizens are thankful for our efforts. They know we are not there to take their country from them. They know we are only trying to help restore security to allow the rebuilding of Afghanistan to continue. Development and reconstruction work, the building of roads, bridges, schools and hospitals can only take place when civilian workers and the projects they are working on are safe from harm.

Today we are debating this motion because we have reached an agreement on how our nation will proceed in terms of helping Afghanistan. This is very difficult work and it is costly. We have had to decide what we will continue to do and for how long we will do it. We have had to decide what to report to other nations on what we feel they should be doing to help get the job done. These issues are spelled out in the motion.

The speeches we are hearing in the House today from all parties are providing the details and working the details of this motion. My constituents are proud our Canadian Forces have performed in Afghanistan. I think my constituents and most Canadians want Canada to continue to influence the world for good in Afghanistan toward democracy, freedom, peace, rule of law, all those things we take for granted. Let us not give up on this country. Let us not say that we will no longer play a role. Let these Canadian values be instilled and imparted to Afghanistan which is begging Canada to continue its work there.

• (1835)

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I just noticed that the member of Parliament is not satisfied with the answer so I will try again.

I know my colleague is the chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and it would be appropriate, since we want to change the mission, to refocus and talk about diplomacy because he has been working hard on that issue.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on Pakistan. We know that if we want to find an Afghanistan solution we will need to take a look regionally. There are some issues at the border and landmines in the south with people passing back and forth easily.

I would like to hear the thoughts of the member for Crowfoot on what we should do now what should have been done a year ago regarding diplomacy. I know there is Jirga and I know that Musharraf is talking with President Karzai, but since the member has been focusing on this at the standing committee, what should we do regarding diplomacy?

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** Mr. Speaker, any time we are involved in conflict it is not only the country but the bordering countries that play a major role. We understand that much is coming across the border.

When we think of what Canada is doing, Canada is involved not just bilaterally with Pakistan or with Afghanistan, we are working multilaterally through the UN and others to meet with Pakistan. We have encouraged it to have closer border control.

One thing I was very impressed with at our last committee meeting was when it came out in the statistics how many troops Pakistan has lost. Pakistan has lost thousands of troops in order to secure the border.

Diplomatically, the member has hit the nail on the head. We continue behind the scenes to work diplomatically to speak with governments and whoever the new leader of Pakistan may some day be to help influence more response there, but we are not there simply trying to fight the Taliban. We are there working with other countries.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I am humbled to be able to walk these hallways and follow the steps of real heroes and to stand in the House and talk on the predominant foreign policy issue of our time with some of the heroes of our time, such as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, a retired lieutenant colonel with the Canadian Forces.

### *Government Orders*

It is an honour to stand here today to speak to the Afghan mission, a mission that has positively impacted the lives of Afghans and Canadians alike. It is an honour to represent the people of Westlock—St. Paul and, within that riding, a real privilege to represent the military bases of 4 Wing Cold Lake and Edmonton Garrison.

With two military bases in my riding, it has allowed me a unique opportunity to hear from our brave men and women in uniform about the ways in which they are helping to create a better life for the Afghan people. Our brave soldiers risk their lives each and every day to help bring about peace, hope and change to a people who have all been but forgotten by the world.

This hope has been realized in many tangible and concrete forms. It has been realized in the light of an Afghan woman's eyes when she has been approved for a business loan, an opportunity never before given. It has been realized in the aspirations for a better tomorrow of a farmer who was once forced to grow opium but now has a variety of crops to choose from. Hope is realized in the smile on a little girl's face when she has seen a classroom for the very first time.

Those are the reasons that our brave men and women risk their lives every day. Those are just some of the faces for which they risk their lives. Those are the reasons that I stand fully committed behind our brave men and women in uniform as they bring hope back into the lives of Afghan citizens.

It is not just the sacrifice of our soldiers and their families that I would like to mention today but also our Canadian diplomats and civilians who risk their lives every day as well to create sustainable development and good governance while helping to decrease poverty. Our civilian diplomats and soldiers are working shoulder to shoulder with our NATO partners at the invitation of the democratically elected Afghan government to bring about a better Afghanistan, a better world and a better tomorrow.

This is the Canadian vision. The mission in Afghanistan brings hope, aspirations and dreams to a people who have been neglected and oppressed for far too long.

While in Afghanistan, Canada has played a multifaceted role, bringing positive change to Afghanistan's educational system, economy, health care system, security, good governance and rule of law, to name but a few. To date, there are roughly six million children in school, one-third of those are girls, while in 2001 only 700,000 children were enrolled. We should think about that. Today there are nearly three times as many females enrolled in Afghan public schools as there were before that.

Directly, Canada supports the establishment of 4,000 community based schools and the training of 9,000 teachers, 4,000 of whom are women. Approximately 120,000 children will benefit from these community based schools. That is incredible and something that Canadians should be and are proud of.

Between 2004 and 2007 per capita income doubled in Afghanistan. As the top microfinance program donor, Canada has helped women take out loans and start businesses for the first time ever. More than 418,000 people in 23 different provinces have benefited from microfinancing, two-thirds of those being females, with a repayment rate of over 90% already.

I am proud to say that 83% of Afghans have access to basic medical care compared to 2004 when only 9% of the population had this access. Thanks to Canada, more than 7 million children have been vaccinated against polio and 400,000 people in Kandahar province have benefited from food aid.

Canadians should also be proud of the contributions we have made to create a safer, better Afghanistan. We have helped with police reform; a global approach that includes mentoring, training, financing, salaries, building police stations and providing supply equipment and uniforms for the Afghan national police. We have also helped train the Afghan national army by working side by side with the ANA, helping them to become a self-sufficient force, while helping them display leadership to be extended in the hopes of providing influence for the central government throughout their country.

Finally, with respect to security, Canada has been working toward a mine free Afghanistan. We have put millions of dollars toward demining initiatives, including mine risk education, victim assistance and capacity building. These are but merely a chip off the iceberg in what we are doing to help create a safer Afghanistan.

● (1840)

Canada is also working toward creating good governance for the people of Afghanistan. Ten million-plus Afghans were registered to vote in free and fair elections for president in 2004. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, 374 candidates were women.

The rule of law is being brought back to a country that has been without it for far too long. More than 70 prosecutors, 68 public defenders and 200 judges have been trained by Canada. These are but merely a glimpse of the results of the hard work and dedication of brave Canadians.

The hopes and dreams that have been brought to Afghanistan do not come without a price, however. It is one thing to build infrastructure and to train the Afghan National Army, but it is another to ensure the country maintains stability, even after foreign actors have left.

Many challenges still lie ahead, but it is through the successes that we have already seen that remind us why we have worked so hard and must continue to do so. No doubt much of the story that I tell today will be news to many Canadians, yet the history of our role in the world is not. Our forefathers have always stood on the side of justice and peace.

Since World War I and, as Dr. Nathan Greenfield so aptly called it, our baptism of fire through the second world war, the Korean conflict and numerous peacekeeping missions across the world, Canadian soldiers have been acknowledged, especially by our allies, as a perpetual inspiration. Yet our role on the world stage has grown increasingly into that of a country determined to rest upon our laurels.

As a free, prosperous and democratic nation, we have the genuine ability to effect change and inspire hope around the world. Our mission in Afghanistan has continued the reputation of Canada in the eyes of those most in need of hope. The work we are doing is most definitely beginning to bring about the change so desperately needed.

Our job is not complete and will not be complete in Afghanistan until the democratically elected Afghan government, the Afghan National Army and all Afghani people are able to stand together in strong, capable opposition to the forces looking to tear their country asunder.

To withdraw our troops before the job is done would jeopardize the progress we have made and the hope we have offered. We have begun to give the Afghan people the tools they need to rebuild and protect their country. However, we need to ensure they know how to use those tools properly. In this task, our most pressing concern must be the effectiveness of our lessons, not the speed with which they are completed. For surely, as the base of understanding and ability is broadened and defined in this war-torn nation, our role will pass from guardian to partner.

It is our responsibility, as elected members of Parliament, to give our soldiers and Canadian citizens a clear mandate and vision on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. We owe that much to them. That is why I support the Manley report. I support this motion and urge all members, especially those on the other side of the House, to also support it.

Let us not give our enemies any doubt as to where the people of Canada stand. This is about more than red versus blue. This is more than Liberal versus Conservative. This is an opportunity to show a side of politics that many think has been lost on our country. This is an opportunity to transcend partisanship and unite us in the House and unite us as a country.

• (1845)

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged by my friend's comments. He and I have shared a floor in the Confederation building. I very much appreciate his willingness to stand up for our armed forces, especially those serving in such a high risk mission in Afghanistan.

I had the opportunity to hear some of my NDP and Bloc colleagues earlier today. I was quite disappointed by their willingness to accept an argument that we could somehow remove our armed forces from Afghanistan and yet maintain some semblance of order and of humanitarian aid.

In fact, one of the comments from the Bloc members was that we should get our forces out of the war-torn sections of Afghanistan. Yet my colleague knows very well there are children and women in that part of the war-torn country who need the protection of our forces, of the ISAF.

Could he perhaps comment on what he would expect would happen if the international community withdrew its involvement in Afghanistan and left it to its own devices and to the Taliban?

**Mr. Brian Storseth:** Mr. Speaker, it is far too easy for members on the opposite side, who wish to oppose the mission, to stand up and say that Canada's is but a peacekeeping mission. That is the paradigm we have created in our country.

While it is true that we are the founders of peacekeeping, we are also the founders of another paradigm called the responsibility to protect, which talks about our responsibility as a free and democratic country to have a role in the global world. Afghanistan is clearly a place where we need to demonstrate this role. It is a place where we

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need to help lift up other people of another nation. To do that, sometimes the responsibility to protect very clearly shows that we have to use security forces to enforce peace.

I do not know of any aid workers from my area who would want to go to Afghanistan if they did not have protection from those security forces, some of the best trained men and women in the world.

I have had the privilege of talking to many of the men from Edmonton Garrison. Just the other week I talked to a sergeant who did an original rotation in Afghanistan and just finished a rotation this summer. He said that the difference he felt that he and his colleague had made in Afghanistan in those seven years was far more and outweighed anything he could have done anywhere else in the world, including at home in Canada. He is proud to be a part of that. Every one of the men and women of our bases, to whom I have talked, is also very proud to be a part of that.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

I am very happy to participate fully in this debate and salute the hundreds of thousands of TV viewers who are watching us.

Last Saturday on Télé-Québec, there was a very interesting film called *Osama* made by Siddiq Barmak back in 2003. It won some amazing awards. The story unfolded at a time when the Taliban were taking over Afghanistan and showed what that meant for women and the people living there.

The Liberal Party of Canada has always said that it supported the mission in Afghanistan, despite the indiscriminate outbursts from the hon. member for Saint-Jean. We had concerns, of course, that we expressed to the government regarding their interpretation and the lack of transparency and consistency. There were major problems here.

However, in view of the fact we were going to start taking another look at Afghanistan's future in 2009, we said that we fully supported the Afghanistan compact signed at the London conference in 2006.

Now we have three basic principles. We are quite happy to say that people should not be playing partisan politics here on the backs of the troops and the people of Afghanistan. It is clearly time to do politics differently. It is also clear that we need to look at the mission differently.

Our leader—the leader of the official opposition—the party for which I am the critic and all the members of our caucus are totally in agreement that there should be three basic principles. The first is that the mission must change. It is no use telling us “Everything is fine—no problems here”, when there are realities out there in the field: this is not a conventional war and there are insurgents. If we want to win the hearts of the Afghan people, it cannot be done with military might. The conflict cannot be resolved militarily. I want to talk about security a bit later.

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We have to rely much more, therefore, on reconstruction and development. It is very clear that everything needs to be re-balanced. Pursuant to the questions I asked of my colleague from Crowfoot in particular, we certainly want to ensure we have a much better balanced strategy, and that is the 3 D strategy of defence, diplomacy and development.

• (1850)

[*English*]

The mission has to change. If we want to accompany the Afghan people, we will have to provide them the tools with which to work. We believe, and I have said this clearly, we have to stop our counter-insurgency war. Because we need to change, we believe we should have a rotation.

This morning I asked the specific question of the Minister of National Defence. What is rotation? In my book, and in a lot of people's book, rotation means to replace. Rotation means to come and support and do something other than what we have been doing. The Minister of National Defence said that rotation meant reinforcement. This is the situation. The government will have to clarify what it clearly means by rotation.

We believe the mission has to change. We believe we should put an end to the actual mission, and it has nothing to do with business as usual. We believe we should refocus under security. Of course we have been there, and we initiated that mission. We said clearly that we believe in PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams. We believe we need a military presence. I have always said that. However, we have to put an end to the way we define combat. We need to finalize that offensive strategy and find some other countries to replace us.

I had the privilege to travel to Afghanistan. Some members from the other side tried to stonewall me, but I decided to go anyway. I did not have any Jos. Louis, but I was there. It was very important. I think the credibility is to be there and watch. Napoleon used to say that we have the policies of our geography. When we take a look at what goes on in the field, we understand. We understand we cannot win in the conventional way and we have to refocus on development.

We believe in the military presence. We believe that under chapter 7, which is what the Security Council resolution is all about, we need to have the capacity to protect civilians. We do not want to relive another Rwanda. Clearly, we want to make sure that our troops will be there to protect themselves and protect the civilians.

[*Translation*]

It is very important to clarify the rotation issue. Unfortunately, we have lost a year. I tabled the motion myself on behalf of my party to go and meet with NATO and find out what has to be done to ensure this rotation, but they do not do it. Unfortunately, we have the feeling again today that something is being done at the last minute.

The government has unfortunately painted too rosy a picture. There is a big problem with opium. Just in the Helmand region, right beside the zone where the Canadian troops are located, opium production has increased by 179%. In 2001-02, when we threw out the Taliban who had been in power, opium production had been reduced to 200 tonnes. In 2007, the forecasts are for 8,100 tonnes of opium, which is about 96% or 97% of world production. That is great cause for concern.

The mission must end. It is not a Canadian, German or American mission. It is a NATO mission. As my colleagues who have military experience, and even those who have only seen how it works in the world, have said: it is normal that there should be rotations in an international mission. To achieve that, we must ensure that NATO can fully assume its leadership role. It is not only up to Canada or some other country to do that. To speak frankly, NATO must assume that leadership and ensure that everyone has the same military operation.

Canadians and Quebeckers are asking questions about the way this mission is being carried out, and with good reason. They do not understand how out of 37 participating countries, only 6 or 7 are in a combat mission. Some 30 countries have what are called "national caveats", parliamentary or constitutional restrictions or what their troops can do. It is essential that we should be able to ensure that all of the countries are in the same situation. When the mission began, there were 102 parliamentary or constitutional restrictions covering 36 countries. Our former chief of staff, General Ray Hénault, who is now the chairman of the NATO military committee, has said the number has been reduced to 52. If we want to ensure proper operation and a rotation, it is absolutely necessary that those restrictions come to an end.

I am almost inclined to humbly dedicate my remarks to an Afghan journalist, named Sayed Parwez Kaambakhsh. He is a 23-year old journalist who is currently condemned to death in Afghanistan. His crime was to promote equality of men and women. It will be essential—and it is our role as Canadians—to send a clear message that this sentence is completely unacceptable. Moreover, if we want to play our full role in the community of nations, we cannot say that everything is just fine. We cannot say there is governance by a duly elected government and everything is going well when we see this type of situation. I believe many others among us feel the same way I do.

No one in this House is against our troops. Our soldiers are doing an exceptional job. I have met them myself. Today, we want to ensure that Canada can play its full role in concert with other nations. To ensure that we make progress, this motion must be adopted. This motion signals clearly that the mission will change—that is the message I am sending to Canadians and to Quebeckers—the mission will end and it will proceed beyond military means. We want to bring security; but we want to completely change this mission by putting much more emphasis on development and reconstruction, and, accordingly, on training Afghan security forces. Certainly, we cannot resolve this situation without diplomatic efforts.

• (1855)

[*English*]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the perception that some people only want to talk about the good things and not the bad things, and that is not what we have been doing.

We readily acknowledge the challenges. We would also like some acknowledgement of the progress. We may be the glass half full guys or maybe the glass half empty guys, I do not know, but it is good that we are coming together as we are.

The member talked a lot about the combat role and should we, should we not, can we or can we not, and that sort of thing. I would like his thoughts on the role of the Taliban in defining the extent of our involvement in combat.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. We enjoy crossing swords with one another.

I was somewhat concerned when I unfortunately heard General Hillier say at the Conference of Defence Associations that the Taliban were watching us, that we were extremely vulnerable and that there were suicide bombers because of how the matter is being debated here. I hope it is well understood that debating is healthy in a democracy. This will take the necessary time. We cannot claim to be giving democracy to another country while we put restrictions on ourselves. I find this unacceptable.

No one is pro Taliban. Indeed, we must work to combat this enemy. I encourage my hon. colleague to watch the film *Osama*. It shows what could really happen when women were prohibited from working and forced to stay at home. They could not even leave the house without the presence of a male. It was absolutely terrible.

If we want to win, we must have security. I have been saying this from the beginning. If we want to win, we must focus much more on development, on a diplomatic position and, above all, on a strategy that involves the Pashtun people. I am not one to believe that we should negotiate with the Taliban. We must have a strategy that involves the Pashtun people. Because of the ethnic situation, we are seeing that the situation could be resolved regionally by working in partnership with them.

● (1900)

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague opposite, the member for Bourassa. I also want to point out how interesting it is that he mentioned the importance of respecting rights and freedoms in countries that Canada helps.

In his speech, the member talked about the problems facing Afghanistan. He emphasized one point, which was that winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people is central to the success of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan. The question is, how do we go about winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people? I think we do it by giving them hope and assurance that the countries involved have made a serious, credible commitment and will not take off when the going gets tough.

The concept of rotation has to be clarified because Canada has established a solid foundation in Kandahar. We have laid down the law, and we have made the region peaceful and secure. That much is clear. It is clear that we need more troops to continue our work and enlarge the safety zone around Kandahar, but it is also clear that our soldiers know the lay of the land and the region. They also know the people, and they have contacts there. Thanks to Canada's military tradition of peacekeeping missions, we have the ability to develop relationships with the people we are helping.

My question is this: should we not pursue this diplomatic offensive with renewed international leadership within the context of the Afghanistan compact? Should we not intensify our efforts—in an

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intervention not unlike the Marshall plan for Europe—to ensure that by 2011, Afghanistan is able to take on the responsibility for its own security, and the country's economic conditions have improved?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Bourassa has one minute to reply.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I will not get into the Marshall Plan and we will not be trying to implement it in Afghanistan. It would not be right or useful to do so.

I just want to say that, unfortunately, his government has staked too much on the security issue to the serious detriment of development and diplomacy. We need only look at the work to be done. If we want a chance at winning, we can stay in Afghanistan but there has to be an end in sight. It is not a Canadian mission and we will have done our job.

However, if we do not focus on development and diplomacy while acknowledging the importance of security and if other countries do not come on board, the future of NATO will be closely tied to the future of Afghanistan. Canada is contributing and operating there but it must go in another direction. For that reason the mission must change.

[*English*]

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan, as we all know, is an issue that has divided Canadians mostly because of the government's lack of transparency and accountability about the mission.

In 2006, the six hour debate on whether or not to extend the mission was simply not enough time and not enough information was given by the government. It was actually a bit of a joke, I thought, at the time since the Prime Minister said that he would extend the mission regardless of what the House said.

It was for that reason that I voted against it, although I am happy to see today that the government has changed its tune and is willing to have an open debate about Canada's future role in Afghanistan. It is not a secret any more that the future of Canada's role in Afghanistan has to change. I think most Canadians want that.

The Prime Minister was told by the Leader of the Opposition to inform NATO at least a year ago that Canada would rotate out of the combat mission, that is, the counter-insurgency part, by 2009.

The Prime Minister, who obviously disagreed with that, continued to persist on his position, knowing full well that he did not have the support of the House. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs would say abroad that they would like to leave in 2009 and were looking for replacements, but that they would rather stay and finish the job, as the Prime Minister has said a number of times, which to me meant that they were prepared to stay indefinitely.

There were no replacements. Of course, we should not be surprised that they could not find any replacements. Why should any other country go against the popular vote of its own population when it knows in fact that Canada was prepared to stay? Why would it offer anything?

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In essence, we have wasted a year by not letting NATO do its job. It is not Canada's role to look for replacements. That is a NATO responsibility and if the Prime Minister had in fact informed NATO with proper time, it may have happened long before now.

Finally, after pushing and shoving by the official opposition leader for some time, the Prime Minister has adopted the Liberal motion, except for some areas which I am still not too sure of and need to evaluate, as I believe they still need some changes.

Clearly, Canada must change the mission. There is no question about that. That has been said for some time now.

The mission should move out of a combat role, that is, the counter-insurgency part, and let other NATO countries move into that role. The Canadian mission then will focus on reconstruction and diplomacy.

The reconstruction part consists of things such as training the troops on the ground, which would be helpful, but there are also areas of reconstruction which are absolutely important and necessary. Canada has a tremendous amount of experience in the area of reconstruction and development, and can provide extreme support.

I will provide one example. We are trying to change the growing of poppies to growing produce instead, vegetables and other crops. Afghanistan used to have a very good system of aquifers, underground pipes, to irrigate their land. These canals were destroyed when the Russians were in Afghanistan.

These canals were used by the Afghani people in fact to attack at different times, so they were destroyed. We need to rebuild the irrigation system, not to mention the larger water supply problem in Afghanistan. This is just one example of reconstruction that is needed in the country very desperately.

We also need a Canadian envoy. We have had envoys before in dealing with countries like Burundi, Sierra Leone and other places. This is very much needed in order to start discussing and looking at a national reconciliation process. There is not going to be a military solution in Afghanistan alone. That is just not possible.

It was not possible in many other countries and I could list a number of them where that happened. A national reconciliation has to take place so that all other parties in Afghanistan are part of the solution. A political and diplomatic solution has to be found.

In addition, I would like the government to set up a House committee to allow for transparency and accountability, and to report back to the House. We had this in fact under the previous government, when Canadian troops were in Kosovo, and it worked very well. Accountability is very important.

• (1905)

Leaving Kandahar by 2009 is a must and NATO needs to be informed now. Canada needs to get into the reconstruction, development and diplomacy mode.

There is a general consensus that we must not abandon the people of Afghanistan for strategic and humanitarian reasons. We cannot allow Afghanistan to be another failed state.

The job our soldiers have done is tremendous and second to none. I saw them when they worked in Kosovo and in Haiti. Indeed they are the best, but they also deserve a break. They also deserve to do some of the other excellent things they do.

Let me focus on the humanitarian aspect of why we need to be there. As a former minister for international cooperation, I saw firsthand the conditions in which Afghan women lived under the Taliban rule, conditions that no living creature should ever be forced to endure. Women and girls experienced gender apartheid in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule and lost all basic human rights. Afghan society as a whole has much to gain by women re-entering into the dialogue with the various sectors of Afghan society. They must be involved in the solution from the bottom up. They must be involved in civil society, governance, political, cultural and social decisions.

Outside Kabul there is a perception that the minister of women's affairs is not even a legal entity. In some regions of the country Human Rights Watch reports that women continue to be assaulted or abused for not adhering to edicts that strictly control women's behaviour, dress, expression and movement.

Under the old regime, women were not permitted to see doctors as the doctors were males. There were not many women doctors as women were not allowed to be trained as doctors or to study. Women were denied health care for any reason. Women were also malnourished and there were frequent deaths because food would first be supplied to the men in the armed forces, then to the boys and then to the girls and women. Their bones were weak and feeble and they would not develop properly. Women were not permitted to get an education. That was only allowed for men. The life expectancy of a woman in Afghanistan was 42 years. Imagine.

Only 12.6% of women age 15 and up were literate, compared with 43.1% of males. The youth literacy rate for females age 15 to 25 was 18.4% versus 50.8% for males of the same age.

Child malnutrition prevalence, weight for age, was 39% in 2004.

These statistics indicate that much more is needed in terms of development and reconstruction. Also, NATO must not fail in providing more troops and appropriate forces so that development can in fact take place. All of these things cannot take place if there is not some secure and more aggressive attention to reconstruction and development. It is very important.

Contrary to what the government wants us to believe, international intervention in Afghanistan did not present women with an immediate change in status, rights and opportunity. The deteriorating security environment has actually made it harder for women to enjoy the rights promised to them by the international community. For instance, 85% of Afghan women in rural areas have seen little or no benefit from the strategies or interventions by the international community.

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Again, women continue to remain oppressed, particularly in education and health care. Maternal mortality still sits at 1,600 per 100,000 births and the child mortality rate is the highest in the world.

Violence against women is widely believed to have reached epidemic proportions and consists of marital rape, sexual assault and other forms of violence in the household, the physical and psychological violence associated with child and forced marriages, neglect through malnutrition and inadequate health care. Forced and childhood marriages constitute 60% to 80% of all marriages.

One area in which Afghanistan seems to have surpassed Canada is that women are guaranteed a particular proportion of the seats in the lower and upper houses of the national assembly. However, it is widely believed that these women are marginalized even within the assembly and that their level of influence is highly questionable, as is reflected with only one woman having been appointed to cabinet. The women's affairs program is considered to be a dumping ground for women's issues.

• (1910)

Development without women is no development at all. I saw it in many other countries while I was minister, that when women are not part of the development process, development is almost non-existent. It does not happen. Development, reconstruction and reconciliation are extremely important if we are going to see a stable country, a successful state and some success in Afghanistan.

• (1915)

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. member. I would say to her that a lot of progress has been made in Afghanistan, especially with regard to women and children. In Afghanistan six million students, including many girls, are now attending school. Not many girls were attending school when the mission started.

Another important point is the giving of financial tools to women so that they can build their own economy with micro-financing. More than 400,000 women in Afghanistan at this point are taking advantage of this program. Their repayment rate is 90%. This is no surprise because we know how well women take care of money.

We asked for a debate in the defence committee. We wanted an open debate on the Manley report because we think this mission is important. It involves not only our reserves, but our Canadian men and women in uniform. They are taking tremendous risks. We think it is very important to have an open and frank debate on the mission and its future.

Development and diplomacy are very important in that mission but they can only occur if there is security. I think our role as members of Parliament is to provide security to the Afghan people. In that way we can build for their future.

Should we put greater emphasis on diplomacy, reconstruction and governance? Then the military mission could increasingly shift to the training of the Afghan national security forces. In that way we would not be saying that we just want to leave, but it would be because the Afghan people would be living in a safe country.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, for me personally it is good to hear that many women are being helped in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, as the hon. member knows from what I have said, there are

still far too many who are truly out of reach and we are not reaching them.

The member has made an artificial separation in terms of diplomatic reconstruction and training and that the military then would not be needed. The hon. member knows full well that when we do reconstruction in a country that is as unstable as Afghanistan is we need to secure the areas where new construction is taking place. Of course, as has happened in other countries, if the individuals who are working are attacked, then the military is there to maintain peace. We want the military to be there to help with reconstruction and to allow for the governance structure to take root.

Quite frankly, none of this is going to happen unless we start right now and there is a Canadian envoy who will talk about reconciliation. There are different factions in every country as there are in Afghanistan. We must start bringing those factions together and have reconciliation. In many other countries reconciliation discussions have taken a couple of years. We must start immediately.

It will take a number of years, but if we want to eventually leave behind a stable self-governing country with a stable governance, we need to start that process now. Perhaps this is why the government in its motion is not going with a Canadian diplomat. I believe that is wrong. I hope that the motion is amended because I believe very strongly that without a Canadian diplomat we will not succeed. Military action in itself is not the answer.

**Hon. Greg Thompson (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with the member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

I have said it many times and I will say it again this evening: Canada is the best country in the world. It is that simple. We live in a nation that is the envy of the world. It is a nation of enduring rights and a nation of enduring freedoms. It is a free and democratic nation. It is a peaceful nation and a nation of opportunity.

Canada did not become a great country by accident or by luck. Our country was built by generations of ordinary men and women seeking a better life, daring to dream and refusing to be defeated. That is Canada. That is our national character. That is our country.

What is more, our nation has remained great because of ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things, ordinary men and women who have always been willing to risk their own lives to defend Canada during a time of greatest need. That is our history. That is our tradition. We have always known what Edmund Burke meant when he said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

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Canada is not a bystander. We have never been a bystander in our relatively short time as a nation. That is why, as Canadians, we have accomplished so much. We did at Vimy Ridge what our allies thought was impossible. That is why Canadians were on the shores of Normandy, why Canadians were in Korea and why Canadians have been keeping the peace. In fact, Canada invented the term "peacekeepers". It is a Canadian word. It is why Canadians are in Afghanistan today doing the hard work asked of us by the United Nations, by NATO and by the Afghan people themselves.

When the world calls, Canada answers, because that is the Canadian way. We do not pick and choose between the easy missions. We do not run away from our international obligations just because the missions are difficult. Edward R. Murrow once said, "Difficulty is the excuse history never accepts". Difficult is an excuse our government will never accept, nor an excuse we need to accept.

We have the Manley report to guide us, to shape our actions and our future in Afghanistan. I urge every Canadian to get a copy of that report and to read it.

The Manley report is not simply the work of five eminent Canadians. It is not just the opinions of John Manley, Pamela Wallin, Derek Burney, Jake Epp and Paul Tellier. It is the result of their extensive consultations. It is a product of their fact finding trip to Afghanistan and their discussions with government officials and non-government organizations worldwide. It is a result of their listening to individual Canadians. It is a thoughtful, practical report and its conclusions are sobering, compelling and honest.

The terrorist threats we face are real. This is not an academic argument; it is real. We witnessed it in the horror we saw when the twin towers were destroyed and Canadian lives were lost. We have seen it continued in London, Madrid and Bali. We have discovered it on our own soil with homegrown terrorist plots. Our security is more than an abstract debate.

The Manley report weighs all of this. Allow me to read one paragraph from the Manley report.

Canadians have carried a heavy burden in Afghanistan. The toll in Canadian lives has been grievous, and it is painfully felt. The financial cost has been significant. The course of the conflict has caused us all to question whether Canada's involvement has been right or effective, and whether it will succeed.

● (1920)

Those are the facts. Those are the issues. Those are the questions we are trying to answer today. However, the Manley report goes beyond that. It also offers us direction. The report provides recommendations that are sound and reasonable and it outlines a path for success.

We all know this path will not be easy, but let me repeat: difficulty is not an excuse that history will accept. I am confident that difficulty is not an excuse that an overwhelming majority of Canadians will accept. Difficulty is not an excuse our servicemen and servicewomen will accept, because our soldiers are the best in the world. They are the best trained and the most professional and, as we have seen in Afghanistan, the most disciplined.

Throughout our history, the men and women serving our nation have stood tall no matter what the challenge and no matter what the

sacrifice, because they know that freedom is never free. It has never been free in the history of this country and the history of the world. These men and women have been willing to pay a terribly high price for our way of life, for our shared values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

That is the proud heritage that we have inherited, the heritage that has been handed down to us from what we call our greatest generations, and it is a heritage that comes with responsibilities. We have a sacred duty to honour our servicemen and servicewomen and to pledge our steadiest and most steadfast support for those who wear the uniform and those who have worn Canada's uniform.

We must stand by them in times of peace. We must stand by them in times of war. That is our mission and our responsibility: to serve those who have served us so well. As we debate the motion before us, it is important that we remember the great debt we have always owed our veterans and our servicemen and servicewomen and that we continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

I know there are members of this House who believe that it is time to cut and run from Afghanistan, but even they readily acknowledge their pride in what our servicemen and servicewomen do every day, the sacrifices and the accomplishments, and Canadians join us in that pride. That is not wishful thinking or empty rhetoric.

A survey last month found that nine out of every 10 Canadians believe our veterans deserve to be honoured for their sacrifices, that they played a major role in building this great nation, and that we as a people are proud of our country's military role not just in the two great wars, not just in Korea or our many other peacekeeping missions, but today in Afghanistan as well. Our government shares that pride. We share that conviction. We share that commitment.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George explained it best, very simply, in a speech he gave just days after the first world war had ended. He asked, "What is our task?" He answered by saying, "To make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in".

That remains our task today: to make our country a fit country for our heroes to live in. Because when we send our men and women on difficult and dangerous missions, they have to know, and know instinctively, that we will be there with them and we will be there with their families.

And we are. We are giving them the resources and equipment they need to take into combat. We are with them through the support we provide for them when they take off their uniforms one last time. We are with them today as they wear that one single proud word on their shoulders: Canada.

We are with them on their deployments. We are with them in our hearts, in our prayers and in our actions. That is what this motion is all about. We will not abandon our soldiers. We will not let their efforts or the ultimate sacrifices of their comrades be in vain. We will not walk away from them. We will not walk away from our duty to the world or our pledge to the people of Afghanistan.

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• (1925)

In Rwanda we saw what happens when the world turns a blind eye, when the world fails to act, and when we walk the other way. We will not concede an inch to the terrorists or allow hatred and violence to change who we are or what we stand for.

This House has always stood tallest when our enemies have wanted most to weaken our resolve. Generations of parliamentarians have distinguished themselves here by rising to the great challenges of their times in making the difficult decisions. I know we will do the same.

We are adding to this chamber's history of important debates and important decisions. I know we will prove ourselves worthy to stand in this House to represent Canadians from our largest cities and our smallest villages and uphold the values that have made Canada the best country in the world.

• (1930)

**Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister, my colleague from New Brunswick. It very much pertains to veterans. New veterans are coming back from Afghanistan now and we all recognize the challenges as they come back to our shores. A number of comments made by the NDP today were more or less bashing the government for not doing enough.

Just last year I was involved in an announcement with the minister at the Chalmers hospital in connection with a stress clinic. Could the minister tell us what action the government is taking to look after our veterans and make sure they are well cared for when they return to our shores?

**Hon. Greg Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I did in fact get a question from the NDP in the House today on that very issue. Actually, I simply said in this House that the NDP members are the masters of hypocrisy. As a government, we have funded and are actually doubling the number of occupational stress injury clinics in this country for our returning men and women. We are doubling that number, and what really galls me, and I think upsets me, is that the NDP members stood in this House and actually voted against that.

I have here the supplementary estimates, Mr. Speaker, and you know, as you were in the chair that night, that on December 6, 2007, the NDP members stood in their places and voted against the moneys to do that. They simply do not support our men and women in uniform. When they stand in the House to suggest that they do, the record is pretty clear that they do not support our men and women in uniform. They are absolutely the world's greatest hypocrites when it comes to defending our veterans.

How can they actually stand in their places and demand that the government do something? We are doing it. It is what we voted for. We voted to put resources into our veterans, into those stress clinics, into more front line workers for veterans, and they stood in their places and voted against it. It is just absolutely wrong.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** Missing in action.

**Hon. Greg Thompson:** Missing in action, Mr. Speaker, hiding under the furniture. The member from Sackville is always on his hind legs in here ranting about what he would do, I guess, but his record speaks for itself. Those members have done absolutely

nothing. For them to suggest that we are doing nothing is just fundamentally wrong, because we were asking for their support on the floor of the House of Commons in a minority Parliament. We were asking for their support to make this happen and they denied us that support. They voted against our veterans.

**An hon. member:** They scurried out.

**Hon. Greg Thompson:** They did scurry out, Mr. Speaker, and they will continue to do that because they do not believe in the mission, they do not support our veterans, and they do not support our men and women in uniform. That is the sorry state of the NDP: all talk and no action. I guess that is why they are the fourth party in the House of Commons. I just wonder where their support is.

It is no secret that in military circles the leader of the NDP—and I have a base in my riding as members well know, Camp Gagetown, and I have met many of the military types across the country—is referred to as “Taliban Jack”. That tells it all. The NDP does not support our men and women in uniform and they know it. The NDP record is deplorable. Those members should be ashamed of themselves.

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my main theme tonight will be how the international community, including Canada, is helping Afghanistan get back on its feet after three decades of civil war.

Before I get to that, I would like to say a few words regarding the revised motion that our government has submitted to the House. First of all, this revised motion stakes out a clear and principled position. This is a Canadian position rather than just a Conservative or a Liberal position. As a Canadian position, it is one that can be supported by a majority of the elected representatives of the Canadian people here in this House.

I think we can all take heart from the fact that there is some fundamental common ground between the government and the official opposition on Afghanistan: that the mission should continue until 2011. There is common ground between the government and the official opposition on this point.

As well, the operational decisions should be left to Canadian commanders on the ground in Afghanistan. Once again there is common ground between the government and the official opposition on this point.

The government believes this revised motion addresses the important questions Canadians have about the future of this mission. This is a duty that we owe our troops. Every day they are putting their lives on the line for us. Politicians of both parties asked them to do this.

Over 80% of Afghans have access to basic medical care, compared to only 9% in 2004. This is an important improvement in the lives of ordinary Afghans. There are now close to six million children enrolled in school, about one-third of them girls. In 2001, only 700,000 children were enrolled in school and none of them were girls. It is these children who are the future of Afghanistan and to whom the future of Afghanistan will be entrusted.

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These are impressive achievements. While we recognize that challenges persist, the evidence of progress vindicates the efforts that have been undertaken by the international community. I need not remind members of this House that Canadians have played a key role in those efforts. Now it falls on us to determine what kind of role Canada is to play in Afghanistan past February 2009.

Our government has stated this many times before: providing genuine security is a fundamental underpinning to the achievement of reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. We are all aware that this is not an easy task. It is a mission that requires courage and commitment on the part of all Canadians.

We must look to a future with a strong Afghanistan that is able to live in peace with itself and its neighbours. Thanks to the strength and determination of the Afghan people as well as Canada's efforts and the support of the international community, real change is being made in Afghanistan.

Over 10 million Afghans registered and voted in free and fair elections for a president in 2004 and a parliament in 2005. Some 347 women were candidates for the lower house, which is remarkable considering the position of women under the Taliban regime. This can only give hope for the future as more and more women become involved in their own future.

We have done this in keeping with the spirit of the Prime Minister's decision to establish the Manley panel last fall. Achieving a bipartisan consensus on our mission in Afghanistan was the goal. We have solemn commitments to keep in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is emerging from 30 years of conflict and civil strife, three terrible decades that saw the country suffer through appalling conditions, ending with the brutal regime of the Taliban.

During this difficult period, the Afghan economy suffered and the Afghan people lived in a society where medical care, education and freedom of speech or religion were restricted and at times non-existent. Over six years ago, the brutal and extremist regime of the Taliban was overthrown. Canada is part of an international mission that is in Afghanistan at the invitation of its democratically elected government.

● (1935)

As I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister asked a group of eminent Canadians, headed by John Manley, to advise Parliament on options for the mission after the current mandate ends. The panel members presented the government with their findings and recommendations on January 22 of this year. As the Prime Minister has stated, the results of their efforts is a balanced, thoughtful and comprehensive report to Canadians.

The government broadly accepts the recommendations put forward by the panel on Canada's future in Afghanistan. As such, we introduced a motion to extend Canada's commitment to the United Nations' mandated mission in Afghanistan until the end of 2011 on condition that Canada secured a partner that would provide a battle group of approximately 1,000 personnel, as well as medium-lift helicopter capacity and high performance unmanned aerial vehicles. The government has been working hard to ensure these requirements are met.

In short, the government is ensuring that the brave Canadians serving in Afghanistan, diplomats, aid workers, soldiers, as well as police and correctional advisers, receive the support they need to see our commitment through.

The decision we have before us must not be taken lightly. We must be cognizant of the risk of a return to turmoil in Afghanistan and of the potential regional and international implications. We must also bear in mind our obligations to the United Nations and our NATO allies. Whatever direction we choose, it must consider the implication for Canada's international reputation.

The government has carefully considered these questions and has reviewed the recommendations laid out by the independent panel. This is a crucial moment for Canada and we have a duty to get it right. At the end of the day, a decision on the future of the military mission in Afghanistan is a question of leadership. It is about Canada's role and influence in the world. Most important, it is about doing the right thing for Canada, for the people of Afghanistan and for the world.

Why should Afghan women not continue on their path to equality and freedom? Why should Afghan children, both girls and boys, not continue to be allowed to go to school? Why should the people of Afghanistan not continue to enjoy the fruits of democracy and freedom that we as Canadians so often take for granted?

These are values that we as Canadians consider important. Our continued presence in Afghanistan is bringing about real change. This is done through our support for development projects and for the presence of Canadian experts in the field to mentor and train Afghans.

Afghans want good governance. They want to see their government provide basic services. They want their children to go to school. They want jobs. However, there can be no hope for education, health care, economic prosperity, equality and respect for the rule of law if the people of Afghanistan are left to live in fear.

Canada's presence in Afghanistan provides an important part of the security that is vital for that country. We continue to train Afghans so they will one day be able to assume responsibility for their own security and weave together the elements of their own future.

That day is not here and if we lack the courage to stay, the new Afghanistan will face a dark and uncertain future. The Taliban continues to terrorize the population in an effort to subjugate Afghanistan once again under the extremist and brutal regime. We must stay in Afghanistan so the people of Afghanistan have a better future.

● (1940)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was tempted to rebut the previous speaker, but I will not do that. As a son of a veteran who required help from the VIP and was turned down, sadly, I will not go there.

What does the member think about the fact that right now \$1 billion in aid goes to the government of Pakistan and people have noted that the government of Pakistan has done very little? I want to quote very quickly a recently interview with Sarah Chayes. She said:

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—we're paying a billion dollars a year to Pakistan, which is orchestrating the Taliban insurgency. So, it's actually US-taxpayer money that is paying for the insurgents, who are then killing, at the moment, Canadian troops. Now if I were the government of Germany or France, I'd have a hard time putting my troops in that kind of equation. I would demand from Washington, that Washington require a lot different behavior from Pakistan.

What would my colleague say about those comments?

● (1945)

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** Mr. Speaker, the whole international community is working toward peace and development in Afghanistan and Canada contributes to that, as well as our international partners. It is something of which we as a government are very proud.

Indeed, the Minister of National Defence met with the president of Pakistan with the desire to engage more fully Pakistan in the border issues that continue to be of concern to this country.

I am terribly proud to represent Northumberland—Quinte West in which is located 8 Wing, CFB Trenton. It is from the hub of Canada's military command that we send our men and women equipment and supplies to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we welcome home for the last time those brave men and women who have laid down their lives in a just cause, in a cause in which they all believed.

We will not abandon Pakistan either. We will continue to work with the new government that will be soon take over there to ensure more stability in the region and a successful outcome to the efforts we put forth in that corner of the world.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to contribute to the debate on Canada's role in Afghanistan. I stand here as the member of Parliament for my riding of Ottawa Centre and my party's foreign affairs critic.

The war in Afghanistan has touched the lives of many Canadians. It has been omnipresent in communities across the country. It is without question the most important issue by which this Parliament and our country has been challenged.

Canadians have been seized by this issue and have participated in many ways. Some have contributed by donating to help the men and women who serve in the Canadian Forces. Some contribute to grassroots aid organizations that are engaged in projects in Afghanistan. On my street, a neighbour of mine solemnly lights a candle every night in a candle lantern he has on his lawn to remember our fellow citizens who serve in Afghanistan. I see that candle burn every night and I think of Afghanistan and of Canada.

In May 2006, when the House voted on the extension of Canada's participation in the war in southern Afghanistan, I asked the following questions. What is the military objective? What are the goals? How long will it take to achieve these objectives? It has been almost two years since those questions were posed. Canadians are still waiting for answers.

It is interesting, when we consider the billions of dollars that have been spent on the military mission and Canadians are still left with those questions and others still unanswered.

Too often our government has been more concerned with winning the hearts and minds of Canadians instead of those of Afghans. It is also troubling that after this period of time, our government could

not choose another path. Everyone knows that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won militarily, that peace can only come through a political solution. To quote Seddiq Weera, an Afghan who is a senior adviser to the Karzai government:

—the war in Afghanistan cannot be won without a peace track, a political track. Why?...The political component has at least two dimensions: one is the unresolved civil war; the other is the regional factor in the conflict.

Mr. Weera went on to say that at its root it was a civil war that they would continue to watch. He said that the war in Afghanistan was ongoing:

—not...because we have 1,000 fewer troops. It's not going on because we have less coordination among allied forces. It's not going on because we have too few helicopters. It's going on because of a mixture of determinants, one of which has not been addressed. To fight poverty is quite a reasonable effort. Lots of investment and meeting the basic needs of the people is good. Improving development is very good. Improve governance, yes. But unless you create a political track, you're not going to win the war.

I should let you know in advance, Mr. Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the member for Halifax.

“Unless you create a political track, you're not going to win the war”, is what Mr. Weera said. This void has grown and will grow wider if we extend the combat mission to 2011. In fact, Mr. Weera points to the need for the UN to achieve peace and reconciliation. That is what Canada should be fighting for, a mandate that includes all regional actors, including Pakistan, India, Iran and Russia.

Accordingly, we need to change our direction now, from a focus on military gains to a primary focus on reconciliation and peace negotiations. As was put forward by one of our former diplomats, Gerry Ohlsen, only the UN can mandate a political framework to legitimize international action and bring about peace in Afghanistan. That is what Canada had done before. That is what the world looks for Canada to do, to seek the path to peace and reconciliation. To miss this opportunity would be tragic.

The vacuum that is present right now in Afghanistan should be filled with Canadian will and knowhow. There is no question that everyone in the House, in the country, wants to help Afghans achieve peace. In fact, this motion has Canada leaving in 2011.

● (1950)

I believe this is a problem. Yes, we must stay to achieve stability, but the only way to get there is to change the path we have been on. We have been on the road of counter-insurgency. It is time to choose the road toward reconciliation, to provide the Afghan people with that wonderful experience of peace, order and good government.

Peacekeeping and peacekeepers have evolved. They are still relevant. We cannot achieve peace through the purchase of more helicopters and troops alone. It is time for a change in direction with a Canadian emphasis. We can make a difference if we act now. We must never give up on the people of Afghanistan. We must listen to them, right now. They need us to change what we are doing. Now is that time.

I want to quote a friend of mine who said that Canadians have a profound interest, one we purchased at great cost in the future of Afghanistan in its peace and stability. Let us work together. Let us work with the Afghans, our allies, the global community as a whole to bring peace and not a continued war to Afghanistan.

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I believe that through the amendment that we have put forward we can do that. But with the government's plan for more of the same, three more years of this direction, I do not believe we can achieve those goals.

I want to finish my comments by stating that if Canada chooses to follow the path that is put forward by the government without choosing this amendment, Canada will have missed an opportunity. I believe all Canadians do not want us to miss this opportunity. I hope that Canadians will talk to their members of Parliament and let them know what they think.

In summation, the path to peace is not an easy road, but it is a road that we must follow.

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my hon. colleague's comments. Certainly, there is a need for political reconciliation. In fact, one of the big mistakes that I think NATO and the UN have made throughout this entire episode is the absence of bringing in those tribes that were not included in the Bonn agreement, those that were not adequately represented in the Afghan Compact. They should be brought into the political decision making of the country, especially the Pashtun tribes which represent 42% of the population.

Many of the sub-tribes, that have been the traditional rulers of the country of Afghanistan in most of its 300-year history, have been largely excluded from the decision making within the country.

I want to ask my colleague a question. We all know and he would agree, I am sure, that there is an absolute need for development on the ground to enable the Afghan people to provide for themselves. But what do we do in a situation where there is an insurgency coming into a country that is going to hospitals and clinics, going to the schools that have been created, and chopping the heads off the teachers, and assaults and terrorizes the population? How can there possibly be development if we do not have security?

We can wish and plead and negotiate all we want. In certain circumstances there is an absolute requirement for force to protect in the long term the sustainable development that is required on the ground. The absence of that security ensures that development will never take hold.

I ask my colleague, how does he propose, with his party's amendment, to ensure that the development work that is taking place will have the sustainability that is required unless there is going to be security on the ground?

●(1955)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I guess what we have to do is change what we have been doing because it has not been working. Every report that has come forward says that security is down and corruption is up.

I want to point to the corruption right now. We hear about the schools that are being filled with children and that is true, but one of the problems, however, is that there are not many teachers in them. I have a report from Afghanistan for just last week. The fact is that teachers get paid \$50 a month. How much does someone make in the opium fields? It is \$20 a day.

What is happening right now is that the security problem is directly connected to the corruption problem. We have to learn in this place that not all the Taliban are the same. What is happening, because of the corruption in the government, was quoted by Sarah Chaise recently. She said that during the day they are shaken down by government officials and at night it is the Taliban.

We have to understand that we are not going to win this war through military means. We are not going to provide security by just providing more helicopters, troops and drones. We have to understand that the path to peace and to the Afghan people is to deal with corruption, poverty, and the horrible situation that most people are living in right now. That means a different form of security.

People might have different views of what security means. Security often is through protection. It does not always come through the barrel of a gun. The point was made about people being taken out to be shot or hung. It is important to note that between 1992 and 1996, tens of thousands of people died in the civil war in Afghanistan. People have not forgotten that. Scores are still being settled.

The fact of the matter is that until the wide gap that was not filled after the Bonn agreement is dealt with and the reconciliation process is not dealt with, this matter will get worse. That is why our party has put forward an amendment for a new UN mandate which would provide the possibility of peace and reconciliation.

I was in Iraq this past summer. The Iraqi people are just starting to get to that point now and many believe it is a point that should have been dealt with long before. Perhaps the government still agrees with the war in Iraq. For those of us who opposed it, we also believe that the mistakes that were made after the invasion continued the misery for the people in Iraq.

No one wants to see that happen in Afghanistan and I am sad to say that if we choose more troops, drones and helicopters, we are going to find ourselves in three years in a similar situation as to the one that is happening right now in Iraq.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity this evening, despite my mild laryngitis, to debate the motion that is now before us.

I am pleased to follow my colleague who very ably represents Ottawa Centre. I am also pleased to say he has succeeded me as the foreign affairs critic for the New Democratic Party and doing an excellent job.

When I entered the chamber this evening, I was listening attentively and respectfully to the Minister of Veterans Affairs who was commenting, and I thought quite appropriately, that we all share a duty.

Those of us in this House who are privileged to serve the people of our communities, and Canadians generally, have an obligation to honour our military men and women, both in times of peace and in times of war. I was nodding in assent and was actually going to compliment him on being inclusive in representing all of us in those comments.

Then he turned and engaged in the most viscous, most vile, and most virulent attack on the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore who is not here in the House in any way, shape, or form to defend himself and who, I have to say, has probably done more for veterans and for the military in my 10 years in Ottawa than any other member in this chamber.

Let Canadians be the judge, but I thought it was unfortunate and ironic. For a few brief moments the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I thought, was going to rise to the occasion, however, he actually descended into the depths and conducted a viscous attack on a man who has championed the veterans independence program and the widows that have been left behind. He has championed the children who are not getting the kind of treatment needed to deal with their wounds resulting from the death or injury of absent family members and returned family members.

He is also the man who has championed the victims of agent orange. I could go on and on, but I think we will just let those Canadians who know better come to their own conclusions based on the evidence and not based on this astounding rant that we just heard and is now on the public record.

I listened earlier this afternoon when the Minister of Veterans Affairs actually made some very sweeping statements that were dead wrong and utterly disrespectful. How those members elevate the debate, how they act to contribute to a respectful debate, I do not know, but I have to say he hit a raw nerve. He made a sweeping reference that New Democrats do not care about our troops. They never cared about the military. I do not know if he said never will, but I am sure that was in his mind too.

What it caused me to do was go back to my office briefly this afternoon and pull off my shelf something that I had been thinking about reviewing for some time and that is the publication *Marching Home to What?*. It is a document produced by the predecessor of the New Democratic Party, the CCF, outlining the post-war program for Canada's fighting men and women.

The reason it hit a raw nerve is not just because I am unduly partisan, but my father was one of the two authors of that report. He was working on Parliament Hill as a researcher with the CCF caucus when Canada entered the war and he went into the air force. He never stopped working on the issue of support for our military through the war, and after the war went right back to working on the post-war program for the military.

It seems to me it does not serve our troops very well and it does not do a thing to honour this place to engage in those kinds of mindless rants.

Having said that, it threw me right back to one of the worst moments, really the worst few hours, I have ever spent in the 10 years that I have been privileged to be a member of Parliament and that was two days after I returned from a trip to Afghanistan in May 2006, which I was very privileged to have taken and was grateful for the opportunity.

● (2000)

To my utter dismay, the Minister of National Defence, who we accompanied to Afghanistan, did not say a word about the fact that the government would be bringing in a last minute motion to extend

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the then mission, which was already raising a lot of concerns, for another two years. This really blindsided and short-circuited any meaningful debate.

What we saw was the beginning of what has never stopped with the government and that is name calling and all kinds of insults being hurled about cut and run and other allegations, instead of a respectful debate that would honour our military, both departed, currently serving and our vets who watch all of this with great care and concern.

It does not surprise me a great deal that the Conservatives and Liberals have struck a bipartisan understanding around the motion, which they are entitled to do. We must be respectful in this House if that is the way they see it. However, what is regretful is that there is not a lot of evidence that in the striking of this bipartisan deal on which we will be voting, the views of Canadians, to a large extent, seem not to have been taken into account.

At the end of the day, a great deal of evidence shows that Canadians have a growing concern about the fact that the counter-insurgency mission in Kandahar is making a lot of serious problems even worse. We heard the statistics earlier. My leader spoke very capably on this earlier this afternoon, as did the NDP defence critic, and outlined the evidence, the facts and the figures on our contribution. It is not because our military men and women are failing us, not at all. I agree with those who have said in debate all day long that we are privileged to have the best military men and women in the world serving us with honour, distinction and great competence. However, they have been assigned to a mission that is flawed and is failing.

I cannot for the life of me understand how it is the Conservatives and Liberals alike constantly rant and rail about the countries that will not deliver more troops through NATO to take up the Kandahar counter-insurgency mission when they know perfectly well why there are not more countries coming forth to assign their military men and women to the Kandahar mission. It is not because they are wimps or cowards. It is because they believe the mission is flawed. Many of those countries are serving in other parts of Afghanistan and some very positive results are happening as a result of that.

I want to say respectfully that I had an opportunity this afternoon for a detailed briefing, which I very much appreciated, with CIDA officials. I have not a doubt that much of the positive results they were presenting and sharing in other parts of Afghanistan are very well-documented and substantiated. It is happening because it is based on a fundamentally different approach.

My colleague who just spoke expressed the importance of that comprehensive peace building process that is needed. It has not happened and it needs to be regional in nature. I cannot believe the veterans affairs minister started in on my leader calling him "Taliban Jack" this afternoon. How pathetic is that when we know that when President Karzai was here in this chamber talking with members, after his presentation he said that we needed that kind of comprehensive peace building process to get under way. That was almost two years ago.

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With respect to development, the amendment we have put forward recognizes that the way to build a path to peace in Afghanistan is through genuine development and through understanding that it is the people of Afghanistan whose interests we need to be concerned about, not the voters of Canada when it comes to saying that we need more flags being waved over projects sponsored by Canada. Will that make the Afghan people feel better? No. Is it to win votes? It is beneath the dignity of Parliament to be caught up in those kinds of arguments.

● (2005)

Even though there does not seem to be any indication that other colleagues are prepared to support our amendments, I am asking Canadians to carefully consider the amendments and understand that they are much more promising in terms of paving a path to peace for the future of the people of Afghanistan, and that is why we are supposed to be there.

● (2010)

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am always puzzled when that member and members of the NDP cloak some of their questions and comments in this rhetoric of casting aspersions on everyone else in the House but then somehow draping this sanctimonious cloak over themselves to say that anybody else who makes a comment that might be the least bit offensive or rubs somebody the wrong way is terrible but they can do the same thing and not have that standard apply to them.

What I find even more troubling and contradictory is the suggestion that peace is just going to arrive, that it is just going to fall out of the air somehow in Afghanistan, that development will expand, that we will be able to build more schools and roads and that more programs will simply appear without any security. That is where there is such an absolute disconnect, bordering on disillusionment, when we hear this coming from the NDP.

As for her umbrage taken at the comments made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, she should check the record. The truth hurts. When we check the record and see the actual voting pattern over the last 10 years by that member and other members of the NDP when it comes to support for the military and veterans, the record speaks for itself.

When budgetary requests were made by this government and the previous one, the NDP refused to support those budgetary implementations that would have given greater aid and support and the necessary equipment, in some cases, for the military and veterans.

I am puzzled when I constantly hear that member express such outrage at anyone who might take a contrary position. However, at the same time, if anybody criticizes the NDP when it puts its position forward or if anybody points out some of the obvious contradictions, some of the absolutely unalienable problems and inability to reconcile the reality with what it is calling for, it is personal. It is a terrible outrageous attack and somehow shocking and appalling that anybody would ever raise such questions about the position of the NDP.

The cold, hard truth is that in Afghanistan today we need that security for the type of ideal panacea that the NDP thinks is just going to arrive somehow on its own. That is the reality.

The member has been there. To her credit, she has seen with her own eyes what is taking place in that country, which is what makes it even more perhaps appalling that she has come back and contradicted what she has seen with her own two eyes: that the security that the Canadian Forces are providing in Afghanistan is absolutely integral, inextricable from the development and the type of work that she herself wants to see happen.

I do not know how she can reconcile that. I do not know how she can logically suggest that these things can happen without the presence of the Canadian Forces and the military of other countries.

Then she has the audacity to stand and suggest somehow that she can speak for the entire international community and the reason that it is not going to Kandahar is that it has come to the same conclusion, as disconnected from reality as it may be, that it does not think that the mission is successful.

She sure does not speak for me nor for this government and I do not think others in the international community would want the NDP speaking for them either.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** Mr. Speaker, I waited and waited in case there was a question at the end of that lecture.

● (2015)

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** It is called comments and questions.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** After I heard all of the insults hurled, I still kept waiting for a question.

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** It is questions and comments.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** He knows everything.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** I am sorry, I am not prepared to enter into that kind of an exchange, but I would say—

**Hon. Peter MacKay:** I was not speaking to you.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** Mr. Speaker, do I have the floor or does the Minister of National Defence have carte blanche to keep yelling and shouting so I cannot even hear myself think?

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Halifax was addressing....

**Ms. Alexa McDonough:** Actually, I was hoping, Mr. Speaker, that you would call the Minister of National Defence to order because I could not even hear myself think while he was hurling his insults as I was trying to speak. I accorded him the courtesy of listening to every word he had to say.

I suppose it is a rhetorical question but I would like to ask the Minister of National Defence a question as he gave me no chance to answer any questions that he might have asked.

How does the minister think we will get on the path to peace if we put the overwhelming bulk of our resources into a counter-insurgency mission which is killing more and more civilians, destroying infrastructure, causing people to lose their homes, their lands or their livelihoods and is causing a severe increase in the security problems that are plaguing people's lives?

I do not hear a word coming from the defence minister about the importance of comprehensive peace processes that would involve regional players and yet every informed person who comments on what is happening there says that it is long overdue and that it is very crucial to finding a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

I am sorry that there was no question directed my way so I am taking the opportunity to reinforce the absolute importance of what is underscored in our amendments that we put before the House to engage in a robust, diplomatic process to prepare the groundwork for a political solution under UN direction, because that is the only way we will get on the path to peace.

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, six long years ago our country entered into an international effort to go to Afghanistan. We moved in with a UN-backed, NATO-led mission. Our goal there was to remove al-Qaeda, which was using Afghanistan as a training base prior to 9/11 and at 9/11. We also went there to remove the Taliban.

We did not go there to make Afghanistan a safer place for Afghan people. We did not go there to save Afghan lives, as some of us wish we could have. Had we been there out of the goodness of our hearts, we would have entered into other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where, every single month, month in and month out, 32,000 people are dying of preventable causes and where 5 million people died in the largest genocide that we have seen since the second world war.

We went to Afghanistan for our own self-interest. Our troops, as members have said today, are acting in a courageous manner and in a way that makes us all proud. I can say on behalf of all of us here that we are indebted to their sacrifice and their courage. We honour their bravery. We in the House of Commons say to them that they are our best and finest Canadians.

Our job here obviously is to have this debate to ensure that the conditions for success are there for this mission, to ensure that we are able to put forth those conditions. In doing so, we are truly supporting our troops.

What is our goal? Our goal is to enable the Afghan people to provide for their own security. Our goal is to enable them to deal with the four pillars of Afghan security: Afghan police, Afghan army, the correctional system and the judiciary. Those four pillars of paid, equipped and trained personnel are absolutely integral if the Afghan people are to have their own security, the same kind of security that we ourselves enjoy in our beloved country.

Unless we provide security, unless we enable them to build all of those four pillars, it will be like a chair without its four legs. The chair will usually fall down or be weak. Our job is to enable the Afghan people to have those four pillars of their own security.

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker, with the member for Scarborough Centre.

We have spent a lot of time with the Afghan army but we have neglected the Afghan police, the correctional service and the judiciary. We do this at our peril.

What we are proposing is that the government take to Bucharest the demand on the part of NATO to fund, train and equip all four

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elements of Afghan security, those four pillars. If we do that, and if we set up targets, timelines and guidelines, then the Afghan people, the Canadian public, our forces and our allies will all know what our targets are. Importantly, the Afghan people will understand very clearly when we are leaving. As their numbers increase, our numbers can decrease and therefore the Afghan people will know that we are not there as occupiers but as those who are there to enable them to be the masters of their destiny.

Those four pillars have to be dealt with. The Prime Minister should take that to Bucharest. Our allies, I am sure, would find the wisdom in that solution. Unless we do that, we have a never-ending open-ended obligation and that would be irresponsible.

Second, we have to deal with the political implications. One thing did not happen early on. The dominant tribe in Afghanistan is the Pashtun, of which there are many tribes and sub-tribes. They have been the traditional rulers in the 300 year history of Afghanistan. The Pashtun have dominated. Although Mr. Karzai is a Pashtun, he is not considered to be a true member of the tribe, for many reasons. They are not going put up with the Tajik-dominated government that they had. As a result, they have taken up arms.

Our goal is to make sure that we are able to reconcile this in a country driven for decades by feudalism, tribalism and war. Our job is to give them a manner of tribal reconciliation between the Tajik, the Hazara, the Pashtun and others. If we do that, then there will be a chance for peace, but if we fail, then there will not be peace in Afghanistan.

● (2020)

Third, Mr. Karzai rejected Paddy Ashdown as the supra-representative. That was a mistake. Unless there is a supra-representative there who is able to coordinate the activities on the ground and, quite frankly, knock some heads together, the corruption that is a cancer within the government of Afghanistan will continue and this will erode the efforts of the international community in perpetuity.

We will never win, the Afghan people will never win and security will never come to Afghanistan unless external forces are able to work with Mr. Karzai and, quite frankly, take a very tough, hard line to rein in the corruption that is destroying the ability of any of us to work with that country and to enable the people to have the security for which they yearn.

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Fourth, there is the issue of poppies. Maybe a limited narcotic substitution program can take place with the opium being redirected to the legal production of narcotics, but that would be very limited. A second option is the use of artemisinin, which is the drug of choice for treating malaria. Ironically, artemisinin grows in the same kind of soil that poppies grow in. In some areas, the poppy crops could be transplanted and transported, allowing artemisinin to be grown.

However, the reality on the ground is something very different. It is stark and brutal. What is a farmer going to do when the drug lords come to him, put a gun to his head and tell him that if he does not grow poppies his women will be raped, his house will be burned down and he will be shot? He is going to grow poppies. That is the stark reality on the ground because of the absence of security in large parts of the country.

What we need to do is something that is entirely in our court. Unless there is a demand strategy, unless we reduce demand in our country and in the west, there will always be production of illegal drugs. We have failed to adopt the very intelligent work being done by Dr. Julio Montaner and others at the Centre for Excellence in Vancouver and by others in our country who have intelligent, effective drug and harm reduction strategies.

Unless the government is able to work hard with the provinces to implement a national drug strategy, there will always be people in our country who are buying heroin and other drugs. Those who buy heroin actually are putting money into the hands of those insurgents who are killing our soldiers, so congratulations: buy heroin and it supports the murder of our soldiers.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to have a demand reduction strategy in our own house. Regardless of what the United States feels, we need to do it. It is our responsibility. It is our responsibility to our troops.

The other big issue, obviously, is international assistance. It is a dog's breakfast in Afghanistan. Groups are tumbling over each other to try to provide care, but in effect we have a very ineffective international development assistance regime. We know it. We have heard it.

What could we do to rectify the situation? Let us take a leaf out of the UNAIDS mandate, which decided to use a three ones approach: one implementing mechanism, one framework and one mechanism to oversee it. If we use that three ones approach, we will streamline the mechanism and we will be able to have an effective aid and international development strategy on the ground in Afghanistan.

We also need to take a leaf out of the books of groups such as the Peace Dividend Trust, which very effectively and intelligently is ensuring that moneys going into Afghanistan are not being deployed to international workers and contractors. Rather, those moneys are being used to build up capacity within Afghanistan, by Afghans, for Afghanistan. By doing so, this is able to provide the long term sustainable security and development the country needs. It is within our purview to do that.

I see that my time is up, so I will close with this. At the end of the day, our goal is to communicate to our troops, the public and the Afghan people some very realistic solutions. We also have to be realistic in terms of our expectations. Afghanistan is not the

democratic republic of Afghanistan but the Islamic republic of Afghanistan, and while some may wish to change Afghanistan into a pale replica of us, that is not going to happen.

Whatever we do has to be within what the Afghan people want. It has to be what is wanted by the Afghan people. It has to be congruent with their goals and objectives for their future. It has to be sustainable. Unless we do that, there will be war without end.

Lastly, there is confusion among some about the differences among insurgents, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. They are very different groups. Also, the Taliban is not a monolithic structure.

● (2025)

We have a responsibility to provide an effective series of solutions for our troops and for the Afghan people. I hope the government listens to what our party and other parties are offering in the debate taking place tonight. We are offering effective solutions that the government can take to Bucharest, particularly the four pillars approach, which is essential to the long term success of Afghanistan by Afghans for their nation.

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear tonight by the speech delivered by my hon. colleague that we on this side of the House welcome the debate on the government's new motion on Afghanistan.

We are pleased to see that the government chose to use the proposed Liberal motion introduced two weeks ago as its basis for this new motion. I say this not in a partisan way but to also illustrate that we need to cooperate on issues such as this one.

The new motion adopts the principles that the mission must change, that it must end, and that it must go well beyond an exclusively military focus, principles for which the Liberal Party has been calling over the past year.

As well, with this motion the government is acknowledging that the mission must change. It has used the Liberal description of the mission after February 2009, which will change in focus to a mission of training, security and reconstruction. It has also accepted today that the mission must end. This motion sets a firm end date of July 2011 to Canada's mission in Kandahar.

The Conservative government has also accepted that our presence in Afghanistan must be about more than military. Key commitments on development and diplomacy that were absent from the government's original motion have been imported directly from the Liberal motion.

I would like to give my hon. colleague an opportunity to expand on some of the answers that we need to get from the government in order to support this new motion.

**Hon. Keith Martin:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question on this extremely important issue is a very prescient one.

I want to deal with the first aspect. We have to be realistic in what we are trying to achieve in the type of environment we are in. This is an Islamic country riven by feudalism and corruption, a country that has seen decades of war, and it is a people that has been traumatized. Many Afghans have never seen peace in their lifetimes.

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My hon. colleague mentioned the end date. We have to marry that end date up with targets for the four pillars of Afghanistan security. With our allies, we have to enable the Afghan people to have trained, equipped and paid for Afghan police, army, corrections and judiciary.

We know that the Afghan police at one time were being paid \$40 a month. It has gone up to \$70 and it may be up to \$100. However, if people do not have enough money in their pockets to pay for food for their families and they have an AK-47 at their sides, what are they going to do? Their choices are stark and they do not have very many. It is staggering to me that the government and our allies have not dealt with this before.

In fact, I find it really shocking and a complete violation of the responsibility of the government that back in 2006 the Conservative government gave this House only two days upon which to determine whether or not there would be a two year extension to the mission. That was an utterly irresponsible political act.

The government did not give us a chance to put forth constructive solutions as we have done here today by talking about the targets, the four pillars of Afghanistan security, the political reconciliation that has to come within the confines of Afghanistan, and dealing with the external insurgency, which means bringing into the mix a regional working group that involves Pakistan, India, Iran and the CIS states to dampen down the insurgency that is destroying the very heart and soul of Afghanistan.

The government did not give us that opportunity. As a result, we have seen the errors of the last two years, which have done a huge disservice to our troops, to the Canadian people and, worse, to the Afghan people.

The government has to listen to these solutions and, by heavens, it has to work with us and take these solutions to Bucharest. Frankly, before Bucharest, the government should phone our allies and drive these ideas through with them. If we are able to drive them with our allies, we can get our allies on board before we get to Bucharest and go in with a united front and a very strong, effective plan to deal with the challenges ahead.

● (2030)

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me thank my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for sharing his time with me to give me the opportunity to add my voice to this most important debate.

I am pleased that the member also mentioned the shortage of time when this debate first started a couple of years ago. At that time, as members will recall, we were in a minority government and in such a short period of time were not able to take out some of the bugs and bring forward something better. Today again it is a minority government and here we are asking for the time to discuss this. Why? Because we are asking our men and women in uniform to go into harm's way and, we hope, bring some peace, security and development to this most unfortunate region of Kandahar, Afghanistan.

I followed the debate throughout the day and was saddened in many ways by some of the comments that were made.

I want to say first and foremost that I think I speak on behalf of every member in this House when I say that when we stand to speak, we are not here to pit our military against party A or party B. It has nothing to do with politics and everything to do with doing the right thing, making the right decision. That is why I am going to start by reminding each and every Canadian of some words that the Prime Minister has used in the past. In essence he used George Bush's words when he said, "We're not going to cut and run". It is not a matter of cutting and running. The government has not said so, no member has said so, no Canadian has said so, and our men and women in uniform have not said so. We are simply trying to set the terms of engagement for a successful outcome. I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

In the last Parliament I had the privilege of chairing the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. Today I am vice-chair. I have had the opportunity, unlike most other members who I am sure would have appreciated the opportunity, to listen to various witnesses who came before our committee, including people who were formerly in the military, academics, recognized organizations, NGOs, people currently in the military, and the previous minister of defence as well. We were able to hear all their comments.

Members also listen to their constituents. This past Friday, I met with an Afghanistan group, who said, "You guys don't really know what is going on over there". I heard some other comments, which I will bring forth today.

Some good things have been said in the Manley report. Through this debate I also want to inform Canadians that the committee on national defence committee worked very hard to put a report together which was tabled last June, with 12 recommendations. There was a 13th recommendation which unfortunately we could not put in the report, and I will explain why. It concerned something which everyone is talking about, and that is training, training, training.

We recommended that we get more involved and make sure that the Afghans are trained properly to provide security, policing and whatnot. The researchers came back to us and said, "There is no evidence to support the recommendation as stated. The current ANP training program is the responsibility of the U.S. and Germany, at a cost of \$1 billion".

So, what are we talking about? We are talking about training, training, training. If we are going to address an issue, we have to deal with reality. The Canadian forces provide only about seven or eight policemen to help with training the military police, local ANP, only in the area of Kandahar. I mention that to clarify it for people who are very interested in this most important issue.

● (2035)

The Minister of National Defence went to the recent meeting and he was promised by the French that they would send 700 troops. That was an empty promise. There is no delivery.

The concern I have with respect to the Manley report is the 1,000 additional troops. I am hoping it does not include the 2,500 troops the United States of America is to send in for a period of seven or eight months. One of their senior military people said a couple of weeks ago in a press conference in the United States that 400,000 troops are needed.

*Government Orders*

We have been told by witnesses that until now approximately 50,000 to 51,000 troops are there and we have trained approximately 49,000 to 50,000. The problem we have with that is what my colleague pointed out earlier in terms of the poppy growing areas.

Mr. Siddiqui wrote in the *Toronto Star* a couple of weeks ago that that is where the problem lies. The organizations pay a farmer, or a security guard, or a police officer \$50, \$60 or \$100 a month and the drug lords pay them \$300, \$500 or \$600 a month. During the day they are acting as police officers and during the night they are pushing drugs. They bring in hundreds of millions of dollars which they then use to support their insurgent activities. We are cutting off our nose to spite our face. We are not making any headway.

My colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca hit the nail on the head. We know where the problem is. Why are we not focusing on those poppy growing areas? He talked about a feudal system. We understand it. How do we get them to move away from that system? By engaging them, by providing security, by providing development, but security especially, so that the farmer's life is not in jeopardy.

I have another concern in terms of the borders. I read a headline, "Taliban calls truce with Pakistan". As far as I am concerned, the president of Pakistan, Mr. Musharraf, needs to be put in his place. He should either shape up or ship out. On one hand I remember when the Conservatives were in opposition they said they would not deal with those guys. Today we do not want to deal with them, but the guys we are trying to protect are in essence dealing with them behind our backs while our men and women are in harm's way. I do not find that acceptable and I am sure every Canadian does not find it acceptable either.

Witnesses tell us what is going on in Afghanistan. In a recent article, Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier said that we are making progress, that insurgent ambushes have fallen in four of Kandahar's 17 districts. However, further on the article states that Major-General Marc Lessard, the new commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, says that violent incidents are up by 50%. Who can we really believe?

Let me summarize. With respect to NATO, I would ask the minister when he goes to Bucharest to pull up his socks and let Canada be counted. We had before our committee the chairman of the military committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, General Henault, former chief of the defence staff for Canada. My question to him is on record. I asked him if he was preparing for 2009 knowing that that was the date. It took me three questions. I finally got out of him that they were preparing.

We do not buy this argument that if we give them short notice, we cannot replace the troops. That is hogwash. I want everyone to know that NATO does not respond overnight. It does sometimes in an emergency situation, but it knew that we would be leaving in 2009 and it was planning for it.

● (2040)

I close by saying to all the NATO partners that if they are going to be members of NATO, then they should participate equally. The Korean conflict was mentioned earlier. Let us share in this together. It should not just be Canadians taking the hit. Let us rotate. If a

country is going to be a member of the club, then it should take up the responsibilities.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by my colleague, with whom I sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence. He often has an informed opinion about how things happen.

However, I would like to remind him that in 2001, when the previous government began the mission, Parliament was not consulted and there was no debate, contrary to the Conservative approach, which holds that it is important that Parliament support soldiers on mission abroad. That is why we are engaging in our third debate in less than two years, a debate that we hope will be as informed and open as possible. In the same way, we wanted the Manley report to be debated in the Standing Committee on National Defence. Unfortunately, the opposition refused to invite the people concerned to the committee.

My colleague mentioned an important aspect of governance: making sure our Afghan partner eliminates government corruption. He also mentioned the challenges of regional stability and porous borders.

But he is well aware that our Prime Minister is going to Bucharest with two very clear demands, which he has already begun to state: there must be additional troops in Kandahar and additional equipment, especially helicopters, so that our soldiers can move safely through areas where there is violence.

Given that the demands will be clear in Bucharest, why has my colleague opposite finally come around to these dates? What led his party to agree with our position that it is not necessarily up to parliamentarians to decide how things are developing in the field, but that we have to proceed according to what is happening in the field?

I would like to know how the Liberals came around to the government's position on continuing the mission in Afghanistan.

● (2045)

[*English*]

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, the member has asked several questions. First, when Canada went to Afghanistan we went in under the three D policy, development, diplomacy and defence. That was a decision we made given the circumstances. We learned along the way. We had a debate that was forced by the opposition at the time. Today it is more elaborate. As time goes by the debate actually improves.

I have heard military people, most recently the head of the U.S. defence command, say that a thousand troops are not going to do it. He is talking about 400. We are really fooling ourselves when we say that an additional thousand troops is going to solve this problem in answer to that question.

*Government Orders*

Second, I must say that we had a constructive exchange in committee and that is why we will move positively forward. That is also why I am a bit upset. When in opposition, the current Prime Minister said, "I am going to use committees. I am going to use the parliamentary process". Committees brought the report in. He was part of it. What did the Prime Minister do? This is not a low blow, but he threw it out. It did not matter. He went through independent channels.

That being the case, we should all sit at home and not bother going to committee. We should not bother listening to witnesses. Instead, we should hire independent people to do all the work for us. What can I say.

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to give the hon. member an opportunity to answer. I paid careful attention to what he said. It is obvious that over the years he has proven to be an expert in the field of defence.

I would like the member to comment on our fundamental principles and our guide as Liberals as it relates to Afghanistan. Should there be a change in mission, an end to the mission, a greater commitment to development and diplomacy and greater transparency and accountability?

**Mr. John Cannis:** Mr. Speaker, what we have done is the Liberal Party under its leader has managed to refocus the mission to where it should be, which is development, defence and diplomacy. We want to help build schools, roads, security, a civil service and a society where the citizens of that country can grow and prosper in peace and harmony. I am supporting this motion because now the new Conservative Party is seeing it in the Liberal way.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Saskatoon—Humboldt.

I am quite pleased to join in this important debate on the future of the Afghan mission. I believe this is not a time to shrink back, as some would have it, as we move to a pivotal moment in the future of Afghanistan. Pulling back or pulling out at a moment that requires one to go forward and commit would be a colossal error. When the scales are about to tip, or have just tipped, a greater effort and more resolve is required to tip them in the right direction. This is that time, this is that hour. It is a time of going forward and not shrinking back.

This is why I am happy to see there is some fundamental common ground between the government and the official opposition on the continuation of the mission until 2011. To have left in 2009 would have been cutting and running. It would not be something that would be conducive to what would need to happen. The House cannot abandon the Afghan people, as some have suggested. We need to continue advancing security, development and governance.

Canadians have asked honest questions like why are we in Afghanistan? War is never easy, not for the troops and not for Canadians themselves.

I respond by saying we need to remember why we are in Afghanistan and what it is we hope to accomplish. Canada was invited by the Afghan government, a democratically elected government, along with 36 other nations as part of a UN-sanctioned, NATO-led mission. We were committed to Kandahar, which is the

most troubled region in Afghanistan, by a previous government. Through a vote in the House, in which we all had an opportunity to participate, we honoured and extended that commitment.

We should also remember that we are not there solely for the benefit of Afghans, but also for the benefit of Canada and Canadians.

The brutal reality of September 11 serves as a reminder that no country is immune from the threat of terrorism. Canadians died the day the twin towers came down. If we choose to live in a false sense of security, pretending all is well and ignoring the reality of what happened on 9/11 or who was behind it, we will ultimately come to regret it.

We must take the fight to the enemy, but this responsibility is not ours alone. It is the responsibility of all peace-loving nations as a whole and we must share in that responsibility. Ultimately the people of Afghanistan have that responsibility as well.

The independent panel on Canada's future role on Afghanistan, led by former deputy prime minister John Manley, said in its report:

A primary Canadian objective, while helping Afghans, has been to help ensure that Afghanistan itself does not again revert to the status of sanctuary and head office for global terrorism.

We must remain committed to the people of Afghanistan to 2011 to provide sufficient time for Afghans to ready themselves to shoulder the responsibility of security and governance. Canada has always stepped up to the plate for our international obligations.

Canada has a long history of proving our commitment to international peace and stability, whether in World Wars I and II, Korea, the former Yugoslavia, or today in Afghanistan. Our mission in Afghanistan is in keeping with this history, while maintaining a balance of policy needs like security, governance and development. Canada has a responsibility as a leader in the international community to step up when the need calls.

We cannot focus on every conflict in the world, but when we do act, we must act decisively and with purpose. If we are to be involved with a conflict, we must put in a determined effort. It must be real, it must be substantial and it must be with an eye to victory. We began by rebuilding the military and updating its equipment, but as the Manley report indicated, specific steps needed to be taken with respect to Afghanistan.

The Manley panel recommended that Canada's role in Afghanistan should give greater emphasis to diplomacy, reconstruction and governance and that the military mission should shift increasingly toward the training of Afghan National Security Forces.

The motion before us today reflects these recommendations, which the Prime Minister broadly accepted.

• (2050)

The motion states that the House is to take note that the ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans. Our goal is to help build a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure. We aim to create the necessary space and conditions to allow the Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict.

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To achieve that aim, it is essential to assist the people of Afghanistan to have properly trained, equipped and paid members of the four pillars of their security apparatus: the army, the police, the judicial system and the correctional system.

We are making progress in these areas as well. For instance, more Afghan battalions are up and running than last year. Every month that goes by, they are better trained to provide security for the communities that are trying to live in peace and to raise their children. Our goal is to let Afghans defend and govern themselves.

Canada is helping to reform the Afghan justice system, to promote human rights and allow for better protection of its citizens. Consider this, Canada directly supports the training of more than 70 prosecutors, 68 public defenders and more than 200 judges. Having a judicial system that works and operates, sets the checks and balances and the foundations necessary for a society to succeed.

Over 600 Afghan national police have received training through the provincial reconstruction team. Canada is a major contributor to the international Law and Order Trust Fund that pays the salaries of over 60,000 policemen in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. We have helped construct police stations and checkpoints to help improve local security.

Let us not forget what the motion calls for. It says that Canada should continue a military presence in Kandahar beyond February 2009 to July 2011 in a manner fully consistent with the UN mandate on Afghanistan. This means we will continue training Afghan national security forces so they can assume responsibility for their own security. Security means development can happen. Security means democracy can flourish.

To quote the Manley report, "Security enables development; effective governance enhances security; development creates opportunities, and multiplies the rewards, of improved security and good governance".

Security is an essential condition of good governance and lasting development, but this continued involvement must have what it needs to meet the goal. We are our making the commitment conditional on NATO providing us with a battle group of 1,000 soldiers. As well, our soldiers need medium to heavy lift helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. I know the government is working hard to meet these requirements.

The motion is not an open-ended commitment and neither is it without condition. It defines the extent and duration of Canada's commitment that is consistent with Canadian's hearts and minds on this matter. To date we have carried an enormous part of the load in the most difficult part of the country. As the Prime Minister has said, Canadians want us to make a positive difference in a dangerous world. In Afghanistan we are making that difference.

We must remember that terrorism remains a threat to global peace and security. Afghanistan has been used as a base for terrorism in the past. In the interest of our collective security, Canada and its international partners share a responsibility. In the end, we must provide the people of Afghanistan with the hope for a brighter future by establishing the security necessary to promote development and an environment that is conducive to improve Afghan lives.

Rebuilding a shattered Afghanistan is a slow and complex process in a country that is emerging from more than two decades of human rights abuses, terror, conflict, drought and poverty. That responsibility is not ours alone. It is the responsibility of all peace-loving nations and everyone must play their part in a determined way.

I urge all members of the House to support this motion so we can continue the important job of helping to rebuild Afghanistan.

• (2055)

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of comments to make. I think we should all be very careful in our expectations.

First, Afghanistan is an Islamic republic. It is a feudal, tribal Islamic republic. We will not turn it around into a democratic, secular, human rights embracing nation. It just will not happen, unless we want to be there for generation after generation. If we were, we would be seen as occupiers and the insurgency would make matters worse.

Second, on the issue of al-Qaeda, all the battles that we will fight in Afghanistan, all the reconstruction that we will do there will make almost no difference whatsoever to al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is an international diffuse organization with no titular head. It is a diffuse movement all over the world. If we were really interested in dealing with al-Qaeda, which incidentally left a few short weeks after 9/11 and it by and large left the country before we even got there, then we have to deal with some difficult and tricky issues such as Saudi Arabia, repressive, thuggish regimes in the Middle East, the lack of resolution to Israel and Palestine and not having two states side by side with 67 borders. We have to deal with those things in order to address al-Qaeda as well as putting money into our own domestic surveillance mechanisms and strengthening our role in Interpol and others.

The member made some good points on corruption. Will he ask his government, when it goes to Bucharest, to put much greater pressure on our allies to support adequate pay for the civil service in Afghanistan, as well as the pay for the Afghan police, army, judiciary and corrections and that they also receive the equipment they need and adequate training?

Unless the civil service is paid adequately, the people will resort to bribes and petty crimes to survive. That kind of endemic corruption will not go away unless the people have adequate pay and also an adequate governance structure. I suggest Canada could make a very strong, positive impact on the future of Afghanistan by using our extraordinary tools within Canada. We are an exceptional country that could provide the governance solutions required in other countries, to train other countries to have a good public service.

This is something in which I firmly believe. Our country could play a very effective role if we were to use the tools that we have within our own country to enable Afghan people to build up their own capacity in governance as well as in primary health, education and economic development.

*Government Orders*

• (2100)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member indicating that expectations should not be set very high, but we should have expectations nonetheless.

Incredibly, if we look at the history of what has happened in a short period of time, there has been progress. I know it is important to have various capacity building foundations to ensure the ability is there to succeed. I know in the judiciary having prosecutors and defence counsel, including judges, are fairly important aspects and that has been ongoing and going forward.

Payment has been made. I appreciate that the member wants to ensure it is adequate. However, one thing is for sure. Leaving as early as 2009 would not have left them in a position where Afghans would have the ability to succeed.

However, the progress that I do see is significant. It would be unthinkable just a few years ago to imagine what has happened to date. For example, a new Afghan constitution has restored the rule of law with respect to the human rights of every Afghan citizen, including women and children. The Afghan people now vote. Women and girls have rights and children go to school. There are reports on what those statistics are and they are encouraging.

There is no doubt they need to have the infrastructure, the capacity and the governance structure to succeed, but we have to be there as that grows. By extending this mission and ensuring the protection and nurturing of that, at some point it needs to take root and it needs to be the responsibility of the Afghan people to take it to its ultimate conclusion.

**Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join the debate in the House of Commons today on Canada's future mission in Afghanistan.

Before I go into the main body of my speech, I would like to tell Canadians watching, particularly the men and women of our armed forces, their families and very close friends, and especially because of my own personal family, friends and members of the reserves who are participating in the mission in Afghanistan, that we as their representatives in the House of Commons want them to know that we understand their sacrifice. They have taken more on in this mission than any one of us will.

I do not know how anyone can bear the loss of a loved one who sacrifices for his or her country, but it is something we honour and value. All members of the House, regardless of where they stand in this debate tonight, wish to express their deepest gratitude to them for their sacrifice.

It is important to recall why Canada went into Afghanistan. As a nation we have always believed in and fought for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This has been consistent in Canadian history regardless of the stripe of the government. Yet, many Canadians question why we are in Afghanistan and why it is important to stay the course in a country half a world away. That is why today's debate is so important.

For the greater part of the past 30 years, Afghanistan has been a nation in conflict. After the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989, most of the world went back to its own business and forgot about

Afghanistan and its problems. While the rest of the world went about its business, the Taliban rose to power and took over in Afghanistan. It implemented a strict, medieval interpretation of Sharia law and became notorious for its treatment of women.

I am sure all Canadians, who have seen it, remember the almost unbelievable pictures of a woman being executed in a soccer stadium, a tragic reversal for a site that was meant for fun and enjoyment and turned into a place of cruelty and barbarism.

Then on September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda committed the deadly attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. and like the cities they attacked, their victims were diverse: Canadians, Americans, Europeans and Asians. People from all nations and across the globe died that day. In the years that followed, al-Qaeda's atrocities spread from Madrid to Bali to London. Its cruelty knew no borders, whether geographic, religious or cultural.

In the face of such a threat, Canada joined an international coalition to drive the Taliban out of Afghanistan and to destroy al-Qaeda. We committed to Afghanistan to help rebuild the country and ensure that it not become an incubator for terrorism again and a threat to democracies around the world.

Our efforts in Afghanistan have been a whole government effort, a collaboration of our military personnel, the diplomatic community and aid workers. We work in partnership with the Afghan government and other international allies and there have been incredible achievements.

Five million refugees returned since 2002, 90% of them finding jobs within six months of their return; 10 million Afghans registered to vote in free and fair elections, the presidential election of 2004 and the parliamentary election of 2005; 347 women were candidates for the lower house; 83% of Afghans now have access to basic health care compared to a mere 9% in 2004; 40,000 more babies survive each year in Afghanistan; and in a country where girls were not allowed to be educated, today more than two million girls are part of the six million children who are being educated.

Canada is directly involved in helping to build schools, set up after school programs and training teachers. We are providing training for 9,000 new teachers, 4,000 of whom are women. Women are now part of the Afghan National Police and there has been a targeted effort to include women in family response units.

• (2105)

These are important steps as Afghan policewomen can address the unique needs and problems of Afghan women, respecting the values and customs of the society. These are incredible achievements considering where the country was less than a decade ago, in the grips of the Taliban.

*Government Orders*

We cannot forget the accomplishments of our military. The men and women in Afghanistan wearing the Canadian Forces uniform have made great progress. From a start of 30 to 40 trainees, the Canadian Forces have now contributed to the training of 35,000 Afghan national army personnel.

We have mentored five Afghan national army kandaks, the equivalent of five Canadian battalions. Training and mentoring these units will significantly increase the size and capabilities of the Afghan national army's security capability.

Canada is also contributing to the training of the Afghan national police. Over 600 Afghan national police have received training through the provincial reconstruction team.

A civilian-military cooperation team, including engineering specialists, recently completed construction of a well for Kandahar University. Prior to this, the university was forced to truck in water at the expense of educational priorities.

Canadian Forces are helping to rebuild and pave the key Kandahar-Spin Boldak highway, a highway which will help farmers move produce to markets, doctors to reach villages, and police to respond to emergencies.

Just a month ago, the Canadian Forces inaugurated the Arghandab River causeway. This causeway links two highways and provides greater access for the local economy while improving the ability of allied forces to respond to threats. Despite this remarkable progress, more needs to be done.

The Afghanistan Compact, which details timelines and benchmarks, calls for an Afghan national army approaching 70,000 in strength and an Afghan national and border police with a combined force of up to 62,000.

In economic and social development, the Compact calls for a fully upgraded and maintained ring road and roads to connect Afghanistan to neighbouring countries.

It sets a goal of electricity reaching 65% of households and 90% of businesses in urban areas and 25% in rural areas by 2010.

It calls for water resource management plans to ensure sustainable development in the future.

It sets goals for poverty reduction and assistance to women, the disabled and youth.

It sets a number of goals for rural development, like safe drinking water and access to markets for agriculture.

The motion before us today recognizes the need for Canada to continue our work in achieving benchmarks through the Afghanistan Compact. It calls on Canada to continue the work that it has started. It calls on us to provide security so reconstruction can continue, so we can reach the goals of the Afghanistan compact.

Canadian efforts, diplomatic, developmental and defence, are making a difference, but there is more to be done.

The Manley panel in its report stated:

Canadian interests and values, and Canadian lives, are now invested in Afghanistan. The sacrifices made there, by Canadians and their families, must be respected. What we do there...affects the Afghan people.

This is a mission that reflects Canada's history of protecting people from aggressors. It reflects Canada's history of fighting for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

This is a mission that is both honourable and achievable. We are there for three basic reasons: prevent evil from finding a base again as it seeks to strike out to the rest of the world; promote Canadian values, namely, peace, order and good government; and protect the lives of the innocent in Afghanistan and throughout the entire world.

● (2110)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member who just spoke to explain to us how we are to understand one thing in particular. Since we have been in Afghanistan, one of the things we have done is help the Northern Alliance in its efforts to bring down the Taliban regime. There was a willingness to establish a democracy and a new economy and to curb the opium crops. Why is it that poppy production has tripled since then? How are we to understand that? If we look at this issue alone, would you not say this is a major failure? I will come back to other aspects a little later.

[*English*]

**Mr. Bradley Trost:** Mr. Speaker, I would just say to the hon. member that the way we evaluate any mission or any project is through its totality.

I am not an expert on the specifics of the opium trade in Afghanistan, but I would point to all the good that I talked about: the schools for women, the civil rights, the ability to have water, to have agriculture, to have trade, and the millions of people who are now in their homes. This is good. This is what we have done. This is what we have contributed.

The hon. member brings out a point. The opium trade needs to be dealt with. The fact that the opium trade needs to be dealt with in Afghanistan is not a reason to withdraw. If anything, it is a reason for us to continue to engage. We do not want that heroin on our streets or on the streets of anywhere else in this world because of the damage it does. If Canadians pull out, if we back away from Afghanistan, we no longer have the ability to influence and protect our people here from that scourge.

It is for those reasons we can choose to leave and no longer have any influence, no longer be able to protect Canadians from heroin. We can either choose to leave or we can choose to stay and make a difference. I, for one, believe we as Canadians must choose to stay and make that difference.

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as our leader said earlier today, the Liberal Party believes that the successful future of Afghanistan is really in our nation's best interests.

*Government Orders*

We believe our efforts there really reflect the fundamental values and principles in which Canadians believe: freedom, democracy, equality, security and the respect for fundamental human rights. We fundamentally believe that these values are worth pursuing. We believe that our efforts in Afghanistan, supported with a clear UN mandate, can be successful.

We are also very clear on the principles that we must adhere to as a country, which is that we must have a change in the mission, an end to the mission, with a greater commitment to development and diplomacy and greater transparency and accountability.

It is on that last point that I have a couple of questions. They relate to the government's motion calling for a battle group of 1,000 NATO troops to rotate into Kandahar by February 2009.

The question I have first is, why 1,000 troops? Where did that number come from? I have heard numbers as high as 5,000.

The second question relates to the rotation process. How long is the government prepared to wait before it determines whether or not this condition has been met?

• (2115)

**Mr. Bradley Trost:** Mr. Speaker, the 1,000 personnel recommendation comes from the Manley report where it says, “in the neighbourhood of about 1,000”. A military officer I have talked to would prefer to have more forces at his disposal, more equipment, et cetera. My understanding is that was the recommendation having talked with military personnel on the ground.

As far as the matter of the rotation of Canadian troops, my understanding again is that those are operational matters and I will defer to people with military experience as to what benchmarks specifically they would be looking for.

I will note for the hon. member that my understanding is that both the United States and most recently I read a report that France has been looking to be engaged and be supportive. Other countries have come to understand that if we put more effort in, if we put in the appropriate amount of troops, equipment and support, we can put the Taliban and their allies on their heels.

I was reading a report only yesterday about how the British forces were noting that in their district, the Taliban had pulled out, not completely, but partially. They had them exhausted. They had them on the run.

While I am not an expert again on the particulars of that, it was an encouraging report to read, that we are pushing back, that the forces that we are providing to help the Afghan national army and national police are seeing success. That is why I am encouraged by what our allies are doing, what Canada is doing, and what the Afghan people are doing in their own country.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is always an onerous task to rise and speak in Parliament on a matter of such importance and broad application for both the Taliban—who are not our first concern of course—and Afghans: the Taliban because of the defeat we want to inflict on them and Afghans because of the impact the mission has on them.

My speech will reflect the views of the Bloc Québécois, of course, but also and most importantly of the people in my riding of Chambly—Borduas. Like other Quebecers, most of them are asking some very pointed questions, first, about the reason for the mission and, second, about its success. They want answers. We expected to get some in 2006 but are still waiting. The answers we have been given lack credibility, as I will show a little later.

I am also very concerned about the fact that our opinions are divided. There are some retired generals in my riding. I am thinking of two in particular, one of whom, Mr. Rémi Landry, is very well known and highly respected and often comments in the media. Like other military personnel, they are very loyal to the democratic decisions taken by our parliaments. They will always defend these positions in the field, not only the kinds of missions they were assigned but also the argument for them—which they also do very well.

These people cannot be blamed, therefore, for having very specific views and biases about the duties they were assigned in the past and still defend today. With all due respect for both these people, who still serve the country very well, and also democratic debate, I believe we have a responsibility in regard to two things. First, we need to look at what the purpose was of our presence in Afghanistan, and second, we need to ask whether or not we have been successful and whether there are still good reasons for our military involvement.

This question was asked by the parliamentary secretary a little while ago. He said Canadians want to know why we are in Afghanistan. He was quite right to say they still want to know because no answers have been forthcoming. The answers we have been given do not hold water.

I would like to remind the House that it was in response to the events of September 11 that Canada became involved in Afghanistan under the aegis of the United Nations and that it was originally the United States which called upon the other nations to show a united front to the people probably responsible for the offensive of September 11, 2001. The purpose of the operation—as I said before—was to help the Northern Alliance advance on Kabul and replace the Afghan government. The objective was literally to rebuild the economy and form a viable democratic state in Afghanistan so that Afghans could run their own country and determine their development.

This was based not on the 3 Ds but the 4 Ds because in addition to defence, there was development, democracy and diplomacy.

Have we kept that balance? That is always the basis of the debates here in the House of Commons. To achieve these objectives, Canada made a commitment to keep the majority of our troops in the field until February 2007. It is appropriate to recall each stage because there was nothing to allay our concerns about the relevance of our presence.

*Government Orders*

● (2120)

This is the third or fourth time that this has been debated. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they had the same concerns as the three opposition parties do now. It is troubling now to see the lack of credible answers from the Conservatives. It is even less credible because on their own they have changed the nature of the mission in mid-course. It must be a balanced mission to establish democracy, diplomacy and development. The remarks this afternoon have brought to light the fact that, only a few months ago, of the 2,500 Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, six military personnel were assigned to deal with development and another six were working on diplomacy.

I will come back to that because some extraordinary things have been said here. Regardless of their ingenuity, how can six people assigned to development for a period of about six years build 4,000 schools when we have not seen any? How can they claim to have built thousands of kilometres of new roads when only these resources have been assigned to all the engineering of roads? Those are questions that arise today; the same questions that were asked previously and that were never answered. They try to answer today but those answers do not hold water.

On May 17, 2006, in great haste, the government introduced a motion to extend the mission that was supposed to end in February 2007. We remember that. The vote in this House on extending the mission to February 2009 was very divided, to such a degree that the difference was only four votes: 149 members voted in favour of extending the mission from February 2007 to February 2009, and 145 voted against the motion.

In Quebec, people are asking questions. Indeed, 70% of the population of Quebec is against our presence in Afghanistan and they feel it is a shame that they did not elect another five Bloc Québécois members, because then we would have won the vote and the matter would be settled. We lost by four votes. The Liberal Party also voted against extending the mission at that point. In fact, the Liberals were divided among themselves with the result that the Conservatives won by four votes. It all happened May 17, 2006.

On April 19, 2007, the Liberals presented a motion to the House to have the mission end in February 2009. Since the government had a minority and the opposition had a majority, we immediately wanted to make our position clear, failing any credible responses to help us understand the evolution of the mission in Afghanistan in relation to the initial objectives. Unfortunately, the responses were not forthcoming. Then, beyond all expectations, the NDP voted with the Conservatives. The vote on the motion that was presented on April 19, 2007, was held on April 24. We could have decided that day to stop everything in February 2009, but no, the NDP voted with the Conservatives to make sure that did not happen.

Today, here we are having this debate again. As odd as it may seem, the NDP is now saying we have to vote immediately and as soon as the vote is won, the troops have to be pulled out of Afghanistan and brought home.

● (2125)

Demobilizing combat troops is not as easy as packing up a camp site. This does not happen in a day. It takes at least six months. Such is the result of the NDP's vote. It is not a simple matter.

Earlier I was mentioning that there are 2,500 soldiers there. The three Ds are democracy, diplomacy and development. There are 12 people in total to take care of all that. This produces little in the way of results and does not support the Conservatives' argument.

They say that 4,000 schools have been built. That is a lot. In Canada, that would be a major construction project. How did they do that? Maybe they were small schools, I do not know, but there needs to be infrastructure in any event. We are told there were clinics, wells and an irrigation system. We have not seen anything of the sort. We want to believe it, but everything we have been told has turned out to be false. In wartime, it is said that the primary victim is the truth. And the truth, as a victim, is under attack by the statements being made here. It is quite worrisome.

This is why the Bloc Québécois cannot give a blank cheque to keep this going, given the negative effects it has on Canada.

The parliamentary secretary says that we are there for two reasons: for Afghans, but especially for Canadians. I am not convinced that this benefits Canada. I would rather that he stick to telling us what positive things we are doing over there.

Earlier I mentioned poppy production, which has grown threefold since we have been in Afghanistan. But one of our tasks there is to eradicate poppies. How are we managing to do the opposite? As I mentioned earlier, it is because truth is the first victim. This is yet more proof.

I also said earlier that the Conservatives have hijacked the actual mission. It is very negative, as we all know. It has turned into an offensive mission instead of a reconstruction mission.

It is difficult to follow the logic and reasoning of each of the parties here in this House. Members will remember that in April 2007, the Liberals were the ones who introduced the motion to end the mission in February 2009. For several months, the Liberals have been repeating that they did not want to go past February 2009. What happened in the past few days to make them do an about-face and jump on board with the Conservatives? They say that there are differences they are trying to make clear, but we do not see them. The end result is that the Liberals agree with the Conservatives that the mission should go to 2011. And earlier I spoke about the NDP's position.

We are maintaining our position for all the reasons I have mentioned. They are trying to drag us in and make us accept that there will be effects or collateral damage, for example. But 78 soldiers have died over there. That is not nothing. We support these people. They are over there because we, as parliamentarians, sent them there.

*Government Orders*

• (2130)

They do their jobs well, with dedication and loyalty. The Bloc has tremendous respect and admiration for all members of the military. Not only are people who risk their lives for others especially generous, but they also have exceptional, exemplary courage. It must be said. All the same, we must not continue to expose them to danger once we realize that the mission objectives have not been achieved. That would be irresponsible. That, too, must be said.

No soldier over there who goes into the field and risks his or her life would come back here and say it was all for nothing. They believe they are doing something important, and they are. However, in the final analysis, we are the ones putting them in harm's way. It is up to us to figure out if we are putting them in danger for no good reason. That comes first.

To date, we have put lives at risk on the basis of guesses and falsehoods, many of which have been made and told right here. We should not have the mindset that because we are over there, we have to keep going until the Taliban are all extinct. We could end up being there a very long time.

We have to remember that this is costing us \$3 million per day, which is not peanuts. Are we investing that money appropriately? We do not think that \$3 million should be spent on offensive action, on combat, because that is not our strength. We should invest the money in reconstruction and in adjusting the balance of the mission, as recommended in the Manley report.

The Manley commission was very critical of the Conservatives' militaristic approach. We have not talked about that enough here. Let us take another look at the report. It came to the same conclusion we did, and it confirmed that we need to restore balance to the mission. According to the report:

It is essential to adjust funding and staffing imbalances between the heavy Canadian military commitment in Afghanistan and the comparatively lighter civilian commitment to reconstruction—

That is what it says. We have not been talking about that here. These people went to Afghanistan to study this issue. They came to the same conclusion we did. They said that we have to do more in terms of reconstruction, development and governance. The report makes it clear that the insurrection will not be quelled by force alone. Furthermore, the report repeatedly recommended that diplomatic measures be pursued with neighbouring countries to include them in Afghanistan's development.

It is a thinly veiled criticism of Canada's leadership in that regard. No one will say so. That is the cornerstone. All that is overlooked. We pretend that this does not exist, as though this work had not been done. The Conservatives will pick and choose whatever suits them to try to convince us that we must continue on the same path. Yet the report clearly says that we must rebalance the mission in all areas.

I will close by reminding hon. members that, in Afghanistan, one in four children will not live past the age of five. The life expectancy in Afghanistan is 45 years. It is one of the lowest in the world. Malnutrition affects 70% of the population and more than 70% of the population does not have access to clean drinking water. The majority of the population has inadequate access to health care and education. Among the women surveyed, 40% have been physically

abused by a member of their immediate or extended family. There is one doctor for every 770 Afghans, although there is one soldier for every 742 Afghans.

• (2135)

Has anything changed? Has any progress been made in this file? No, not a word. I would like to hear the Conservatives address this.

What will this change if we continue? The responsible position would be to withdraw the combat troops and rebalance the mission to make it a development mission. I would remind the House that the 1,000 soldiers that some people would like to add to the forces would not be assigned to reconstruction, but to combat. Thus, it does not change a thing.

And this is what the Liberals rallied around. It is incomprehensible. It is an unbelievable flip-flop. Only a few days ago, they said that the mission must end in 2009, yet here they are supporting the Conservatives to extend the mission until 2011.

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech and I was amazed at the member's utter lack of understanding of what is actually going on in Afghanistan and the misinformation that he is labouring under. He says that we have 2,500 soldiers over there, 6 of whom are with CIDA and 6 of whom are with DFAIT. In fact, those are civilians and not soldiers at all.

When he talks about the projects that have been undertaken, yes, if they were being conducted by six or twelve civilians the progress we have made would have been unbelievable. The fact is that those projects are being conducted by Canadian soldiers. They are the ones out there in the villages getting irrigation systems going, helping to build schools and helping with medical clinics.

He said that most of the Afghan people do not have access to health care. That is just flat not true. Eighty-three per cent of Afghans have access to basic health care compared to less than 10% five years ago.

The member is completely misinformed about what is going on there. I suspect that it is because he is either simply misinformed or he has another agenda. He talked about over 100 Canadian deaths in Afghanistan. That is absolutely not true. There have been 80, including 1 civilian. If he would get his facts right he might have a little more credibility standing up in this House and presenting arguments.

I could go on and on. There has been a 22% decrease in infant mortality. Forty thousand Afghan babies do not die in childbirth every year because Canada is there and Canadian soldiers are there providing health care to Afghans, along with the rest of our allies.

The mission is in balance. If he would get out of just the Kandahar province and look at all 34 provinces in the country of Afghanistan he would see that there is tremendous balance in the mission. Kandahar is the toughest nut, there is no question, but that is specifically why Canada is there, because our folks are the best. They have been doing a heck of a job and he should acknowledge that, but I fear he will not.

*Government Orders*

If he wants to look at some of the development projects he can go to Google Earth and have a look. It is right there provided by the satellites.

I would like to ask the member one question. What does he think the role of the Taliban is in our ability to carry out reconstruction projects or our ability to put more energy toward those things, which we are putting energy to but he does not realize it? What does he think the role of the Taliban is in all of this?

• (2140)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary should have listened to what I said. First, I did say that 78 troops had lost their lives. Second, I never said that there had been no progress in terms of healthcare. I reported what the percentages are at present. That situation, and I will not come back to it in detail, is still a harsh reality there.

The progress made is not due to the troops who are there now, because most of them are assigned to combat. In fact, few of them are assigned to reconstruction. I am not saying that the intention is not there, but that is not the work being done at present.

It is unfortunate that the member is instead trying to defend this mission at all costs, by arguing and not hearing what we are saying. It would be much preferable if he would give us answers to our questions. He has not given any.

This afternoon, I believe it was him who talked about 4,000 schools in six years. I do not know whether Canada, with the infrastructure, equipment and engineering at its disposal, would be able to build 4,000 schools in six years. It is an even greater challenge in a devastated country, unless we are converting houses into schools and doing things like that. That may be the case, but that is not what he is saying. He is saying that the troops have built 4,000 schools in six years. It is time to correct that, if it was misspoken, but it was most certainly what he said.

It is that kind of statement that takes all credibility away from the information the member is giving us here.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what a sad diatribe it is and how sad it must be for the hon. member opposite to live in such a world where everything is seen as a negative and reality is often overwhelmed by the negative stories that are conjured up in the local and national press. However, the reality on the ground in Afghanistan, from the people I have talked to and the people in my riding who have been there, is that it is far different than what the hon. member is describing.

Maybe we should not be surprised that the member has wrapped himself in the cloak of negativity since he does come from a party that does not even realize how wonderful it is to live in such a country as Canada and does not understand why these men and women are going over there and standing up for this country in the first place.

My colleague asked the member, “what are your solutions to the problem?” It is not all right in this debate, where we are trying to transcend some of the partisanship, to just stand and do the typical

political move, which is to dodge around the question. We want an answer. What is it that you see as the solution?

• (2145)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I let the hon. member go once with the second person but then he did it again. The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy with my colleague's question. First, it is the right question. He said that I am negative. They have a solution. It is war. We have a number of solutions. It is those other solutions that he does not want to hear. The other solution is a balanced mission, as the Manley report said. We did not appoint Mr. Manley and his team; they are the ones who did so. Mr. Manley said that it had to be rebalanced, which means going in with more resources for development, diplomacy and democracy.

In terms of democracy, I would note that in 2004, the election turnout was 75%. That is extraordinary. Everyone was overjoyed with it. People said it was a good sign, that the Afghans wanted to try out democracy. But I have the impression that the regime that is being installed has shut them out, because in the second election, two and a half years later, turnout was 30%. That is an extraordinary drop-off. Why did it occur? The Conservatives are so ideologically fixated on the war that it is all-out war. They ask us what we are proposing in return.

Where war becomes necessary, everyone must go to war and we agree with that. When the merits of going to war cannot be explained, we do not agree. There are alternatives such as helping these people with reconstruction, democracy and training.

I would remind the House that Canada has extraordinary expertise in reconstruction and leading peace missions, an expertise that is being wasted.

[English]

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Speaker, the member continues to show his lack of information on what is actually going on there. In fact, the voter turnout the last time was 60%, not 30%. If he is going to use facts he should at least use the correct ones.

We are delivering on reconstruction development to the best of our ability. It is the Canadian soldiers who are doing that. What does the member think the role of the Taliban is in how we conduct our operations in Afghanistan? It is a simple question. What is his understanding of the role of the Taliban and how it affects us?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what the member is driving at. The Taliban will not be helping us with reconstruction. We have to change our approach. The member is going back to that argument because the Conservatives are not at ease with our proposal, and I understand that. If I were in their place, I would be very unhappy. They are unhappy because they cannot give us reasons.

*Government Orders*

I also spoke to people there who are involved in missions, who are representatives of aid organizations and not just any organization. They have told us that people are public servants by day and members of the Taliban by night. Who is a Taliban? It is a flawed question. It shows the lack of a strategic understanding of the entire issue, an absolute lack of understanding. It hinges on two things: the Taliban and war.

As with any society, it is not written on your forehead that you are a member of the Taliban. They do not act like bikers, they do not put an emblem on their backs. I will say it again, thousands of people are public servants by day and Taliban members by night. The situation is not at all like the member has described it.

We have to get things right. The Conservatives do not accept this and I understand that they are unhappy about it because they cannot justify their position.

• (2150)

[*English*]

**Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this forum in the House of Commons in the Parliament of Canada is an excellent place to share ideas. Today I guess we could call it a debate. I like to think of it more as a dialogue, a conversation among colleagues, as to what the best course is in reference to the issue of Afghanistan.

While I participate in the dialogue, I am very mindful of the great sacrifices made by men and women of the Canadian Forces. Rest assured, as every member of the House of Commons rises to his or her feet, our hearts go out to the families and to the communities that have been affected by this war.

We in the Liberal Party fundamentally believe that a successful future for Afghanistan is in our national interest. We believe our efforts, as the Leader of the Opposition said earlier on, have reflected the values and principles in which Canadians believe.

What are those values? Those values and principles are freedom, democracy, equality, security and the respect of fundamental human rights. Our party believes these values are worth pursuing. We believe our efforts in Afghanistan, supported by a clear United Nations mandate, can be successful.

Before I go on, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Pickering—Scarborough East.

What has this debate, this journey that we have all participated in taught us about arriving at some compromises among members of Parliament representing different political parties and stripes, but whose focus is very much a Canadian focus? It is that our country, which is blessed with a democratic institution, with the rule of law and with values that we all understand and appreciate, can export those values to a country that is in need. This is essentially the issue in Afghanistan.

However, what have we learned perhaps by an earlier mistake made by the government, where time was limited on the issue of debate and it did not take enough time to consult opposition parties or allow for this forum to take place?

The valuable lesson is that if we are reasonable in our approach, if we are reasonable in our expectations, if we have a bit of trust in

each other and if we can focus on a common objective and pool all our resources together, we can make headway, we can achieve those well specified objectives that we all share.

I do not mean to say this in very partisan way, and forgive me if it may sound partisan, but we on this side of the House welcomed the start of the parliamentary debate on the government's new motion on Afghanistan. We are pleased the government chose to use the proposed Liberal motion introduced two weeks ago as the basis of its new motion. However, this comes with a sense of openness and realization that perhaps at all times we do not have all the answers to the issues, that perhaps it is important to listen to other voices, to be open to suggestion and understand that debate and dialogue is precisely that.

• (2155)

We do not all think alike, but if we can take the best of what each one of us has to offer in the debate, then collectively, as a House of Commons and as a country, we can in fact move forward. I will give a few examples of what has been achieved. I sit on this side of the House and will bring my perspective to the debate.

The new motion adopts the principles that the mission must change, that it must end and that it must go well beyond an exclusively military focus. These are principles that Liberals advocated over a year ago, principles that make sense. Perhaps the government had to think a bit about it, but it has now arrived at the same conclusion. That is part of the process of how one arrives at mutually acceptable results.

With the motion as well, the government acknowledges that the mission must change and has used the Liberal description of the mission after February 2009, which will change its focus to a mission of training, security and reconstruction. Given what is going on in Afghanistan, it is understandable that this shift occurs. It is common sense and a shift that speaks to the mission of training, security and reconstruction, which is precisely where we should be as a country.

The government also has accepted the fact that the mission must end. This motion, as presented, sets a firm end date to Canada's mission in Kandahar of July 2011. The Conservative government has also accepted that our presence in Afghanistan must be about more than military.

Key commitments on development and diplomacy, which were absent from the government's original motion, have been imported directly from the Liberal motion. I am not saying this to be boastful. It is to demonstrate to members of the House as well as Canadians that in fact a cooperative spirit exists within the chamber that can move our country forward to achieve the results that we all agree are fundamental in Afghanistan.

I also note that the government has kept virtually all the Liberal motion as it pertains to the need for greater transparency and accountability to Parliament. Unfortunately, the earlier motion was silent on this issue. What I think happened was that through some mistakes, and mistakes happen in politics, the government realized that it had to open up to the Canadian people, that it had to give updates as to what was going on in Afghanistan because people wanted to know.

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Canadians want to know why we are there. Canadians want to know when we will come back. Canadians want to know whether we are successful. Canadians also understand we are losing lives in Afghanistan and they want to know we are losing lives for a just cause.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. It would seem there is an expectation on the part of the member that the debate will go on longer, but it will not.

It being 10 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill C-44 under government orders.

\* \* \*

• (2200)

[*Translation*]

**AGRICULTURAL MARKETING PROGRAMS ACT**

**Hon. Tony Clement (for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food)** moved that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our farmers across Canada, the people who put meat on our tables and who produce 23% of agricultural income, need their government to take action to help them get through the perfect storm that is threatening their livelihood.

[*English*]

The Canadian livestock industry is a powerful driver of Canada's economy. Meat products are Canada's largest food manufacturing industry with over \$20 billion in sales. The red meat sector is the largest employer in the food industry. Red meats are a major driver of Canadian exports.

Thanks to the Prime Minister's action, the future looks very bright for our livestock producers. The demand for animal protein is increasing globally, specifically in China, India and other emerging markets. Canada has a rich and robust resource base in place to meet that demand.

We have a strong culture of science and innovation, a culture that this government is fostering even further. Our agriculture sector is incredibly productive.

Our livestock producers are competitive. They are innovative and they are positive about the future of their sector. They just need some help to weather the perfect storm that has hit their industry: the high dollar, the over supply and the high input costs. These and other factors have combined to put severe financial pressure on Canada's livestock producers.

If they are to be viable and competitive in the long term and take advantage of the promising market opportunities that are out there, our hog and beef producers need immediate assistance to get through the current crisis and to begin the necessary adjustment. Governments and industry are fully engaged in this issue.

[*Translation*]

To help hog producers manage disease, the government launched the circovirus inoculation program, under which producers are immediately entitled to \$25 million in assistance from the federal government to have hogs in Canada tested and vaccinated.

This is the first of two phases of a \$76 million initiative to assist the hog industry in controlling diseases. As well, to assist our slaughterhouses, which are key factors in the equation, our government has invested \$51 million to improve the temporary foreign workers program.

First, the new AgriInvest Program will pay out \$600 million in federal funds to kickstart producer accounts. Those payments are now being made available to our producers.

The government will make more assistance available to producers through interim payments and targeted advances under AgriStability, the new program based on margins.

[*English*]

Unlike the Liberals who had the poor sense to cut agriculture spending by \$400 million in the 1990s, we are taking real action. In December we announced the first step in a national action plan to help Canada's livestock producers.

Through the new suite of business risk management programs, ministers agreed to accelerate access to payments under agri-stability through targeted advance payments and interim payments. We promised to take action and we have taken action.

In total, from late 2007 through 2008, nearly \$1.5 billion in cash payments is expected to flow to livestock producers through existing and new programs.

We are also currently working with the provinces to fast track 2008 agri-stability TAP payments, 2008 interim payments and 2007 final payments.

Targeted advance payments have already been triggered for hog producers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Interim payments are available for those who are not eligible for a TAP payment.

This is real action from this government to give the livestock industry some of the help it needs, because when farmers need help, they need that help right away.

Governments and industry have also been working together to identify ways that would help industry position itself to be competitive in the long term. These include: reducing costs of implementing the enhanced feed ban; increasing livestock, pork and beef sales abroad; and bringing innovative feed grain inputs and products to market more rapidly.

Internationally we are working hard to find new markets for Canadian producers and we are working hard to maximize the markets we are already in. Access to international markets is an important part of economic success for Canada's livestock producers.

Opportunities to expand our agriculture trade relationship are enormous. The world wants our livestock products, from genetics, to breeding stock, to the finished product. The government is working hard to take these products to the world.

We have taken every opportunity to further secure, protect and enhance access to the U.S. and to other key markets for the Canadian livestock sector. We have engaged through a friend of the court submission to fight the latest bid by R-CALF to once again close the border.

Canada has regained full beef access to the Philippines. Partial access has been granted for Canadian beef exports to Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and Russia. We are actively seeking to resume beef exports to Korea and China.

As well, the government has an ambitious agenda for the negotiation of bilateral free trade agreements. Canada is currently negotiating free trade agreements with several important markets for our beef and pork exports, including Korea which is of particular importance. Other markets include Colombia, Peru, the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean.

I am very pleased to report that access to Canadian breeding stock has recently been restored to Mexico as well as to Barbados. This is welcome news for Canadian exporters and is an important step in restoring market access with all of our trading partners.

This government's commitment to expanding our agricultural markets is clear. We are taking action to strengthen opportunities for the sector in global markets. These actions will ensure a strong future for cattle and hog producers.

The world wants our beef and pork products, and we are more than ready to deliver.

The legislation we are proposing is one more sign of this government's commitment to take action for Canada's hard-working beef and pork producers. As I said earlier, our producers know where they are going, but they need a bridge to get there and this bill provides that.

The measures in this bill are based on close consultation with industry which asked for a loan program to alleviate the short term financial crunch those in the industry are facing. The time to act is now or we risk seeing viable, competitive producers shutting down their businesses.

Accordingly, under these proposed amendments to the Agricultural Marketing Programs Act, a producer will have easier access to up to \$400,000 in cash advances under the advance payments program. In other words, producers will no longer have to use these payments from business risk management programs as security for the loans. Instead, they can use their livestock inventories.

• (2205)

This responds directly to demands from the industry to decouple BRM and APP payments, because payments from the BRM

### *Government Orders*

programs were reducing the effectiveness of the program by clawing back the dollars available.

Second, we are proposing to expand the triggers for emergency advances under the payments program. We will do this by adding severe economic hardship as a trigger, along with the existing triggers of weather and natural disaster.

For those severe economic hardship situations, the amendments will raise the maximum payout from \$25,000 to \$400,000, of which \$100,000 is interest free.

We are taking action to offer livestock producers repayable advances which could total up to \$3.3 billion.

We are also taking steps directly targeted to the hog sector to help those producers who wish to restructure and rationalize in the face of these realities.

What we are seeing across North America is a massive downsizing in the hog herd. This has created an oversupply of cull sows, which has driven the price down by well over half and has pushed processing plants to capacity limits. As a result, producers are forced to delay their restructuring plans.

In response to this situation, the government is investing \$50 million in a cull breeding swine program. Administered by the Canadian Pork Council, this program will help restructure the industry and make it more competitive. Producers will receive per-head payments for each animal slaughtered and will be reimbursed for the slaughter and disposal costs.

In addition, the government will work with the industry and review meat inspection user fees to assess their impact on competitiveness of the sector.

The Government of Canada is also working to reduce costs and increase competitiveness under Canada's enhanced feed ban. This complements the federal government's commitment of \$80 million to help the industry adjust to new feed standards.

Looking to the longer term, this government continues to work with the sector to secure its competitiveness and profitability. A big part of this is Growing Forward, a new federal-provincial-territorial plan to make the Canadian agriculture sector not just viable, but vibrant. It is a collaborative vision for the sector that is focused on the future. It is a vision for a profitable and innovative sector, a sector that seizes opportunities and a sector that responds to market demands and contributes to the health and well-being of Canadians.

This agreement builds on the best of the agriculture policy framework. It brings our producers the bankable business risk management programs I outlined earlier. It builds on the ideas put forward by producers and others who work in the sector.

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The bottom line is that there is tremendous opportunity for agriculture in this country. The global demand for protein is growing, especially in the Pacific Rim, a market Canada is ideally positioned to serve. We have world renowned animal health, favourable climate, superior genetics and an abundant land base to produce the product to meet the demand. The fundamentals are in place and the future is bright. All that is needed is a springboard to get us there. We need to reframe the discussion from one of crisis to one of opportunity.

• (2210)

[*Translation*]

In supporting this bill, I have given you an idea of the problems that the industry is facing and the significant steps that our government has taken to help our producers get through a very hard time. The proposed legislation is an important part of an exhaustive strategy that will provide short-term assistance and will help hog producers plan for the future.

I urge my colleagues to pass this bill and to demonstrate their support for this industry, as it struggles to overcome its problems.

[*English*]

In closing, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, this whole government since we were elected in January 2006 have always put farmers first.

I am so proud to stand in this place to introduce this wonderful piece of legislation that will help the cattle and the hog industry to go on to be sustainable and to be profitable for years and years to come.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate. The hon. member for Malpeque.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Are there questions, Mr. Speaker?

**The Deputy Speaker:** I believe there are no questions and comments pursuant to the agreement reached earlier this day. I am recognizing the hon. member for Malpeque on debate.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought there were questions.

In any event, what we heard just a moment ago was a lot of rhetoric. As for the last comment by the parliamentary secretary about putting farmers first, nothing is further from the truth.

That member has stood up many times in the House talking about farmers being pleased and about the government acting decisively. We asked the government about this in October. This is now February 25.

This is February 25 and the member stays quiet. Yes, I am frustrated, because I know too many people who have gone broke in the process. As for that member standing there and talking about the government acting decisively, nothing is further from the truth.

Finally today in this bill the government has admitted what we have been telling those members since last summer, which is that their programs are not working, especially not for a livestock industry in crisis. Instead of acting as they should have, government spokesmen continued to perpetuate the myth to the general public that they were actually doing something, as we heard a moment ago.

Following questions in the House to which the minister failed to respond, I raised the crisis in a late show debate on October 30 of last year. It is important to note what was said at that time:

Atlantic Canada is on the verge of losing its hog industry. Many of the most efficient hog operators are packing it in and hoping to get out with some dignity and the minister still sits on his hands.

Their life's work was being destroyed. Third, fourth, fifth and sixth generation farmers were losing their farms, losing their homes and losing their heritage.

The federal government, as I said at the time, had a duty and a responsibility that previous Liberal governments understood and acted on. They acted on potatoes and PVYn, on poultry, on ad hoc payments and on BSE, but the Conservative government fails to act and continues to perpetuate the myth that it is doing something.

It was October of last year when this crisis was raised, and vividly, for the government's attention. It failed to act. Week after week, we and other opposition parties in the House raised questions. The non-response from the minister and his government was, to be blunt about it, just unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, as you well know, and we just heard it a moment ago, it is not unusual for the government to say something that we cannot believe. Worse, in November, the Minister of Finance released his economic statement and again ignored the livestock crisis. There was absolutely nothing for an industry in crisis in the November economic statement when the government had high surpluses at its disposal before it started to squander that surplus away.

Any government should use prudence so that it has reserves in place to assist industries when they are in trouble, whether it is manufacturing, agriculture or forestry. However, the government, with its incompetent Minister of Finance, has squandered those resources and those surpluses. I do not know whether the money is there or not, but the money was there in November and should have been utilized to assist this industry in crisis.

On December 3, many of the points were raised again in debate in the House to suggest that the government should be acting rapidly. Even in a western paper, the *StarPhoenix*, Kevin Hursh, a consulting agrologist and farmer, said something that I want to quote because I think it is important:

For the past decade, the agricultural industry in Saskatchewan has gradually developed a more healthy balance between livestock and grain. Grain is still king, but the cowherd has expanded. While the number of hog producers has continued to drop, hog numbers in Saskatchewan are up substantially.

All that is now at risk. Those of us in the grain business shouldn't feel too smug. There won't always be such a strong international market for our feed grains. If we lose a big chunk of the livestock industry, we'll also lose a large part of the domestic feed grain market.

*Government Orders*

● (2215)

He went on to say that he felt “the cattle and hog sectors would go forward to government with a united front” with proposals for assistance that would not open them up to countervail action. He closed by saying, “Hopefully, governments will listen”. Those were the key words: “Hopefully, governments will listen”. But as we now know, the government did not listen and it did not act and every single day some producers went out of business in this country.

That parliamentary secretary stood and said what he just said as if nothing happened, as if no family farms were destroyed, trying to leave the impression that his is a government of action that puts farmers first. Absolutely nothing is further from the truth.

A Senate committee and a House of Commons committee tabled reports in December and still there was no action on the part of the government. Finally on December 19 we had an announcement by the minister of a so-called action plan, but as we warned at the time it was not an action plan that would work.

There are three points I need to make. First, the minister called the United States Secretary of Agriculture to get his approval. This is the first government in Canadian history that allows the Secretary of Agriculture in the United States to determine what our agriculture should be. That is absolutely the wrong approach. Second, the minister raised expectations and false hopes. Third, the program could not work without legislation and could not provide the financial liquidity the livestock industry really needed.

What really angered producers was that every time the minister and his parliamentary secretary could, they would re-announce that old \$600 million kickstart program, which for the livestock industry was basically inaccessible. That is why we have the legislation here today. That is why the government is coming forward with Bill C-44. It is finally admitting that the proposal on December 19 really did not work and required legislative amendment.

For the minister and his parliamentary secretary to get up time after time and say that farmers were happy, the program was working and the government was taking action was just throwing salt on the wounds of those producers who were suffering out there. The bill certainly shows the mistruths in those answers, especially those from the parliamentary secretary.

In fact, when the standing committee—and I note that the chair of the committee is listening—called the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Canadian Pork Council before the committee on January 31 to gain their response to the government position, they laid it out fairly clearly. The president of the Canadian Pork Council said:

Let me be clear that the December 19th response was a cruel joke to many of our producers. There were false hopes and false assumptions and false expectations that simply weren't deliverable.

In other words, the program was not working, but all we got from the government was deny, deny, deny, and the parliamentary secretary, as is his way, and as he did tonight as well, on January 29 stated: “That money is flowing toward cattle and hog sectors as we speak”. We now know that not to be true. The money was not flowing to hog and beef sectors “as we speak”.

● (2220)

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would apologize to this House and to producers who now know what he said was not true.

There is even further evidence of that in the frequently asked questions paper that the department provided with this legislation. I will read question six from the document:

Why go the legislative route? Isn't this just more parliamentary brinkmanship?

The answer:

The legislative changes are necessary to get these advances out to the producers who are in dire straits. If all parties worked together, we can do this very quickly.

What is the government going to do for the 15% of producers across Canada who have gone because of the government's lack of action? What is the government going to do with the almost 40% of the industry in Prince Edward Island that have left because of the government's lack of action?

We have called. Farmers have called. We have had an emergency debate. Months have gone by since this issue should have been dealt with: September, October, November, December, January, and we are at February 25. It is a little late. Every day some family farm bites the dust because there has been no real concrete action that would mean dollars in producers' pockets.

Thank goodness for the ideas and cooperation from the opposition or we would still be waiting. The impression the government tries to leave is that it is the opposition that is holding things up. We have cooperated. We tried to get this bill through. We have tried to encourage the government to come forward. We have offered to be cooperative in the emergency debates at committee to get the legislation through and actually get dollars in people's pockets. That is what we are doing tonight. We are trying to get Bill C-44 through so the money can get to producers.

The holdup all along has been the minister and the government in terms of burying their heads in the sand and thinking they had done something when that something really did not mean anything to the actual producers who really need the money.

It is kind of interesting that finally on Friday we got a call from the minister that there is now an emergency to get this through before the budget. Do the Conservatives think there is an election coming and they have to own up that they have not done what they ought to have done? It is rather interesting that we are debating this bill tonight and the briefing is tomorrow, after we have debated and passed the bill.

The leader of our party asked me and Cindy Duncan-MacMillan to hold some quick and dirty hearings on the livestock crisis and come up with some recommendations, which we did. We tabled those recommendations last Monday. I want to go through those recommendations.

*Government Orders*

I will admit that the bill the government has proposed does move one step forward, but there are a lot of steps that have to be taken in terms of a livestock crisis recovery strategy. For instance, on the agri-invest, or the old CAIS, or agri-stability, with losing 15% from the agri-stability as a result of the agri-invest, what the livestock industry is asking for is to make that optional to producers so that they can either use the agri-stability program or have the option of agri-invest. That would help them out in this time of crisis. There is nothing in this bill about that proposal.

Let me just go through some of the recommendations so that they are on the record. Maybe after a few months the government might come forward and seize on them. That is, if the Conservatives are around in a few months. They may be long gone and we will not have to worry about this inactive government anymore.

• (2225)

Here are some of the recommendations.

Put cash in the hands of beef producers immediately by making special 2007 CAIS advance payments of up to \$100 per cow and \$150 for feeder cattle.

Put cash in the hands of hog producers and implement an immediate short term loan for Canadian hog producers to improve cash flow as markets adjust with the loan program secured by long run future business risk management payment programs to be negotiated with hog producers. That is basically what this bill does tonight.

Put, on an immediate priority basis, 2006 CAIS payments and 2007 CAIS targeted and interim advance payments for all hog and beef producers.

Work with all parties to determine how the livestock advance payment program could be improved and be accessed by the hog and beef producers including amending the security requirements, which is in the bill and we support that.

Unlinking or decoupling CAIS payment offset with advances given.

Extending time restrictions on advances and the bill, I believe, does that as well.

Allow all hog and beef producers to be given the option of having the top 15% CAIS or the new agri-invest program for at least 2007 and 2008 and maintain the \$600 million agri-invest kick-start already announced.

Defer not only interest payments but also clawbacks of all CAIS overpayments to hog and beef producers until December 2008.

Establish immediately a working group to develop a livestock production insurance program to provide hog producers equivalent coverage given to crop producers and help them to address margin declines due to disease outbreaks.

For the sake of not only the agriculture sectors but also Canada's forestry and manufacturing sectors and exporting industries, look at and examine their monetary policies.

There are measures that need to be taken in the medium and long term, as well. Market competitiveness is the key for hog and beef producers.

For farmers in this country, significant regulatory hurdles and a non-level playing field relative to our competitors in the United States and elsewhere impedes our producers success in markets. Specifically, the livestock prices strategy should also include some medium and long term initiatives.

These would include the following.

Realigning Canada's regulatory inspection fees and cost recovery rates such as those applied to border measures, traceability and food inspection to be competitive with Canada's major trading partners.

Working with the CFIA and industry groups to significantly improve approvals for new medications.

Establishing a new dedicated trade directorate that could pull together resources from the CFIA, Agri-Food Canada and International Trade Canada to focus maximum resources on market access agreements for Canadian livestock production.

Establishing a new trade quick response team to rapidly defend against industry trade challenges.

Eliminating supplemental imports of beef above current trade commitments in Canada.

Working with all provinces to significantly reduce interprovincial trade barriers such as meat inspection, a chronic barrier to innovation and entrepreneurship as producers face a bewildering disarray of different provincial standards and regulations.

That kind of livestock prices recovery strategy, as we proposed a week ago today, is composed of suggestions from farmers for farmers. It addresses both short and long term challenges.

We believe those initiatives, if put into action, would in fact help our industry become innovative, more economically sound, put it at a more level playing field with our competitors around the world, and do what needs to be done for the long term potential of the industry.

I am disappointed tonight that it took the government six months to finally come to the realization that it needed to at least take a step in the right direction to assist our industry that is in trouble.

I encourage the government to consider some of the other proposals that I have put forward here tonight.

• (2230)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to also take part in this debate on Bill C-44, which the Bloc Québécois fully supports. Admittedly, there is an emergency and, as a farm producer keeps telling me, all this is not the workings of the Holy spirit.

*Government Orders*

Listening to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who spoke earlier, one got the impression that the government is taking action today to solve a problem that arose just yesterday. That is my greatest fear in this situation because, while we support Bill C-44, the government must certainly not assume that the problem is solved, that it can wash its hands of it and that all is said and done.

The optimistic remarks of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food had me fearing the worst. Just this afternoon, the worst did happen at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. With the help of opposition members on the committee, I managed to get a motion approved, asking that the chair of our committee send the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food a letter urging him to respect the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food concerning the crisis in the livestock industry. But the Conservative members, the government members of the committee voted against this motion, arguing that this bill would solve the problem. Far from it. Just because we support the bill does not mean that we believe the livestock crisis is completely over and that there is no longer any problem. It was really pathetic to hear the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food earlier try to persuade us that all is fine again, that everything has been fixed and that the government did all that with its magic wand. That is not true, and we must be very careful.

We definitely have some reservations. We have some questions about this bill. Will the government follow up on the recommendations in the unanimous report I mentioned earlier by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, which was behind the emergency debate I instigated on February 13?

Will there also be consequences for Quebec since this bill falls under the agricultural policy framework?

And how much of the \$80 million is new money?

It is all well and good to broaden the definitions, but if at the end of the day the producers are sharing the same amount, no one benefits. According to some sources, this is not new money, but an interest rate reduction instead. We must remember that a loan is still a loan, and we do not want to increase the debt load of producers.

Earlier, I heard cries from the government side when I spoke about the committee's unanimous report. What happened this afternoon does not make any sense. All the members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food unanimously adopted a report to help resolve or at least alleviate the crisis in the livestock sector, in the pork and, particularly, the beef sector. All the committee members voted in favour of this report and agreed that long-term measures were needed to alleviate this crisis because they acknowledged there was a crisis and that solutions must be found.

Bill C-44 is not the ultimate and only solution. I think it is completely inconsistent and cynical of the government members to have voted against a motion today in committee that would have had the chair of the committee call on the minister to take action to ensure that the committee's recommendations are adopted. I will list them later on, so we can see how the committee, including members from the government, had a clear view of the situation and were

prepared do something to propose logical solutions, demanded by the producers themselves.

Today, because a bill has been introduced, all that is going by the wayside. But the Bloc Québécois will not give up, just as we did not give up when I joined the agriculture committee, which was grappling with the supply management issue. We obtained a unanimous motion to protect the supply management system.

The same is true of our call to use article 28 to restrict milk protein imports. Government representatives and bureaucrats told us that we were going to be crushed by countries like the United States and New Zealand, which would tell us that we had no right to use article 28 and that it made no sense. The country would be put in an embarrassing position, and there would be plenty of problems. Then, out of the blue, the Minister of Agriculture at the time came to the annual meeting of the dairy farmers of Canada and told them that he was invoking article 28. It was no good when the Bloc Québécois was calling for it, but when the government feels an election coming or a demonstration on Parliament Hill, it makes the necessary decisions.

● (2235)

We have to put things in perspective.

On a positive note, I will say that I am glad the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food introduced this bill, which would change the eligibility requirements for the advance payments program, in response to the emergency debate the Bloc Québécois requested on February 13 about the crisis in the livestock industry.

As I said, the government still has a long way to go to make livestock producers more competitive. There was a reason we asked for an emergency debate. Livestock producers are at the end of their rope and have to take whatever help they are offered. That is why Bill C-44 helps matters. But as I told the minister when I spoke to him last Friday, the government still has not responded to the six recommendations in the unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled "Study on the Collapse of the Beef and Pork Sector Revenues", which was tabled in this House on December 12.

The report recommends that transitional measures be put in place to alleviate this crisis, along with longer-term measures to improve the competitiveness of the industry. The government does not seem to understand that we are looking for longer-term measures. As with any problem, we have to look beyond the end of our noses. To resolve a problem, we have to ask what can be done in the future to have solutions that ensure the sustainability of a certain sector. That is what we tried to do with this report.

### *Government Orders*

The Bloc Québécois has been very aware of the problems of livestock producers for a long time now. In November 2006, I invited pork producers from Quebec to come testify in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. A year later, in light of the government's inaction, we had to raise this issue again and put the livestock crisis back on the agenda. I also had to request an emergency debate on this matter because nothing was being done.

As I was saying earlier, to listen to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, we get the impression that the Conservatives only found out there was a problem yesterday and today they are taking action and resolving the problem. We have to go back much further than that. My colleague, the hon. member for Malpeque, has already listed everything the opposition has done in this matter. For a very long time now, alarm bells have been ringing and it was high time the government took action.

I do not know whether it is because an election is in the air, but perhaps some matters will get resolved a little more quickly now. Mind you, I am not complaining. This does not bother me. In any case, when we achieve success for the producers and the people we represent, we are always prepared to hold our heads high in our ridings and throughout Quebec and tell people that we did something good for them. That is not a problem. The minister can also say he got things done with Bill C-44, and I would be the first to recognize that he finally did.

Yet, it took threats of demonstrations on the Hill—which, farmers told us, were in the works—as well as the possibility of an election, before we saw any action. This government has been in power for two years and could have taken action long ago. Members here in this House have expressed their agreement with what I just said.

Some very interesting recommendations were adopted by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I would remind the House that the report was unanimously passed. The first recommendation states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada deploy ... a special transitional measure that will provide cash flow in the form of interest-free loans to be paid back over a period of three to five years, and bankable cash advances to hog and cattle producers.

The report also states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, payout the remaining percentage owed to producers under the CAIS Inventory Transition Initiative (CITI) and respect the federal-provincial funding agreement.

Another interesting recommendation states that:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) hold formal discussions with the Minister of Finance to show the impact of the strengthening Canadian dollar on the food producing and processing industry in Canada and to examine ways to relieve the pressure on the industry from the rising Canadian dollar. AAFC officials should report back to the Committee on the result of these discussions.

Of course, this would have allowed us to participate in the debate that arose in all the sectors affected by the sudden surge of the Canadian dollar.

• (2240)

It is our duty to examine this situation and determine to what extent it affects our sectors. In addition, given that pork and beef producers are exporters, it would have been important to study this.

The fourth recommendation states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that measures be taken to improve the responsiveness of BRM programs when a liquidity crunch arises in the farming sector. Examples of these measures include, but are not limited to:

allowing producers, for the purpose of reference margin calculations, to use the better of the Olympic average, the average of the last three years, or a five-year rolling average;

eliminating the viability test, which requires that producers show positive margins in two of the three years;

increasing the annual contribution limit in the AgriInvest program;

fast-tracking the federal \$600 million Kickstart program for producer accounts in the AgriInvest program, so that funds can start flowing earlier than initially planned.

Another recommendation states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food conduct a complete review of regulatory measures susceptible of putting the Canadian meat industry at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis other countries, and that this information be shared with the Committee.

And the final recommendation states:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada review program funding available to beef producers, processors and renderers to help them with the disposal and storage costs of ruminant specified risk material (SRM).

Those are the six recommendations. Because I only have 20 minutes, I will not read the entire report. However, I can tell you that it is an excellent report that was adopted unanimously. We would have thought that government members would join us in continuing to exert pressure on the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to respond favourably to these six recommendations. Unfortunately, we did not have this opportunity because the members of government are under the impression that Bill C-44 has fixed everything.

However, not everything has been fixed yet. This is evidenced by the fact that, in a press release issued today, the Canadian Pork Council says that it is pleased to see the bill being passed quickly. At least, this is what it hopes, and this is what will happen, because all the opposition parties will ensure that we go through the various stages very quickly, so that the bill comes into effect. However, while the Canadian Pork Council is pleased with this situation, it also makes the following comment, through its president, Mr. Clare Schlegel:

...while the troubles in the industry will not end soon, the federal government and the pork industry must continue to work together to find improvements that help to guarantee the long-term competitiveness of this important Canadian livestock industry.

That pretty well sums up what I said earlier. We are of course pleased that the government has finally decided to take action, but we are concerned about guaranteeing long-term competitiveness, and we are saying that the troubles in the industry will not end soon. The producers themselves just sent us a very important message. That is why we, on this side, will continue to ensure that the recommendations made in the report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food are implemented once and for all.

I should also point out that the producers' demands have not all been met. Obviously. One might argue that every industry has specific demands but does not always get everything it asks for. The fact of the matter is that this bill does not solve the majority of problems experienced in the beef and pork industries.

Just last Friday, I met with representatives of the Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec at my constituency office. These are people from my region, central Quebec. They came and presented their problems to us. Every member from Quebec received a small pamphlet in which the federation asks the federal government to implement several solutions to help pork producers. The hon. members will see that Bill C-44 does not solve everything.

For example, the Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec is asking that the \$1.5 million cap under the AgriStability and AgriInvest programs, as well as the \$3 million cap on the start-up fund, be raised.

• (2245)

It is asking that the reference margins to provide appropriate support to producers be adjusted in light of the unique nature of the crisis and the persistently poor market conditions.

It is asking that the Canadian product labelling rules designed to ensure that consumers can clearly identify where products come from be tightened up.

It is also asking that a new envelope be set up to support shared cost programs, allowing for regional flexibility in the next generation of agricultural policies.

As we know, Quebec farm producers are calling for agri-flexibility in addition to the AgriStability and AgriInvest programs. We are therefore looking for a much more flexible program for the producers and for the provinces as well.

The advance payments program, which was recently expanded to include stock production, should not use the business risk management program as collateral, thereby forcing producers to pay back advances when they receive payments.

All the MPs from Quebec received a visit from the pork producers in their region pushing these demands. Obviously, I would like to take advantage of this speech to pass this along to the government and make it realize that Bill C-44 is not going to put an end to all this and shut everyone up. Of course the government would rather see the opposition remain quietly seated and not say another word, but since we represent our people we will continue to speak up. It is with a great deal of vigour that I, personally, will continue to defend not only the pork producers, but the also the beef producers who are going through this crisis.

I must say that it was not so long ago that the Conservative government sang a very different tune about this crisis. I am referring to the emergency debate that I requested and obtained on February 13. I agree that some Conservative members made good, realistic presentations. In any case, one such member, the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake, was even cited in the Canadian Pork Council newsletter as having delivered an eloquent and interesting speech.

### *Government Orders*

It should be noted that the news release did not cite the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food because he had his rose-coloured glasses on. He came here, and all he did was put down the opposition parties, saying that it was all a bunch of garbage, that money had been pumped into the pockets of agricultural producers, and that all was well in the best of all possible worlds. As a result, the Canadian Pork Council did not quote him as having given a speech that addressed the producers' grievances.

It did mention me, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska—I cannot say my own name—because I was the one who called for and got an emergency debate. It also said that the comments made by the members for Malpeque and British Columbia Southern Interior were especially notable. I would add that the Bloc Québécois members for Montcalm, Beauharnois—Salaberry, and Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot also gave speeches recognizing the seriousness of the crisis.

On the government side, we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, and especially from the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière. I promised him that I would print copies of his speech to give to agricultural producers because it was so appalling, lamentable and sad to hear him say that everything was fine in the livestock sector. And that is exactly what I did.

On Friday, when people came to see me to talk about this crisis, I gave them a copy of the speech. After reading a few lines, they were very disappointed in this government member, who refused to acknowledge just how serious the crisis had become. Yet, even his minister realized that something was happening, given that we are now studying a bill that was just introduced.

There was a problem at that time. Fortunately, the opposition is here to make the government understand what is going on. Otherwise, we would still be stuck there and nothing would happen.

All that to say I am very pleased to see this bill fast tracked, so that our farmers may get at least a bit of a break.

• (2250)

[*English*]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to appear again in front of this full House of all my colleagues who have come to listen to this speech. I realize it is standing room only. I will try not to be it too long because the time is getting late. I will leave the eloquence to those who spoke before me.

Before I talk a bit about my reaction to this bill, I would like to underline what my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska said about our committee.

The motion he had today was very logical. It was something to the effect that we ask the chairman and the committee to respect all of the recommendations that were voted upon.

We underline once again for the government and the minister that these are important recommendations and it would seem kind of bizarre that the government side, the Conservatives, voted against this motion. I did not quite understand that but being new in politics there are a lot of things I do not understand.

*Government Orders*

I kind of looked at this as an insurance. We have this bill today but we have this insurance to see that all those recommendations are followed. Actually, had we acted and followed all those recommendations in due time, we probably would not be here speaking tonight. Nevertheless, I thank the minister for his action.

I had a conference call on Friday with him, the deputy minister and Mr. Clare Schlegel, the president of the Canadian Pork Council, who was also on the line. As we talked, the minister outlined what he was proposing. My basic question was for Mr. Schlegel and I asked him what he thought. He said that it was a good bill and that it was a good move. I told him that was fine with me because we were there for the producers. The minister had been in contact with someone from the livestock and cattle sectors and they said that it was a good move.

In a sense, I am glad that we are finally moving quickly, that we do have the political will to move and that we have the support of all members in the House. This is a cooperative effort.

Since I got into this business, I have always maintained that I do not care who gets the credit as long as we do something and the fact is that something is getting done. Election or no election, so be it, but at least we are getting out there to help the producers.

However, it is important, as we talk and as we listen to this debate, to put this into perspective. The crisis did not start yesterday. The crisis did not start two weeks ago and we have a reaction today.

We heard from the cattle producers and the pork producers late last November and there was indeed a crisis. We knew all along but we were wondering what steps were being taken and finally we had an emergency meeting. As a result of that meeting, the committee made recommendations, which all parties supported. It would have been logical for those recommendations to have been followed as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, as often is the case, nothing really happened. A lot of words were said and we got the spin that a lot of help was getting out to folks but when they came back to our meeting in January, we heard that this was not the case and that they were still hurting.

There were press conferences and press releases. I wrote a couple of letters to the minister. I must say that when I write these letters I do them in a cooperative tone. It was just a letter telling the minister about the meeting we had and that I would like to once again emphasize that there is a problem and I would like to see what action we are taking.

Many of us asked questions. I asked a question in the House on February 1, which reads:

Mr. Speaker, pork and cattle producers told the agriculture committee that the government has basically abandoned them. Some have called today, February 1, black Friday and others are calling the government's funding promises a cruel joke.

Farms are foreclosing, rural communities are dying and yet no immediate assistance has been committed.

● (2255)

Then my final statement was this. When is this going to end? When is the government going to stop leading Canada down the road to agricultural suicide, which is the term I used?

As we can see, there was a cooperative approach. There was pressure, press releases, questions and the debate that my hon. colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska was able to get in the House. Then we laid out what was happening in consultation with our friends in the pork and cattle industry.

It is important perhaps to underline and note some of the correspondence that had gone back and forth over these last few months. I will quote from a letter from the president of the Canadian Pork Council, Mr. Clare Schlegel, to the minister on January 23. He stated:

Over the last four months we have been working with you and your officials to find solutions to the "perfect storm" facing hog producers across Canada. After much debate within our industry, we put forward a series of reasonable requests to respond to the financial dilemma. We do appreciate the speeding up of payments within CAIS or (AgriStability). But, as you are aware, that alone does not come close to responding adequately to this crisis. This has been pointed out to you in the cash flow statement when we met in December.

● (2300)

[Translation]

He went on to say this:

We had asked for unsecured loans to help producers facing serious liquidity problems. We recognize that a loan must be secured, and we have changed our request accordingly. We need your department to immediately provide loans that come after those of secured creditors.

In its current form, the advance payments program is not very useful, because it only serves to put off current loan contracts. The program should be significantly changed and most of the changes would be legislative or regulatory. Could that be done quickly?

He asked, "Could that be done quickly?" He continued:

In addition, none of the suggested improvements to the AgriStability program have been introduced, except for faster payments. This is threatening the survival of some of our best businesses.

I want to emphasize that he said, "This is threatening the survival of some of our best businesses". The letter went on:

As you know, the Canadian pork industry is a modern, world-class industry. But our future is problematic because of the strength of the Canadian dollar compared to the U.S. dollar. Pork producers are prepared to adapt to the new reality, but they cannot react fast enough.

[English]

Mr. Schlegel finished his letter by saying:

Difficult decisions are being made now on the farm. False hope does not help, as your announcement before Christmas created. While many of the provinces have stepped in with individual programs, they await your leadership. It is time for the Canadian government to step up to the plate.

We see this happening little by little. As I go through the file and I see what has happened over the last few months, I wonder why it has taken this time.

I have a very high regard for the officials that work in the Department of Agriculture. They are professionals. They can get the job done. The minister himself told me, "We are not going to go political with this. We are not going to tie it to the budget. Let us do it quickly so that just in case there is an election my officials in March can get some money out to farmers". We know that the minister can act quickly. The reason this has not been happening is not because of them. It is that somewhere along the line these quick and important decisions were not being made.

*Government Orders*

There are a couple of points in the provisions of this new bill which I think are really important. For example, the bill expands the circumstances for which an emergency advance can be issued to include severe economic hardship if the Ministers of Agriculture and Finance jointly agree that the hardship exists.

This is a tremendous point. It gives a little flexibility to the minister to say that there are economic hardships. In this case it is the Canadian dollar, but whether it is a rise in the biofuel industry or the world situation, at least the decision can be made to start getting some help flowing to our farmers.

The interesting thing is that the farmers are not asking for aid and handouts. All they are asking for is a little help to give them some security and stability so that they can get loans and weather this perfect storm. They do not want their farms foreclosed. They want to continue to farm until the world situation improves and there is a better situation at all levels.

On November 15 a communiqué came out from the Canadian Pork Council and I will quote a couple of paragraphs. I said that I did not want to speak too long. I want my colleagues to have a chance to go home early and get up bright and early tomorrow so we can get on with another day. The communiqué says:

Canadian hog producers are facing a financial crisis that is unprecedented in terms of cause and unparalleled in terms of negative outlook. Simply put, prices are collapsing, input costs have increased dramatically and cash losses are mounting at such astonishing rates that entire communities including producers and input suppliers face financial ruin. Most disturbing is the observation that no positive market correction in the foreseeable future seems apparent.

That is an interesting point. We should emphasize that for those who think that the market can regulate everything, that the market will make sure that everything works out well for producers. At times we see that is not the case. I firmly believe that we need an intervention from government, not necessarily in the form of handouts, but in this case we need to assist our primary producers.

The second paragraph says:

The situation is critical. The rapid increase in the value of the Canadian dollar relative to the U.S. is having an effect that is akin to a major system shock. For 25 years, Canadian pork producers faced a steadily declining dollar. They responded by building an industry that became a world leader in terms of exports and overall competitiveness. That advantage has vanished in a few short months driven by forces completely outside their control.

We talked about the pork industry, but the conditions are relatively the same for the cattle industry. We have probably the best producers in the world. They are faced with hardships because of the rise in the dollar, because of what is happening in the world and also because of the biofuel industry. We have to come to grips with those problems.

If prices are increasing and helping one segment of the agricultural community, which is good from the point of view of agriculture, then what about the effect it is having on another sector? Somehow we have to mitigate that. By working together we will probably be able to do that.

● (2305)

I and my party support Bill C-44. It is a positive step. I am a little disappointed that we have not acted on all those recommendations. I hope that as a result of our support for the bill and as a result of the motion that we had in committee today, we will see quick action by government to implement all the recommendations so we can help producers across the country who are hurting. They deserve no less.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I feel like I should say a word of thanks. I feel like I have been chairing the agriculture committee all night. With apologies to the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake, I appreciate this vicarious opportunity, but it has come to an end.

Pursuant to order made earlier today Bill C-44 is deemed read a second time, deemed referred to a committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

**The Deputy Speaker:** It is amazing what the House of Commons can do when everybody agrees.

It being 11:10 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:10 p.m.)



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